



A B S E N T S T O R I E S



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OPEN SPACE ASSOCIATION (2018): Open Space Association was established in 2018 by the coordinators, workshop moderators, and volunteers of Çimenev, a Centre for Science and Arts in operation since 2016. The Association aims to provide women, children, and notably young people from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds with capacity-building opportunities in such fields as education, civil society awareness, social entrepreneurship, and technology.



DEEP POVERTY NETWORK (2019): Deep Poverty Network was established by a group of researchers, sociologists, psychologists, and journalists as a product of experience and observations gathered through Çimenev workshops and field work. The Network aims to research poverty and to identify its scale; to monitor the conditions pertaining to human rights; and to provide a platform where poverty can be discussed as a human rights violation. To this end, the Network offers food aid and support with bills and remote education to day labourers working under precarious conditions, while also conducting human rights monitoring and opening up for discussion and adding visibility to the multidimensional nature of poverty.



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG TURKEY REPRESENTATION (2001):

The Heinrich Böll Foundation works independently and nurtures a spirit of intellectual openness. Its goal is to support efforts from democratic actors for the protection of human and minority rights, the ecology, sustainable development, and global as well as local security policies. Being based in Istanbul, for more than 20 years the hbs supports civil society initiatives that stick to the above-mentioned principles and strive for democratic governance free from any discrimination based on the rule of law, gender equality and the rights of all people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS... *We would like to extend our gratitude to the owners of the stories for sharing them with us; to Meryem Dide and Cansu for their great efforts in the transcription of the audio recordings of interviews; to Tülay Demircan and Myra for their mostly voluntary efforts in the illustration of each story and in the book design; to Esin for her proofreading; and to Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representation for making this project possible.*



PREFACE

In our foundation year, we conducted the “Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic” research study again with support from Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representation to measure the extent to which individuals living in poverty were able to access their fundamental rights during the pandemic; we will refer to this study in many parts of this book. This research process, coupled with our regular efforts of 1.5 years to support and empower individuals living in poverty, brought us face to face with the failure inherent in reducing individuals and experiences to mere pieces of data.

There were a wide range of means at our fingertips to narrate the unsustainable conditions and rights violations in deep poverty: research, monitoring, photography, interviews, exhibitions, videos, and stories...

We chose stories as our tool for the Absent Stories project. Believing that the stories we encountered during our work in this field would be best told by their owners, we aimed to offer this book as a space for individuals directly exposed to poverty to have their voices heard.

In the first part of the book, you will find the stories of fourteen individuals who had been involved in Deep Poverty Network. These stories were all narrated by their owners. They were then storified by the Deep Poverty Network team. The owner of each story was either kept anonymous or openly identified in the story depending as per their preference. The owner of each story read and finalised the respective text before publication. We found it interesting to end each story with information from relevant legislation, research, and the media, etc.

The second part starts with a story penned by Hacer Foggo, who has been active in the field of poverty as a journalist and activist for 20 years. In this part, we compiled a quintessential diary of daily human rights stories told to us during the neighbourhood visits, telephone interviews, and support processes we conducted as Deep Poverty Network.

We hope to see the day that all conceptions and discussions of poverty be grounded in the recognition that poverty is a human rights violation and its elimination is possible only through seeing it, acknowledging it, and addressing it with a rights-based approach.

***Inspired by the title of the “The Women’s Side of the Story” broadcast on Open Radio.*



PART ONE



D R O P Y O U R
S E C U R I T Y
B L A N K E T !



D R O P Y O U R S E C U R I T Y B L A N K E T ?

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT, HACER FOGGO

I had given up telling stories. The heroes of my stories were all engulfed in desperation. They were heavy-hearted. Their problems were relentless. Every problem you thought you had solved would give birth to a new one. They were hopeless and distrustful of the human hubris and complex.

The stories I told would come across as bothersome; I could tell from the faces. This is because hearing the stories of a bunch of people unknown to them, let alone a bunch of people so down and out, means for the listener that they have become a part of those stories, which, in turn, means that they have to do something, which is not easy.

Any such story may be off to a flying start, but then go downhill in a stroke; it may harm you; you may have to drop your security blanket. When I wrote these lines, the “pandemic” had not yet come into our lives. The pandemic started at a time when I had given up telling stories of deep poverty, and the ensuing evolution of destitution into hunger on the streets of hardship evoked in me the urge to have these stories heard by everyone. I write from time to time; of course, I write whenever I find the time... On occasion, it takes me days and even years to shake off the effect left on me of a person I have visited at home or a news Article I have read... In one instance in 2014, I read a news article on Alihan, a waitress from Izmir. The words he had posted on Facebook before he committed suicide by lying on rail tracks were a testimony of his entire story of 18 years:

*“Waiter! What is on the menu? – We have life, Ma’am. – This life? You keep it; I am out...”
Alihan’s starry eyes and his words haunted me for years.*

Alihan had left these words behind before taking off the “deep poverty” ring he had carried around his neck his entire life and these words would then become an epitome for the stories of more than one hundred musicians who committed suicide during the pandemic seven years later... My mind did not let go of how Zehra and her family saw their house being demolished in a phase of urban transformation in 2006 and had to spend the rest of their lives in tents, sheds, and tumbledown shacks, either. These makeshift houses are prone to fires; when electricity is not available or has been cut off, the candles used at night tend to tip over, setting fire to the furniture, burning children. In sheds, mice gnaw at the cheeks of babies; women suffer from alopecia; there is always a seemingly never-ending stride of scabies, tuberculosis, COPD, and asthma.

They carry their water home from wells, fountains. When Ünzile died in a tent in Çanakkale and news outlets reported her to have “frozen to death due to lack of care”, those in power toiled for days to refute this claim and those bowing and scraping after them somehow fail to opt for developing strategies to reduce deep poverty over having the reports retracted. When I reported on the tragic death of baby Zeynep in a tent in Kağıthane for a newspaper years ago, the mayor immediately sent a letter to the newspaper to dispute the report without a word of condolences or a visit to the family of the infant, as if to say, “Yes, a baby might have died, but we will not see a scratch left on our image”. The same story played out over and over in Sulukule, too; until the last house was demolished, they kept saying, “This is the most socially oriented project in the world!”. My stories are the stories of deep poverty as a legacy handed over by parents to children of Sulukule, Küçükbakkalköy, and Kağıthane, neighbourhoods that were demolished fifteen years ago, when they were just 10 or 12. These children have now grown into their 20s and are holding their own children in their arms and the same legacy on their shoulders.

When I wrote these lines, the “pandemic” had not yet come into our lives. The pandemic started at a time when I had given up telling stories of deep poverty and the ensuing evolution of destitution into hunger on the streets of hardship evoked in me the urge to have these stories heard by everyone.

PERSONAL LOAN

As the pandemic erupted in March, the streets were filled with cries of “Anyone with food to spare?” and alarms were fitted on all bottles of baby formula on shelves, which foreshadowed the tough year ahead. The word on the street was in unison: “We have no diapers, no baby formula, no milk, no oil, no vegetables, no nothing!”. With my hand on my heart, I had not thought for one second that their evolution from poverty to hunger would be this sudden, this fast – I mean, it happened in a matter of days. This whole process was much tougher on women and single mothers in particular. They developed their own strategies to cope with hunger; I met mothers who had been feeding their babies sugary water, rice mash, and even instant soup instead of baby formula. For infants that were too young for food, they reportedly found the solution in “weaning them off formula”.

Destitution like never before. Families fighting hunger day in and day out. A sufficient supply of formula and diapers turning into a constant challenge for children, and parents finding it hard to look into their eyes without being shaken by shame.

Local governments were rather late in seeing the state of “hunger” brought along by the pandemic, thinking that a mere “care package” would be enough to keep life going or a one-time aid of “1000 TRY” would cover a whole year’s losses, and this way of thinking deepened the already deep scale of poverty even further and turned it into a quagmire.

