Bycel, Lee T. *Refugees in America: Stories of Courage, Resilience, and Hope in*

Their Own Words.

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Reviewed by Dr M. Anjum Khan

Refugees are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, with the same hopes and ambitions as us—except that a twist of fate has bound their lives to a global refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale.

Khaled Hosseini

Is all human's human? Or are some more human than others?
Roméo Antonius Dallaire, saved 30,000 lives during the Rwandan genocide

The author, Lee T. Bycel, dedicates this book, *Refugees in America: Stories of Courage, Resilience, and Hope in Their Own Words*, to all the refugees who flee the horrific persecution in their homelands and travel thousands of miles in search of safety and refuge. Bycel is a humanitarian activist, Rabbi, teacher and author, who serves as the Sinton Visiting Professor of Holocaust, Ethics and Refugee Studies at the University of San Francisco. He has visited refugee camps in Darfur, Chad, South Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Haiti. He has written extensively about the predicament of refugees, and has procured financial support

for medical health centers in refugee camps. He makes an attempt to demonstrate how the refugees have experienced the worst of the human condition and how, despite that, their spirit, courage, and resilience reflect the greatness of the human spirit. The book contains eleven stories of eleven refugees from different parts of the world resettled in America, which provide a perspective into what millions around the globe are experiencing today. The author believes that if we can transcend the limits of political discussion and see refugees as human beings with needs and dreams just like our own, then we can find sustainable, just, and compassionate solutions for them to live lives that are safe, that meet their basic needs.

The first chapter, titled, "Hope Is the Oxygen of My Life" presents forth Meron Semedar from Eritrea, describing the socio-political upheavals of the country. His belief that 'hope is the oxygen of my life' represents every refugee's optimism. The second chapter, titled, "Children Who Returned from a Walk-through Hell" tells the story of Noemi Perez-Lemus from Guatemala. The third chapter titled, "The Imaginary Girl" is about Asinja Badeel, representing the Yazidis from Iraq. The fourth chapter, titled, "He Threw Garbage on Me" portrays the refugee experience of Deng Ajak Jongkuch, from South Sudan. "The Apple Lady", the fifth chapter, is about the ordeal of Jewish refugees in Poland represented by Sidonia Lax.This chapter also includes a list of surviving skills likely to be useful for a refugee.

The sixth chapter, titled as "The Walls Have Ears" delineates the plight of Syrian refugees through Malk Alamarsh's experience in Syria and the long wait for resettlement in United States. The seventh chapter, titled, "A River of Memories" deals with the Cambodians refugees through Vanny Loun's life story as a Cambodian refugee. The eight-chapter titled, "Blind but the Heart Can See" contains the personal account of Darwin Velasquez from El Salvador. The ninth chapter titled as "The Life Before and the Life After" narrates the life tale of a Vietnamese refugee, Kien Ha Quach Thien. The tenth chapter "They Bombed My Church

on Christmas Day" deals with the trauma of refugeehood uncovered through the life of Wilita Sanguma from Democratic Republic of Congo. The last chapter titled as "Empty Walls" depicts the life and experience of Jawad Khawari from Afghanistan. This chapter also ponder upon the barriers and limitations in a refugee's life in America.

The author's introduction, in which he narrates his journey through the refugee camps, is highly symbolic of the tiring journey of the refugees who unlike the author cannot plan their journey but are compelled to travel on until they find a sanctuary. The book contains photos By Dona Kopol Bonick, who is an esteemed portraitist and artist whose photographic career spans three decades. The photography director for the inaugural BottleRock music festival, her works have appeared in many books, art museums, and private collections. It contains a heart-rending forward by Eshmael Beah, an international and New York Times best-selling author of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier and Radiance of Tomorrow, a Novel*. The book concludes with an equally inspiring afterword followed by acknowledgement, and index.

Th ebook begins with inspiring lines by Nelson Mandela. The book's introduction is both powerful and poignant at the same time. It is a stirring reading with anecdotal and life writing style. The author begins the book with one of his memories of a refugee camps and that is very insightful. The lines "we will go home" is heartening. There are many such inspiring and thought-provoking liners. The narration switches from first person to second person. Another notable point is that the refugees included in the book represent both women and men. The eleven chapters can also be considered text documentaries.

This book contains plural voices in order to undo stereotypes and generalization. The book has brought together diverse voices from different parts of the world. There are several thinking points: the humanitarian crisis, the identity crisis, the journey of survival, and other

subjects. The individual stories highlight state violence against refugees.The book offers a political awareness in different countries, particularly in the United States. The refugees included in the book represent both the sides of the coins. Irrespective of their ethnic background, they are all grateful for being in America, but at the same time, they are also vocal in projecting the socio-economic challenges on the basis of their background. In particular, the chapter, "He Threw Garbage on Me" shows the extent of the stigma the refugees face and suffer. The book will benefit the scholars and researchers belonging to the disciplines such as, Refugee Studies and human Rights, among other disciplines.