

Refugees Then and Now

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Word count-725

I can do something

I can say something

I know how!

I can be nice, kind, and caring

But how?

I will not discriminate

I will not show hatred

I can help people

I can make a difference

I know why!

I can be different

I can stand out

I can be an upstander

But why?

I can do it now to help refugees who still need us today

There are and were many refugees who need our help,

So we HAVE to stand up for them

A refugee is someone who is forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or even a natural disaster. There were many refugees around the holocaust time. One refugee who survived and was brave through the long journey to safety was Gerda Blachmann. Gerda was born on April 24, 1923 in Breslau, Germany as an only child to her Jewish parents. In 1933 Gerda walked through her city to see the windows shattered and the synagogues burning to dust. After she saw how devastating this was she begged her parents to leave Germany right away. A few months later they finally decided to flee to Cuba. They got visas and boarded the liner *St. Louis* on May 13, 1939. When they finally finished their long journey and arrived in Cuba on the 27th of May they were told that their visas were invalid. They had to go back to Germany. After they were back in Europe, Gerda and her mother were planning on sneaking past the border into Switzerland. They dressed up as farm women and drove a hay wagon past the Germany border, then headed to the French-Swiss border. When they were close to the border they were stopped by the Swiss border guards who held them overnight. In the morning, they were thrown on a train with other refugees. No one knew what was going to happen but she and her mom found out soon enough. She was interned at a refugee camp, where she was for 2 years and then she worked at a blouse factory in Bern. Four years after the long war ended she was able to immigrate to the United States in 1949. Gerda was a very brave figure who suffered through a lot during that time, but she eventually survived and made it to freedom.

The challenges of being a refugee were not unique to long ago history. There are estimated to be 70 million people displaced from their homes and about 25 million of those people are refugees. Also, half of the refugees are under the age of 18 years old. One example of a modern day refugee is Aamir. He was 29 and lived with his wife, their children, his parents, siblings and their family in Syria. One time his family heard gunfire, so none of them went outside for days. On the last day hiding in the house there was no more bread and they had nothing to eat. Aamir had to get food and diapers for his family. On his walk he was stopped by the Freedom

Army and was asked to join it. He denied their offer and he said that the last words he heard from them were, "The next time we see you, either you take your gun and stand beside us or you find someone to take your body." This threat scared Aamir, so he hurried home to pack up his family and escape to Lebanon. When they made it to Beirut, Lebanon his family was able to get visas to go to Thailand. In late 2012 when they were in Thailand, he heard about Asylum Access Thailand and got help from the organization. The asylum access group helped him and his family obtain refugee status. As a refugee Aamir could live his life with less worries and settle down in their home. He felt that his family would have a good future. Aamir was lucky to have support and help from his family and the asylum along with his own bravery. Now he is a safe refugee in Thailand with his family. Unless war and persecution can be forever eliminated, people will likely be forced to leave their countries and become refugees. A caring world must open its arms to refugees providing the food, shelter, and safety that all humankind deserves.

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