During the first year of the pandemic, paper collectors roaming the streets would say that they returned home every day with 30-40 TRY, that is, on the days when they could actually go out. The ever-growing pile of bills and rent arrears to pay off and mouths to feed slowly brought them into a mess they found almost impossible to muddle through.

Unfortunately, the gradual reopening of the streets did not change their situation one bit. They were not able to find materials to shift in dumpsters like they had used to. There was a rise in the number of paper collectors, but a drop in scrap value and on top of that, their exposure to waste brought them face to face with the risk of COVID-19 infection. In the end, their unpaid bills meant that they no longer had electricity at home and their rent arrears brought them into frequent altercations with their landlords, who, in turn, set them deadlines to move out. In fact, some families saw their belongings thrown out in the streets even without a deadline. Right at that moment, our President announced that those in need could take out loans from certain banks and repay them in easy instalments and this announcement found immediate repercussions in many a poor neighbourhood. Those in dire straits took out this personal loan of 5000 TRY. For instance, a paper collector we supported took out a consumer loan of 5000 TRY in November 2020, although they had neither a property to their name nor a stable income. In fact, we heard that these neighbourhoods were frequented by representatives of certain banks, wandering around to find potential clients to issue loans. During those days, two families I visited in one of these neighbourhoods told me that the loan they had taken out was a “life saver” for them and they believed that the pandemic would soon be over and they would be able to repay this loan easily.

One family say that they have used this loan to make their shed/shack a better place to live and to buy supplies; in the house they live in with 3 children of elementary school age and one infant, they have at least been able to keep the rats at bay. However, they also say that they have not been able to pay the loan instalment of 190 TRY a month for the last four months and now have to spend their daily earnings to meet their basic needs as they have a hard time accessing food, baby formula, and diapers.

Another woman who took out a loan despite her illiteracy says that the bank constantly sends her notices, which her son in elementary school reads for her, and she cannot sleep at night for fear of being sent to prison. Both of them are day labourers; every day, they walk for kilometres collecting wastepaper and selling tissues and water on the streets or work as housecleaners. They save nearly half of their daily earning, i.e. 20 TRY out of 50 TRY or 10 TRY out of 30 TRY, to pay the upcoming loan instalment. They inevitably fail to save the exact sum; every scream of their hungry baby at home means a dime taken out of the money saved to repay the loan.



SHELTER

Selma spent the pandemic with her three children, 1, 4 and 6, in a house with its front door and chimney in pieces. Every time I called her, she would tell me of a different trouble. It would be about food on one call, cleaning supplies on another, or diapers and formula on yet another; however, the sadness in her voice was, in fact, a product of the bullying she had to deal with at home with her children during the lockdown.

The breaking noise of her already ajar windows, a noise too familiar to her, would be mixed with her children screaming every time and would leave the house in silence after her neighbours saying, without exception, “These things happen in a family”.

During the time of no restrictions, Selma used to collect food out of supermarket bins with her baby tied up on her back and then, she started to go out to sell tissues from time to time.

Every time she returned home, her husband would take her day’s earnings out of her hands, leaving her children hungry again, and at night, her screams would blend in with her children’s screams, resounding the entire street.

Eventually, Selma could not take it anymore and approached a police station with her three young children. She then ended up in a shelter. She could stay at the shelter only for a week; she says that she left the shelter because she felt out of place there, her children were unhappy, she could not get milk to her children whenever they needed it, and her children would “disrupt the shelter” because of their running around. She then describes how she went to stay with her mother in a one-bedroom house, but then she slept rough in a park with her three children and had to go back home. After another night of screams, her husband went to prison. Selma has a new home now. She still does find it difficult to keep up with rent, but her home is now free of the noise of windows breaking and her children screaming in fear.







THE EVER-
HEAVIER CART

T H E E V E R - H E A V I E R C A R T

THE STORY OF A COUPLE COLLECTING WASTEPAPER AND PLASTICS

OWNERS OF THE STORY: DO NOT WISH TO SHARE THEIR NAMES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEVAL ŞENER

I was born in Istanbul. I went to the school in the neighbourhood until the eighth grade. I would go to school without any lunch money and I wouldn't have anything for lunch most days, but I still found a way to go to school. I really wanted to finish high school, too, but our financial means didn't allow me to. We were 3 siblings; I am the youngest. The older ones had to drop out even before they finished elementary school. They went on to work as day labourers; we were trying to bear up in one way or the other. I was lucky as I was able to go to school until the eighth grade. Then, I worked at factories; I went abroad to work in construction; I was a shoeshine for a while; and I collected wastepaper... I got married when I was 17 and had a child before I even started my military service.

Nowadays, I collect wastepaper, but I also take up day labour whenever I can find it. Let's say, on a typical day, I go out at around 5 in the morning. I wander around Alemdağ, Taşdelen, and Nişantepe until 9 or 10 am. I walk for at least 7-8 hours every day, carrying my cart around with me. As the time goes on, it gets fuller and heavier, making it harder for me to walk around. I collect wastepaper on one hand, taking in cardboard and boxes, whatever I can find. On the other,

I collect plastics like nylons, bags, or bottles... If I come across scraps in bins, I take them out, too; it is even better to find scraps. I also take out any seemingly edible food... Vegetables, tomatoes, peppers, or potatoes...

We bring them home to wash them, clean them, and eat them. That cart isn't mine, either. I fetch it from the scrap dealer every morning, do my collection rounds with it, and then go back to him. He takes what I have collected that day and puts them on the scale; the price for paper is 60 kuruş per kilo. If it weighs a hundred kilos, I get 50 lira or



60 lira. Then, I leave the cart there and go home, stopping by the shop or, if it is open that day, the open market. I buy whatever the money I have earned that day is enough for and go back home. So, we spend whatever we have collected in a day on groceries or to replace the gas cylinder. Then, you have the rent, the bills, other debts, and kids' expenses to think about... The list goes on and on, doesn't it? This is how we keep ourselves afloat. It is not easy to collect 100 kg a day, either; my feet grow weary and get blisters. I even get athlete's foot sometimes. There are times when I let it go after 30 kg or 40 kg and go back out again in the cool of the evening. Sometimes, I have to rest for a few days just so that my feet can recover. At other times, I go out for a collection round daily for a few days, which is the only way where I can collect the whole 100 kg. Then comes the rain, the heat, the winter. Everyone in our neighbourhood goes out daily with a cart now; we go out at different times and try to collect from different bins. Actually, I have been doing collection rounds like this since I was eight. I used to go out after school. At that time, there weren't this many people out collecting paper. It is impossible for a single person to do collection rounds every day, either. You need to take turns with someone else.

I was in Gebze at the time when I met my husband in a family arrangement and we got married. I was around 17. I went to school up to the third grade. I couldn't learn how to read and write fully. Let's say, I am able to read, but not write. I have been collecting wastepaper for 6 years. One day, my husband goes out for a collection round and I go out the next day – we take turns. One person cannot manage it by themselves and you have the kids to think about. Believe me, your body can't take it, either. During the pandemic, we've had a curfew on Saturdays, Sundays, and weekday evenings. Normally, we would set off at around 5 or 6 in the evening and collect wastepaper well into the night or set off very early in the morning. The curfew starts at 9 pm one day, but at 7 pm the next day – you never know. Did you know that there were days when the curfew started at 5 pm? That means you can't go out for a collection round on those days. What is more – I don't know what this has to do with the disease but – there has been a drop in the price of paper by the kilo. Some dealers started to buy one kilo for 30 kuruş and others for 40 kuruş. Then, what do you get for 100 kg? 30 lira or 40 lira. It is impossible to live on 40 lira a day, how can it be? Do you think it would be possible? Everything breaks the bank nowadays. Do you know the good thing about going out with a cart? You sometimes find food, too. If it looks OK, you take it and bring it home.

