

editor's message



We're the Lucky Ones

Probably 90 percent of your future is determined the moment you are born. If you happen to be in America when you take that first breath, you are one of the lucky ones. And if you happen to be white and Christian, then you've really won the lottery.

By contrast, if you first open your eyes in Syria, Congo, Uganda, Haiti, or many other Third World countries, then you lose. At some point, you will likely live under the rule of a brutal dictator, and quite possibly experience poverty, torture, tribal and/or religious warfare, or even genocide. And if you're a woman, you can add subjugation, rape, and mutilation to the list of possible horrors.

There may never be a moment in your life when you feel safe and secure and able to protect your loved ones.

It's no wonder people from these places are willing to risk everything to escape. When your day-to-day existence includes scrambling for food scraps, or cowering with your family as bombs fall, or fearing that the knock on the door in the middle of the night is the secret police come to take you away, lifting your 3-year-old onto a leaky, overcrowded boat to cross an ocean can seem like a reasonable thing to do.

Most of us, on the other hand, have done nothing to earn our safe life. It was our ancestors who rolled the dice, coming to these shores to escape despots, poverty, religious persecution, and war. Just like today's refugees.

What surprises me is that there is such a lack of compassion and understanding among some in our community toward the idea of bringing families from war-torn Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo to Bloomington.

There will always be the nut jobs — ignorant, angry, and bigoted. There's one running for president. These people don't like anyone who isn't like them. It's a waste of time proffering facts and logic to haters.

But among rational people who oppose allowing Syrian refugees into our community, the most common argument I hear is that there might be ISIS terrorists among them. This idea, promulgated by our governor and several other governors, has no basis in fact. Refugees from Syria spend at least 18–24 months in transit camps while nine U.S. agencies vet them, including the U.S. Department of State, Department of Defense, the FBI Terrorist Screening Center, and the Department of Homeland Security. The Libertarian Cato Institute calculates the odds of a refugee killing an American in a terrorist attack at 1 in 364 billion. If ISIS wants to infiltrate, the vetting is far lighter on foreign students and tourists. (It is also worth noting that since September 11, 2001, the U.S. has admitted 750,000 refugees and not one has been arrested on domestic terrorism charges.)

Beginning in March 2017, the plan is for 20 refugee families from Syria and/or the Democratic Republic of Congo to start arriving in Bloomington. They will have experienced harrowing pasts. Most won't speak English. They will have no possessions save the few belongings in their arms. They will be dazed, yet immensely thankful, to at last be in America. I know my family, friends, and co-workers will give them a warm Bloomington welcome. I hope you will too.

After all, we're the lucky ones.

Malcolm Abrams
editor@magbloom.com