



Video Story Transcript

No Friends but the Mountains

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/pXGPjldxiNs>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Diane Edgecomb and I'd like to tell you about something that absolutely changed the way that I see the world.

The year was 1999 and a friend of mine in theater, Annette, she called me, and she said, "Well I'm working on a theater piece in Italy. Come and watch as we put it together and the subject of the piece is Kurdish refugees."

Now in the 1990s, the Kurds were coming to the shores of Italy in just waves. They were escaping from Turkey, because the Kurds ancestral lands are in southeastern Turkey in the mountains. But at that time the Kurds and the Turks were fighting, and the Turkish government was unbelievable in their reprisals. They'd gone into the mountains and the military had burned over 3000 villages and they turned out entire families men women and children right into the snow. And when the people arrived in Italy they had terrible stories of torture.

So Annette picked me up at the airport and she was staying on a converted sheep farm in beautiful Tuscany. So we were driving through this landscape of these rolling hills and these cypress trees; I mean it's, it's the background of every beautiful Renaissance painting you've seen. And we pulled into this tiny little dirt driveway and just waiting there in the driveway was this young man. He was about 17 years old. He was - he was really skinny. He'd obviously been waiting for Annette and he had this bushy mop of hair and he held up his hand. He

was saying Hi! And then he gave a big smile and then he just covered his mouth like this [puts both hands over her mouth]. But I could see that his teeth had been broken and some of them were missing.

So Annette said this is our Kurdish refugee. We've been allowed to work with him and have him live here he has a terrible story and we're using it for our piece.

And I could understand enough Italian for me to know that she was saying to him she's an American and she's going to be staying here and will mangiare insieme al dopo, we'll eat together later.

So he left and she's helping me set up my room, but I just couldn't get that picture out of my mind and I said, "Do you know what happened to his mouth?"

And she said, "Before he escaped to Italy he was arrested by the Turkish police and they had no charge against him, but they don't need one. They took him to the concrete interrogation room in the back of the police station and they said to him - Are you Turkish?"

Now everyone who's a citizen of Turkey has to identify as a Turk even if they're not.

And he said, "No, I am Kurdish."

It's a different ethnicity. And so they beat him, and they beat him till he was on the ground and they kicked him especially in the face and mouth. She said, "I think that that knocked out his teeth, but that wasn't the end of it. They tortured him for seven days and seven nights."

And in the end, they put electrodes to every part - sensitive part of his body and put so much electricity through it, they thought they killed him, because they couldn't hear his heart beat through that kid's body and they took his naked body and they threw it into the dumpster.

His father showed up had been looking for his son.

They said, "We have no idea where your son is."

But he knew enough to walk behind the police station and there was his son's hand sticking out of the dumpster and among... garbage.

So I was so heart sore when I heard the story and he was such a sweet kid really. So I went over for the dinner. Annette was making pasta and he was just sitting there on the couch and I didn't speak any language with him, but I grab some graph paper that was there, and a sharpie and I made this like crude drawing of a bear and I like pointed it and I said, "Bear."

He looked over he went ohhh and he said, "Bar."

I said, "Yeah, yeah bar. It's a bar. It's bear."

And then he pointed at it and he said, "Herch."

I said, "Wow! I just learned my first Kurdish word."

Herch, herch, herch and then I drew like a - tried to draw an eagle and then drew an outline of my country and I said America. He said, "Ooooo USA."

He said [simulated Kurdish accent], "USA really, really nice."

And then he took the graph paper and the sharpie, and he said, "Kurdistan, really nice."

And he drew these mountains and the rivers through 'em, and a village and people. And then he drew the people just running for their life. And the village on fire. And I said, "Did they burn your village too?"

And then in the sky he drew an outline of a helicopter. And I thought wow that's how they're getting into the mountains, 'cause they're inaccessible. And then he drew on the helicopter burned into my memory. A rectangle with stripes and a square with stars. He drew a U.S. flag and I said, "What?"

I said, "We have nothing to do with this."

And I was like, "Annette translate for me please. He thinks - tell him it's the Turkish military."

And she said, "Diane I'm sorry you don't know, but those helicopters were manufactured in the United States and your Congress approved their sale to Turkey with the agreement that they were never to be used against civilians. But governments play by their own rules. And they are being used against civilians."

The Kurds have a saying no friends but the mountains. We have no friends but our mountains. But now with these new Apache attack helicopters even their beloved mountains can't protect them now.

And I was just stopped. I was just stopped with my compassionate heart. I was just brought up short and he was just simply holding the drawing out to me - you know. And what was my responsibility.

Nothing? Nothing?

My father was an aircraft engineer and he was a man of incredible integrity and his hands could have helped to make those engines that were doing something in a country I know nothing about. So when I went back to the United States, I started working with Amnesty and other groups to try to raise awareness. When I found out that the Kurds language was under pressure and that they were not allowed to speak and write, I tried together gather their folktales and published a book of their first Kurdish folktales in English. But what I'm trying to say to you is let yourself hear the stories. Don't think that we're not involved somehow. Let yourself be moved and hopefully sometime something will touch you in such a way that you feel like I could do something and just start because we all need friends. And then, we have more friends ourself.