When I go out for a round, my husband looks after the kids. I never take them out with me; they would perish. I don't want them to learn how to do it, either. I want them to go to school and not even be aware of this type of work. But, as those who have worked this way will know, it is gruelling. The cart gets very heavy. It becomes a challenge to go up hills. You sweat blood; you are always on the verge of quitting. Then, you have the traffic to think about. You try to walk side by side with or behind cars, to keep up. Going down a hill is another story. It is all very tough. It is a double-edged sword; it is a pain when the cart gets heavier and heavier, but you do want it to get heavier, because otherwise you won't make any money.

My only dream is to have a proper home. My home now is swarming with cockroaches. It is damp everywhere you look. We are saving some money, something like 300-400 million, just to patch up the holes. The kitchen needs a redo but it is still up in the air. I say, the damp can be sorted with a paint job, but the whole house is rotten. I wish I had a home where we can all live as a family without worrying about the rent. My second dream is for my children to complete their education... They do go to school and will surely continue to do so. They will go to school come what may.

RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“Everyone has the right and duty to work. The State shall take the necessary measures to raise the standard of living of workers, and to protect workers and the unemployed in order to improve the general conditions of labour, to promote labour, to create suitable economic conditions for prevention of unemployment and to secure labour peace.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 49)

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”

(United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23)

“With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

- ***to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;***

to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary.”

(European Council, European Social Charter, Article 30, [link](#))

“Unauthorised waste collection and sorting in the city primarily creates environmental and public health problems, as well as illicit employment carried out under unhealthy conditions, and results in public loss and undeserved gains. ... We have full faith in the sensitivity of our municipalities, mukhtars, and residents in making sure that these districts are forever free of these waste collectors, commonly known as cart people.”

Governorate of Istanbul, Press Statement, 2021-69

“Coronavirus affects all segments of the society. The most prominent impact is observed among day labourers and those taking care of their families on daily wages. Waste collectors have seen a 9/10 drop in their daily earnings along with the closing of stores and businesses, and waste collection has been banned altogether in certain cities.”

(Habertürk, 03.2020, [link](#))

“Thousands of people left unemployed during the pandemic have taken up paper collection.”

(Sözcü, 12.2020, [link](#))

“The Zero Waste Project, followed by the recent efforts to establish the Environment Agency of Turkey, worries recycling workers earning their living from waste. M.K., explaining how being unable to work due to the curfew has left them in economic hardship, says ‘We are afraid that they will now tax the thrash we collect’.”

(Gazete Duvar, 12.2020, [link](#))

“The number of waste collectors in Turkey has now reached half a million. Hundreds of thousands of waste collectors, collectively making up the backbone of the waste industry, demand job security and social security.”

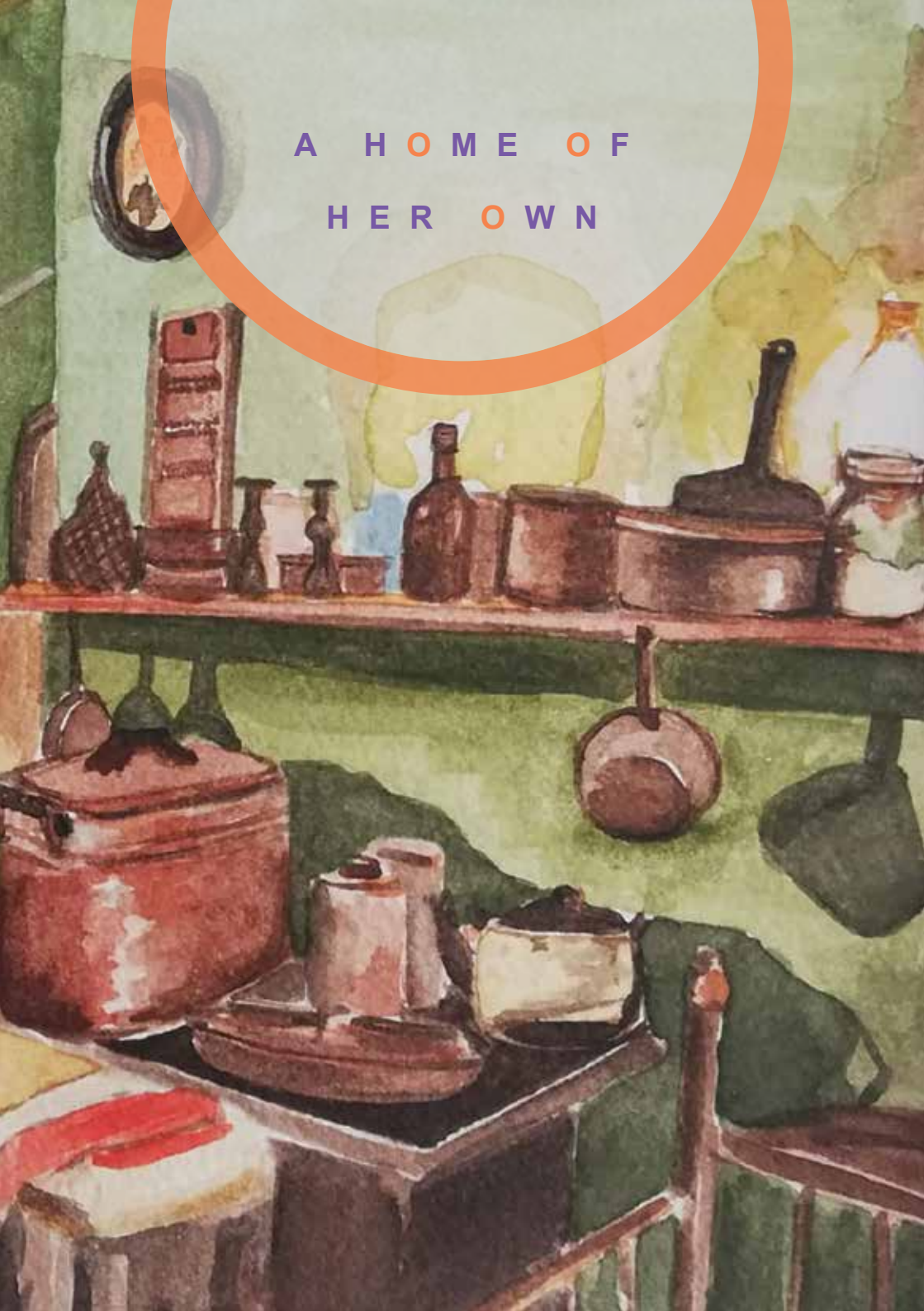
(SATDER, [link](#))

“Synchronous operations on paper collectors in Istanbul: Police and municipality teams organised an operation against paper collectors. The operation resulted in multiple arrests.”

dokuz8 Haber, 06.10.2021



A H O M E O F
H E R O W N



A H O M E O F H E R O W N

OWNER OF THE STORY: DOESN'T WANT TO SHARE THEIR NAME

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: SELEN YÜKSEL

**The names of neighbourhoods and streets were changed for the story.*

My story is quite complicated. Let me tell you the story of my marriage first. My husband and I were best buds; we loved each other. His family visited us to ask my father for my hand in marriage and my father said yes. The next day, they brought me a pair of earrings and a skirt. They put them on me. We remained engaged for a few months before my mother broke off the engagement and I had to elope. My mother went to the police for me, but I didn't bring any charges against my husband. And so, we got married. They gave me a wedding. We were in dire straits at the beginning of our marriage; we lived in a tent. My daughter was born in a tent and I lived there for two years. But my mother used to live in a tent, too, and I spent my childhood in one. It was gruelling to live in a tent with no water, no toilet. In a tent, you can't take a bath or lie around as you like. You have mice and bugs... I hate bugs. The municipality keeps tearing down the tent; you rebuild it, but they tear it down again. Whenever they tore our tent down, we would stay at a factory close by, after letting the guards know about our presence. We would go to the public toilet at a subway station. This was how we lived our lives. Then, we found a cheap house to rent. It was 2018 and our rent was 350 million. I said, "I want to rent this house". My mother helped me out and I borrowed some money from my uncle. My uncle gave me a full gold coin for my mother's sake; I haven't been able to pay him back yet. I went and rented that house. This was the house in Dudullu. I lived in that house for 5-6 months. When I found it difficult to pay my rent, I found Sister Hacer's phone number. I said to her, "Sister Hacer, I can't pay my rent. I am in dire straits". Sister Hacer has known us since Bakkalköy, but I was very young then and can't remember her. My son was born in a house; he was comfortable. My daughter, however, grew up in a cardboard box in the tent.

After I started living in the house, I couldn't keep up with the rent. I moved between 5-6 houses. I initially lived in the Anatolian side. Then, I moved away from Dudullu and ended up in Çimen Neighbourhood. After Çimen, I lived in Erguvan, on Hürriyet Street. From there, I moved to Kanyon Street in Ekşi Neighbourhood. If I have the means to rent a house again, I will go back to Çimen. I moved between a lot of houses. Every time, it was because my landlord threw me out due to my rent arrears. One of them did make a contract with me, but apparently, he'd put a condition there to say, "I can throw you out anytime I want". I can't read and I hadn't even looked at the contract. This time, if I am given a contract, I will make sure to have one for two years. I will bring my brother with me; he knows how to read and

write. I will have him read the contract so that I won't have to move out again. My favourite house was the one in Ekşi Neighbourhood, but the rent was way too high. We weren't able to put together the money for rent. My kids were young then. I would have to borrow money to pay the rent every time. In the end, I said, "I am going to move out". The landlord thankfully asked for only half of the rent we owed. The house cost me 1000 lira per month including the rent and utilities. All the money I would earn a month wouldn't make 1000 lira; how could I pay it every month?

I rented my last house for 500 a month. My landlord's wife and children were very nice. May God bless them! But my landlord was not nice like that. All of them were good to us, but not the husband. We were living right below them, in something that was more like a basement. The landlord lived upstairs. He wouldn't want me to put my wood in front of the door or to string my laundry out to dry. He would give us a hard time about the noise my kids made. He would tell me, "You will not shout!". In the end, he said, "You will move out in May. I don't want you". I had to move out. Then, we went to live with the child of the older brother of my husband's father. Before that, I would go to my mother every time I was evicted. Her house was pretty crowded; I wasn't comfortable there. The kids would always fight. It is still as bad in the house I went to stay in this time. The kids always fight; they can't get along. And, of course, I can't take it when they beat my child. I step in and say, "Don't do that!".

I find it extremely difficult every time I look for a house and every time I move to a different home. It is gruelling to find a home and it is equally gruelling to settle down in a new home. You can't rent one and settle down at the drop of a hat. It takes a lot of searching to find a house. And when you have found one, it just may be so that the landlord won't accept you as a tenant. You view a house and the landlord comes up and says, "I can't have you as a tenant. You are Roma. I know, you won't pay my rent". Then, you rent the house, clean it, furnish it, paint it... I really end up in a wretched state. I embrace every home I have moved in as if I were not the tenant, but the owner. I clean it down. I say, "This is my home. I should care about it". I wipe the windows down. I put up the curtains. I tidy my bedroom nice and clean. I tidy my living room. I wash the landing. My seats... I don't have seats at home. There is this woman who will leave her seats to me once she moves out – may God bless her. So, there is no seating at home. We also find it extremely difficult to come to accept and love the homes we move in. Your kitchenware also takes a beating during the move. I don't have a fridge anymore, either. I used to have one, but its handle broke. The door on my washing machine went bust, too. I can't do my laundry anymore. I hate doing it by hand. I didn't have a bed; I didn't have a bedroom. What I mean is, I used to sleep on a bedstead. My landlord has recently given me a bed. The hardest part is not having a fridge or a washing machine. I didn't have a TV and I still don't. We live with my husband's relatives and so, we watch TV together.

Being evicted disrupts the order for the kids, too. My daughter finds it hard to readapt. She says, "We are guests here, Mom. Let's go to our home now. We have stayed here for too long". My son also says, "Let's go to our old home". I tell him "No, my dear. Let's not go there. There are large mice there". He means our home in Dudullu; there were mice there, large mice. My children would be too scared to go to the toilet. The mice would get into the bread at night

and I would have to throw my bread away every time. They would eat our food. Seeing as we didn't have a fridge, they would eat whatever they could find outside. I did report it to my landlord, telling him to "Find a solution", but he didn't. He said, "You move out, then". That was when I moved out. How could I stay in a house swarming with mice?

He said, "Start looking for a house". I said, "It is so easy to say, come tell me about it! Ask me if I can make ends meet, if I have money, if I can actually move out... It's easy for you to say; you already have a home!". In my previous homes, it was the same story with the landlords saying, "Move out!". Whenever I am not able to pay rent, whenever my landlord knocks my door, I feel so small. His words hurt me deeply. He rants and raves, saying, "Why don't you pay your rent on time? It is overdue; why aren't you paying up?". He says he lives on rent, but I wish he understood us just a little bit. We are not able to work due to the pandemic; we can't do anything. What I mean is, if he experienced hardship, he wouldn't rant and rave at us. But no, he won't understand.

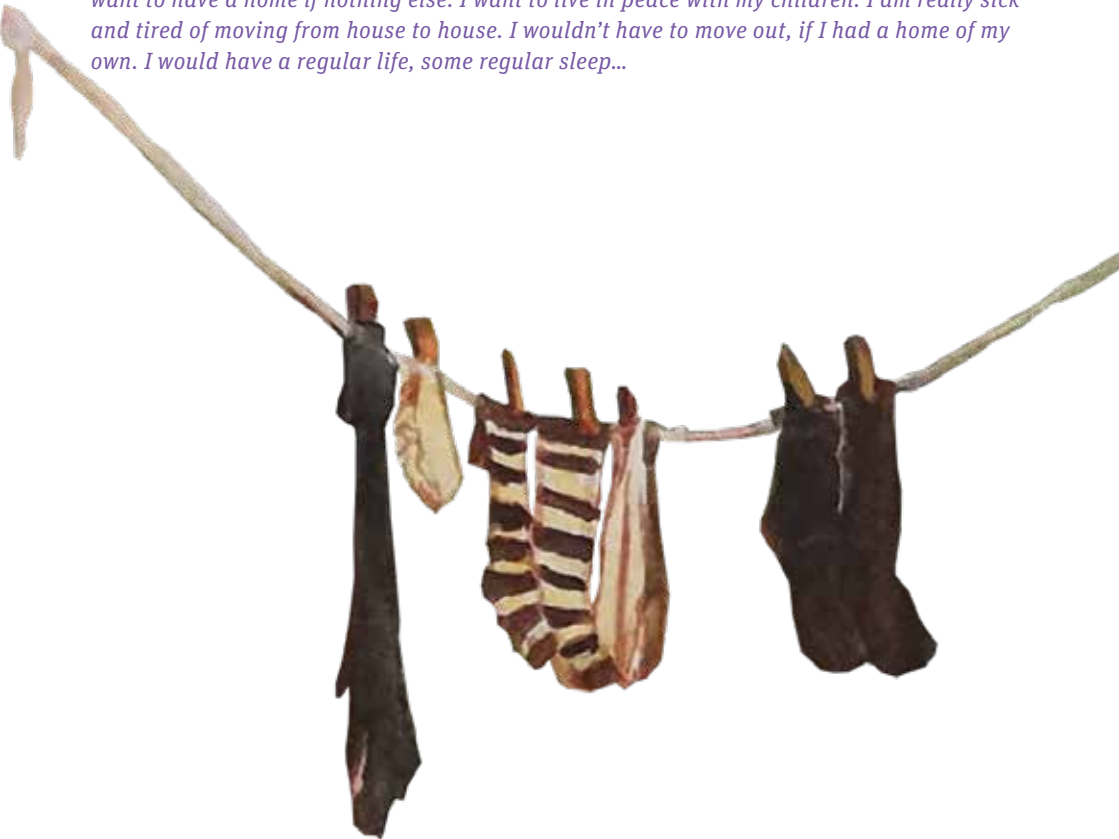
We had it easier before Corona. We were able to work. My husband had Corona at the time of the curfew. There was a curfew for 17 days and he had to remain in isolation for 5 more. He never set foot outside. Recently, the local shop has closed down, too. You can't do your shopping. And the kids always want to go to the shop. No money comes in if you don't work. This curfew has been very tough on us. It is very difficult with the rent and the bills. I am on benefits for electricity bills, which the state pays for me. My water bills are paid by Deep Poverty Network and it is the Deep Poverty Network that sends in food. When food is not enough, my child gets ill. The kids always want ice cream. They want whatever they see in others' hands. Every time, the shopkeeper gives them what they want on credit. Every time we go to the shop, my son says, "Get me this". It is easy to say, "Get me this", but how can I pay for it? How can I tell him, "I can't go anywhere and this is the state I am in". I put on my mask, walk through back passages so as not to be seen, and I collect wastepaper. I bring a sack on my back. I don't have a cart. I have no cart, no nothing. There is a curfew, which means you can't go anywhere. I am hung out to dry. I wish this pandemic would be over soon and we could get back to our easier days. I have only recently recovered from Corona, but I still wear a mask. I put masks on my kids, too. We have pulled through this time and none of us were bedridden, but they say that the second time does lay one up.

The other day, I had to go out during a curfew; there was nothing left at home. I fetched a cart, took my kids with me, and went out for a paper collection round. I went all the way up with my children. Then, we were stopped by police. I was grateful to them for stopping us. Otherwise, I would have passed out. I couldn't drink water. My children were crying, saying, "Mom, get us water". I don't have any money; how could I get them water? I ask the passers-by for some money, but they wouldn't give me any. I immediately got back home and gave my children tap water. I washed my hands and my face, pulling myself together. The police said, "Go back home. Don't you know there is a curfew?". I said, "Yes, we do, but all you do is to say there is a curfew. Have you ever thought to ask, 'Do you have any bread, any food at home??' You have placed this curfew, at least have the decency to help out!". I recently visited the District Governorate. They said, "You had Corona and we got you a package. You're due another one

in June. You will get your package then". In June! Can you imagine? They apparently got me one when I had Corona and the next will be in June... I was made to wait in a long queue to get there, too; I was behind 41 people...

We always collect wastepaper. My husband used to have a car. He would always go out to collect wastepaper and take care of us. We had a small car, very small. His car broke down, though. It doesn't work at all anymore. We had to sell the car for scraps just to pay the rent. So now, we don't have a car... We can't go anywhere, either. There are so many things I would want to do if we had a regular income... If my husband found a decent job, if they allowed him to work, if we had a regular salary coming in every month, I would pay my rent and I would pay my electricity bills.

Look, this is how we live, in misery. I wouldn't want my son to live in misery like us. I would want to buy a house for my son. I would save up. I would spend some of it, but I would put some aside, too. I would buy myself a car. I would do whatever it takes. My dream is to buy a house. I would want to have a car, a home of my own. I would work and put some money in the bank for my kid. I don't want anything else. I really want to have a home of my own. I want to have a home if nothing else. I want to live in peace with my children. I am really sick and tired of moving from house to house. I wouldn't have to move out, if I had a home of my own. I would have a regular life, some regular sleep...



RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11)

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

(International Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25.1)

“The right to adequate housing covers living in a housing arrangement where provision is made for the legal security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy.”

(United Nations, Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 4)

“The domicile of an individual shall not be violated. Unless there exists a decision duly given by a judge on one or several of the grounds of national security, public order, prevention of crime, protection of public health and public morals, or protection of the rights and freedoms of others, or unless there exists a written order of an agency authorized by law in cases where delay is prejudicial, again on these grounds, no domicile may be entered or searched or the property seized therein.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 21)

“Our study shows that 10% of all families of day labourers interviewed for the study live in sheds/tents. Some of the families state that they started living in a shed or tent after they lost their homes to urban transformation, some after they lost their home during the pandemic, and some right after their arrival in Istanbul. The in-depth interviews held with those families living in sheds and tents posed them a question about how safe they felt in their living environments and their answers to this question reveal that their living environments fail to meet their basic needs for safety and living standards.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)

“40.7% of all people in Turkey live in overcrowded houses in terms of the number of people per household.”

(Eurostat, Overcrowding rate by income quintile, 2020)

“The Ministry of Family and Social Services offers a benefit scheme called ‘Shelter Benefits’. This is dispersed in the form of cash for the maintenance and repairs of unsafe and unhealthy housing. However, this scheme is only available for title holders.”

(Alpkan Birelma, Homelessness in Turkey: A General Assessment, 2014)

“39.3% of the population in Turkey complain about heating problems, while 36.9% say that they live in unsafe housing conditions due to roof leaks, rotting window frames, and damp, etc.”

(TurkSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Research, 2020)



Bahien



THEY CALL IT
LOVE

T H E Y C A L L I T L O V E

OWNERS OF THE STORY: DON'T WANT TO SHARE THEIR NAME

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEVVAL ŞENER

(Sultan and Ali, a couple)

**The names of neighbourhoods and streets were changed for the story.*

SULTAN: Our families arranged us to meet. Ali was in his military service. Yes, we hadn't seen each other's faces before. I was born in Üsküdar in 1995, so was Ali.

ALİ: One day, my father was out drinking with friends. Apparently, there was a wedding going on. My father had one too many. Sultan's father knew my father from before. I mean, my father-in-law is his brother's childhood friend. He said, "Come on! Let's go to my house so you can have some coffee!". My father, of course, took him on his offer. They then went to Sultan's house. We were both 20-21 at the time. But I was completely in the dark then, because I was in military service...

Was I any different? Next thing I knew, there was a stranger in my home, asking for coffee. He was a guest; how could I not serve him coffee? How was I to know that he was there to ask my father for my hand in marriage? It got even funnier after that... Ali's father started visiting our home often. As he began to utter my name, my mother got wise to it and said to my now father-in-law, "I will never allow my daughter to marry into your family!", effectively kicking him out of the house. She said, "If you come here, you can have your coffee. If you won't have your coffee, take yourself away from here and don't mention my daughter's name again!". Apparently, she had some information, which we didn't, to back up her reaction. Ali had been married to someone else before me! Ali was already married.

I had got married and then, separated. It was an arranged marriage. We couldn't love each other and we got separated. Then, I went off for my military service. My father then goes and checks Sultan out, etc. How would I know? I don't even know about what's been happening. My father, acting all barefaced, has been going back to their house despite being kicked out every time. Somehow, after God knows whatever happened there, Sultan apparently gave the green light and said, "I can meet him after he comes home from military service". Then, my father called me and said, "Son, get a leave and come back this moment," and I did. I still wasn't aware of what was going on. We visited Sultan. As soon as I entered their living room, her mother threw a slipper at me. I was dumbfounded. I leaned down to kiss my father-in-law's hand, which he extended to me immediately. I was about to kiss my mother-in-law's hand when she said, "Don't ever come here! Don't! Don't! Don't! Go away. Don't you ever! You are no match for our daughter". I mean, she was saying, "Don't get your hopes up. I will not let my daughter to marry you even if hell freezes over!".

At the time, I was still laughing at all the kerfuffle around me. I don't know if it was my ignorance, but I wasn't really thinking about anything in earnest. It was all a load of nonsense for me. I don't know, I wasn't really considering marriage then. I used to say, "I will not get married!". But then, when we saw each other... It was a family arrangement, but we came to love each other... In fact, we fell in love at first sight. It was baffling, whatever it was...

They call it love.

Marriage was still not on my mind at the time. I started to consider it as we got to know and love each other. We saw each other for about 6 months. Then, we had a wedding and got married. I'd been living in Ataşehir before and after the wedding, I moved to Çekmeköy.

My father lived with my grandparents at the time and we started to live with them. But it is very hard to live with other family members in a tiny and overcrowded house. There was a vacant tumbledown house in the yard of my grandparents' house, in the back. That building was there since my childhood, like a shed. If we were to rent a house, how would be we able to put the rent together every month?

So, we started to clean down that shed, tidying it, turning it into a home... I was working in recycling at the time. I was getting a monthly salary, albeit irregular. I still appear in the records as an employee there, but I've been unemployed for a year now, since they made me take unpaid leave. Whatever. Then, we bought what the shed needed – glass, doors, and windows, etc. So, we started to live there.

So, by 2017, we had made a home out of that shed. It had two long but narrow rooms, a tiny kitchen, and only one sink. We made our home with these only. When we moved in, there was no electricity or water supply. We ran the power and water lines ourselves, too. We got the power from my mother's house as our shed was right behind it. We ran the water line from my mother's, too. We would use my mother's toilet and bathroom. We stayed there for 2 years. Of course, we didn't have any furniture. We had no TV. We had nothing, really. There was only a carpet in the entire house, a carpet laid over tarpaulin. That was it! The house was bare otherwise. The kitchen had no cabinets, no countertop. We only had a camp cylinder for gas and kept all pots and pans on the floor. There was only a futon from my dowry for us to sleep on.

As Sultan and I started to spend our lives more in that house, my parents and my grandparents started to have some problems. Right at that time, Sultan gave birth; the memory of the exact day of her delivery never leaves my mind. We went to my parents' house. My father and my grandfather apparently had yet another altercation. I stayed at home with Sultan, pretending not to hear anything. My baby was just 2 days old when my grandfather kicked my father out! That was evidently not enough for him, as he kicked us out for good measure, ordering us to leave the yard?!

This happened around March last year, when the Corona pandemic had just started. Ali was on mandatory unpaid leave. He hadn't been paid a dime for two months. We were able to make do for ourselves, but we hadn't been able to put some money aside. What is a person to do after being off? On top of that, we were left without our shed. I had given birth just 2 days ago. That was when we met you.

I did go out to look for a house, but I'd never lived in a rented house before. What if I wouldn't be able to pay rent for one month or two months? What if the landlord said, "Leave!"; how

could you say, "No!" to that? I couldn't even say that to my grandfather. Anyhow, we found a house. You did give us a lot of support at the time. We took that house. We then went and registered the bills to our name. There was a fee we needed to pay to start the utilities, which they split into instalments, and that left no money to move the furniture. There wasn't much to move anyway, but still. We somehow moved into the house and made it up. It feels good to have a home to call your own, to have your own electricity and water supply – but this lasts only as long as you are able to pay for it. As you know, we moved out of that house, too. Apparently, we were in arrears with the electricity company – 250 million, which started as a small debt, but ran up so high with interest over time. They've recently called me and I said, "Believe me, I don't have any money". "Then," they said, "we will take legal action against you. Just so you know". I said, "OK, lock me up for a bill of 250 lira with interest"; what else could I say? You know why I said that? These energy companies have a habit of acting deaf, as if nothing were wrong. You receive a notice of your original debt of 10 lira running up to 100 lira only after 6 months. They sit on their hands in the meantime, but continue to charge interest. In other words, they drive profit off it.

It was also a challenge to find the house. We walked the streets. We let people around us know of our search. We were then staying with a relative temporarily, but Sultan had recently given birth. The baby was just 2 days old. I would wish we could soon move into a comfortable house for them. Then, a friend of ours working at the municipality checked online listings. We picked a place and we went there to view it.

My friend talked to the landlord on the phone; everything was fine. Then, we met. The guy realised we were Roma. The guy started to back out. It turned out that he knew my friend from before but he still didn't want us in his house. He said to my friend "Alright! I'll do it for you, but you are the guarantor". He replied "OK, I'm the guarantor". We had, of course, saved up the first rent and gave the money to the landlord along with the deposit. Right at that moment, I started to think about the next month's rent.

I had taken up paper collection with a cart after leaving the factory anyway. I would earn 25-30 lira a day with that. If I saved it up, not touching 1 lira of it, I would be able to pay rent. Then, though, what about the bills? What about the food?

We are happy to have found a home on one hand, but overwhelmed with worry on the other.

I would go out for a paper round, come back home, and look after the kids, while Ali took over the cart for another paper run. We found a glass jar. Every day, we would put aside some money for food and chuck the rest away in the jar. We were saving up the rent. Even then, we could save only 100 million every 3-4 days. We talked to my mother for her support just so that we would pay the rent regularly at least for the first months. She earns more as long as she can go out to Kadıköy to sell flowers on the street. But that means that she needs money up front to buy the flowers to sell, like capital. At that time, it was summer and my mother would be able to go out to work. She'd also set some money aside for me on the days she could work. Then, the rent day came around. We opened the jar. We managed to pay the first month's rent with help from my mother. Then came the bills. Cross my heart, we couldn't pay the bills.

We didn't stop saving up, but we also needed to keep the home afloat. The restrictions came back. There was a curfew at weekends. These meant a drop in our earnings. This time, we

started to cut down on the money for food. What did we do? We started to go to supermarket bins. We would sort what was inside the bins and we would wash and eat whatever we found. That was what we lived on. We would spend money on bread only. The price of a loaf of bread had gone up to 2 million then. One day, I was going from bin to bin when I saw supermarket workers tearing their waste into pieces before throwing it out. I don't know why they do that. I go there and check again – they do exactly that. Maybe it is to protect us from expired food or to protect them from a swarm of people checking their bins. I don't know. Our life back then was really tough. With no support from my mother that time, we could pay only a part of the second month's rent. The landlord wasn't exactly happy.

Next thing we know, we can't pay rent; we can't pay our electricity and water bills. I mean, we fall short. We can't take care of everything at once. We go out every day taking turns on the cart, but everything is so expensive that nothing is ever enough. Seeing as it was not enough, we thought it over. On the third month, we fell short with our rent again. Our bills were lying around, all unpaid. After we collected wastepaper, plastics, and scraps, we would sort them out in the yard. Somebody apparently complained to the landlord about it, leaving the guy annoyed. We thought it over - "Rather than being a burden on others...". My husband then said, "Can you live in a shed?". I said, "Yes, I can. I have to". Then we started to look for a good place for a shed. We moved in with our brother. We stayed in his house for a while, but it was difficult for two families to live on top of each other in a hole in the wall. There is a saying in Turkish: "Two hands can sit on top of each other, but two families can't."

His house also had a yard, which we could use. The landlord was a foreigner. I mean... He was Turkish, but... They were from Samsun. They were foreigners to the neighbourhood. He apparently had a house and some land and my brother rented it out. They do have a rent contract and he pays the rent by the year. They've been living there for years. The landlord is a good person; he doesn't raise the rent much. The yard was a good fit. We said, "Let's build a shed here". Ask me now, had I built a shed before? Of course not! I'd worked for a scrap dealer for some time. I'd learned a bit about the materials, but I'd never built one before.

Normally, he won't even touch a nail, but...

Then, I talked to others in the neighbourhood that had built sheds before. We picked the materials from a scrap dealer, but we had no money to pay him. We did something like a barter, an advance, or whatever you call it. He gives me the materials and in return, I get him paper and plastics. Let's say he owes me 30 lira; he gives 15 to me in cash and counts 15 towards the cost of the materials. Anyhow, some workmen and I started to build the shed. You can't really call them workmen – I mean, they'd built sheds before but had no idea about building work, construction work. Let me put it that way. Of course, we knew them from before and so... Three people came together to build this place. Afterwards, when I saved up some money, I did give them whatever I could just to make up for their work and get their blessing. That was it. Now, talking about the door thing -

I mean, we built a shed in the yard from scratch. But winter had come around by then, it was colder. Gaps in the walls let the cold in; sometimes you don't know if you're in or out. We had a lot of snow once, too; whatever melted went right into the house. It was really very tough. But

it is nicer now. You forget about the hardships once it is nicer. As long as it ends well. We ran electricity and water lines from our brother's house. We said, let's share the bills. Let me describe the house a little bit. It has one room and one kitchen. We have a camp cylinder for gas in the kitchen, but we only use it for cooking. There is no countertop, no cabinet again. They're all separate. It does have a toilet and a sink, which we use as a bathroom.

We need to cover the façade with moulding. You have those foams. We need to use that. Otherwise it gets cold. It finds a way through the gaps somewhere. Now, it's summer and it's OK. Now, it gets warm when you put the stove on, but in the winter, the stove doesn't cut it, either.

The gaps in the walls let in not only the cold, but also bugs and spiders. There are a lot of roaches for example. Still we say, "We did it ourselves. We will make it nicer in time. We will cover all holes". It is actually very nice to live in a house we built ourselves, but it gets harder when you think about how it is on somebody else's land and it, too, will be knocked down at one point. It doesn't matter in the end. You can be in a rented house or here, in the house you've built yourself. Nothing changes.

We've built this house now and we don't have anywhere else to go. If we did, we wouldn't live like this.

This place has become like the coal shed of our brother's house. It looks like that from the outside. We don't have a favourite thing in the house. If we did, it wouldn't last long anyway. I mean, whatever we like doesn't last long. We only had a UFO electric heater; we'd found it in a bin. I repaired it so that my kid would always have the UFO on. If I had Internet, I would take a photo of it and send it to you. I managed to get two of the bars on, but not the (other) two. So, our favourite thing is now the UFO heater, for the kid.

I like them all, though. Stuff is the same stuff. Nothing's changed. We also have a residence issue here. The house doesn't have a door number or a residence address. So, we want to have out official residence with our brother, but when you apply for it in the municipality or governorate, they give it to only 1 person from one household. So that, too, is an issue.

I actually want to go back to work or start another job. That place was going to be closed down for repairs anyway. They said, they were going to shut down due to the pandemic. They said, "Just so you know, you will be on leave for two months". We thought it was going to be for two months only. I had my insurance registration and they were paying my insurance premiums and my salary, although not regularly. With the pandemic, they appear to have shut down – it has something to do with the economy, too. There's been a major drop in the number of employees. They can't or won't call me back – I'm not getting my hopes up at all. They can't even help themselves anymore. Anyway, I am looking into it – it can be a cleaning job or a warehouse job. While I collect wastepaper, I'm always on the lookout for ads, notices. I have my driver's licence. I wanted to take up driving. I was on a kick. I checked driving jobs online. I really wanted to start working again. We've had a lot of hardships. I have a friend, who started to work at a supermarket as a motorcycle courier. He gets exhausted, but apparently his insurance and salary are paid regularly. It's not a small amount, either – 5 thousand lira. I asked him what was needed: A motorcycle licence. I went and talked to a driving course. It was a big relief. I gave up hope on the driving thing and decided to become a motorcycle courier. I said, I can really make things right this way. And I am also in heavy debt, Sister. It's beyond bad. We took

out a personal loan after the pandemic like everyone else in our neighbourhood. They said the repayment would start after 6 months. We really needed that 6.000 TL at the time and we said, we would pay it back once we breathed easy. Breathing easy? We swam like a brick! Anyway, I went and got myself in the course. I haggled the course fee of 1380 lira down to 1000 to be paid in 200 lira instalments. I went to the classes, I learned. The exam fee was 130 TL and I borrowed it from our scrap dealer again. I mean, the scrap dealer is all we have. There's nobody else. Everyone is just like me. I went up to the scrap dealer. We had a little chat. "Oh!" I said, "Brother, the situation is so and so...". The scrap dealer did mop a bit, but felt obliged to give me the money. God bless him, he didn't turn me away. I got it from him and paid the exam fee. I sat and passed the exam, too. Now, once I pay off my instalments and this tax they charge for the licence, I will immediately go to these markets to work as a motorcycle courier.

The night before the exam, he fell asleep saying, "I need to pass the exam". He slept with his pants on. He passed the exam. He will get the certificate from the course and bring it to the civil registry. There is a 590 lira tax on A2 licence. He will pay that tax, too. Then, he will get the licence.

You can't just apply anywhere, either. I really want to work at some places, but they are too corporate. You need a licence of at least 1 year. They pay you for each delivery on top of the fixed salary. I mean, like a commission. I looked deep into these companies and I told her about them. So, we both know what it is. Now, our only hope is for me to become a motorcycle courier, to have a regular income. Then, we can breathe easy. If the land owner tells us to move out, we can rent a house. We can save up until then. We can pay off these debts. We won't be in debt to anybody.

Then, I can also find a reading course, I can learn to read and write. I asked you about it before. I talked to you about a reading-writing course. I wish there were one. I couldn't finish school, but I can finish that.



RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

(United Nations, International Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25.1)

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11.1)

On 07.01.2014, the Peace and Democracy Group Presidency mandated by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey requested that a Parliamentary Inquiry to review the conditions of people living in makeshift housing, e.g. in sheds, containers, tents, or prefabricated housing, with consideration for both the Principle of the Social State Principle and the International Conventions to which Turkey is a party with a view to allowing these people to providing them with proper housing. Final Status of the Proposal: Nullified due to the End of Legislative Year

(Parliamentary Inquiry Proposal dated 07.01.2014 Ref link)

“Our research study shows that 38% of tenants in 103 households interviewed for the study state that they are under the risk of eviction; 10% that they live in a shed; and 37% that they do not feel safe in their living space. On the other hand, June 2021 data indicate that 11% of 880 households studied live in sheds/containers/tents and 32% in slums.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)

“The number of motorcycle couriers has been on the rise in recent years; however, 10% of these riders lose their lives in accidents in their first year of employment.”

(Habertürk, 07.02.2020, Ref. Link)

“The Federation of All Anatolian Motorcycle Couriers (TAMKF) states that motorcycle couriers have been in 63 thousand accidents and 190 motorcycle couriers died as a result since the first COVID-19 case in March 2020.”

(NTV, 05.03.2021 Ref. Link)

“The Federation of All Anatolian Motorcycle Couriers (TAMKF) indicated that 190 motorcycle couriers lost their lives in traffic accidents since the first COVID-19 case in Turkey. The same figure was 19 in the year before the pandemic.”

(Hürriyet. 05.03.2021 Ref. Link)

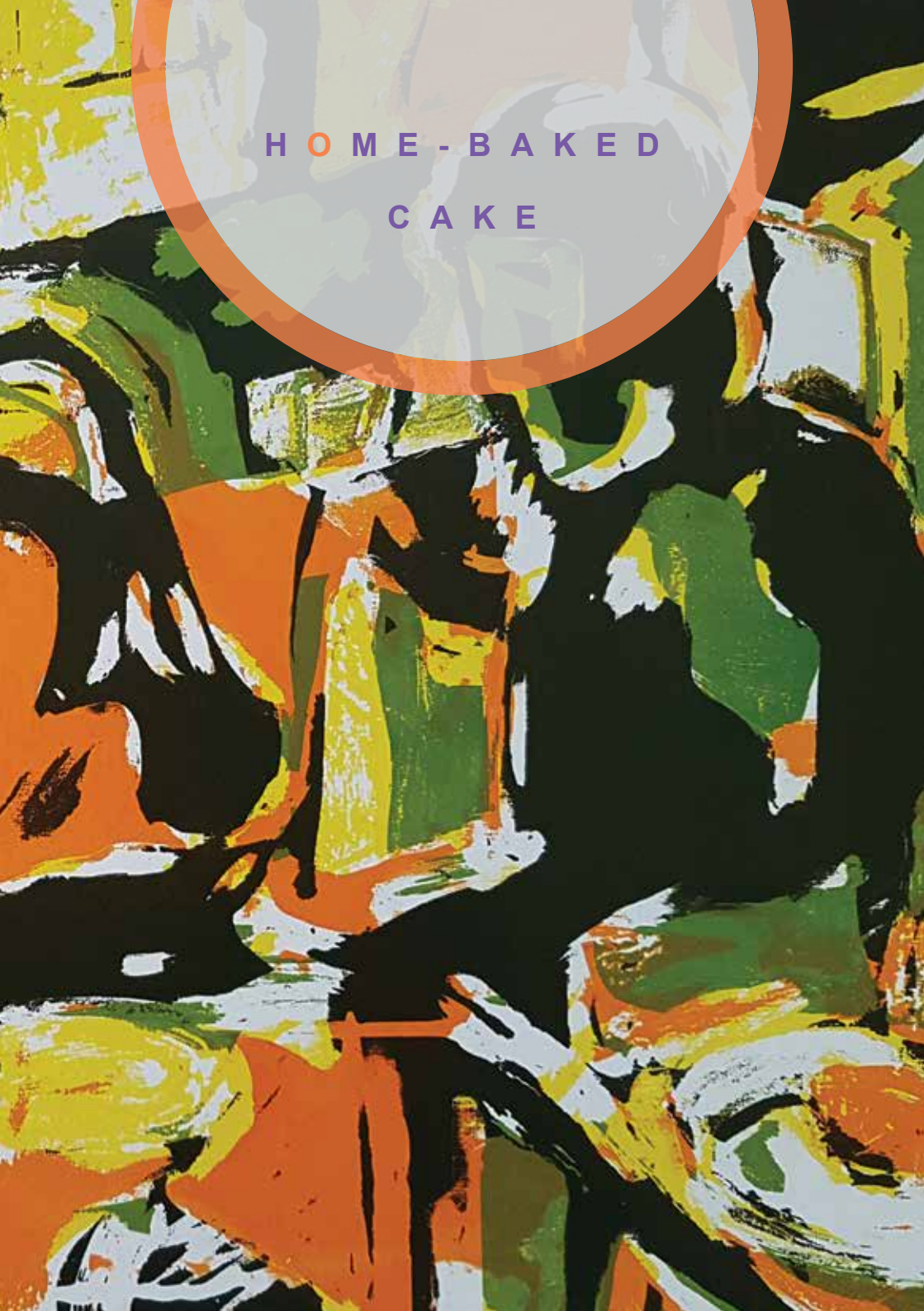
Gaziantep MP from CHP, Irfan Kaplan, issued a parliamentary question to the Presidency of the GNAT on 18th October 2019 and, following a period of no response, again on 23rd January 2020, to be addressed by the Minister of Labour, Social Services, and Family, Zehra Zümürüt Selçuk, to find out the number of motorcycle couriers involved in traffic accidents, the causes of relevant deaths and injuries, and whether the Ministry has any efforts in place to add this profession to the list of Dangerous Professions. (GNAT, Parliamentary Question No. 16229 and dated 18th October 2019, Ref link) (GNAT, Parliamentary Question No. 19024 and dated 23rd January 2020, Ref link) The response given on 27.07.2020 provided no data as to the traffic accidents involving motorcycle couriers and rates of resulting injuries and deaths, but stated that the profession was not included in the list of Dangerous Professions and this matter would be addressed by a commission to be established by the Directorate-General for Occupational Health and Safety.

(GNAT, Parliamentary Question No. 7/20407 and dated 27th July 2020, Ref link)

Istanbul MP from CHP, Yüksel Mansur Kılınc, issued a parliamentary question to the Presidency of the GNAT on 7th February 2020 to be replied by the Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, to find out the number of traffic accidents involving motorcycle couriers and the rates of injuries and deaths resulting from such accidents, as well as whether there are any efforts in place to improve the safety of motorcycle riders in terms of traffic signage.

(GNAT, Parliamentary Question No. 19499 and No. 7th February 2020, Ref link)



An abstract painting with bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, yellow, and black. A large, semi-transparent white circle with a thick orange border is centered at the top of the image, containing the text. The overall style is reminiscent of modernist or expressionist art.

H O M E - B A K E D

C A K E

H O M E - B A K E D C A K E

OWNER OF THE STORY: NURSEL

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: SELEN YÜKSEL

Well, I'm in a bad shape financially. I live in a shed. We used to collect wastepaper, plastics, and scraps. We haven't been able to go out for a proper paper round since Corona started. My husband still goes out and collects wastepaper, but it's not enough. My daughter needs diapers; she has other needs. A simit costs 1.5 million; bread is 5 million by the loaf. What you earn working is never enough; one day you earn well, the next you don't, because you can't find enough waste as the municipality collects the papers. If something does come up, you get 30-40 million, and you can only buy water with that 30-40 million, and water is now 4 million. And bread is already 1.5 (lira). Go figure! My daughter needs diapers, she needs tomato paste. I also use a cylinder for gas, a camp cylinder. Just one cylinder is now 35 million... And that cylinder doesn't last a week or two at that. You use it to cook pasta, to cook lentils for example. I have to, because I have a daughter. You sit at the table for a meal and sometimes you leave the table with an empty stomach, leaving it all to your husband and kid.

My daughter doesn't eat much of the proper stuff, but I give her snacks to nibble on. She eats fries when I make them for example. She usually eats yoghurt, instant soup, or Danone; I give her a banana from time to time, if her father has found one in the market bins and brought it home. So, normally, there's nothing we buy from the shops. We can't. When we get your support every month, that's when we eat properly. I mean, they send us some minced meat or chicken from time to time. If they don't, we can't really go to a shop and buy something proper for ourselves. Even if we can, it will be limited to a small yoghurt, some ingredients for a soup; and you know, you have those yellow meatballs for 4 million, we get them if we can. So, we can't afford fruits, vegetables, or meat.

Nowadays, we don't receive support from anywhere. I got myself listed with the Municipality three or four months ago for diapers for my daughter. We used to get diapers, but it was later cancelled. When it comes to financial aid, they don't offer it at all. What they sent me last time turned out to be full of dry provisions, one portion of each item at that. In it you had red lentils, bulghur, rice, pasta, and a kilo of oil. For example, the other day, everyone here got some fried meat. We didn't. They said, "The mukhtar gives out some papers, you can go and get it with that paper". I then turned to the mukhtar and called him. I said, "My mukhtar," I said, "apparently you have this thing in place and you lead the way for it. They gave out some friend meat, but

they won't give us any". "No," he said, "they're lying. It has nothing to do with me". Now who should you trust and believe? I call the mukhtar and talk to him right in front of the man who told me about this. The man still says, "I'm on my way back from the mukhtar's". It's Sunday; how can you be on your way back from the mukhtar's? So you see, no one cares about us because we, how should I put it, are Roma. But when the time comes for us to vote, then they are aware us all of a sudden. Other than that, nobody cares if you're without food or water.

We can't go to work due to this pandemic. We can't go anywhere. So, how can you borrow money from others? But you do – you borrow 50 million, 100 million. Then, when my husband goes out for a paper round on two days, he earns 100 million and you give it all to pay back your debt. Then, you're left starving again. What you do doesn't come to anything. And the shops, they don't give us anything on credit and we can't afford anything proper. I can't lie; we are at the end of our rope. Right now, in the last 10 days, I can't recognise myself, believe me. You know, you can earn some money in a day – be it 20 or 25. But I don't even have that right now. This messes with my psychology real bad. My daughter has her needs. She has only 10 diapers left. So, what will I do now with only 10 diapers? 10 diapers will only last me two days. What am I to do? I even need 1 million so badly, I can't tell you. This is how low I've sunk. I surprise myself now. I mean, it wasn't this bad. My husband would collect some stuff here and there or bring some back from the bins. Even if we couldn't eat properly, it would be something. We don't have that now, we have nothing. Do you know what supermarkets are doing now? They don't put the expired goods outside anymore. They put them on a different shelf, on the side counter and sell them for 2 million or 3 million. For example, the best tomatoes would sell for 5 million and the rotten ones for 2 million.

I, for example, didn't cook anything proper at home today. I have nothing; what can I cook with nothing? Yes, we have dry provisions like red lentils and green lentils. But you eat it all the time and get tired of it. I mean, of course, even this is a luxury for some and we do count our blessings, but this is what I want to tell you: We don't buy anything proper. When we go to the shops, we buy a carton of six eggs, six eggs are only enough for a single meal. This is how we carry on. Now, my daughter has fallen ill. She gets rashes all around; they get itchy all the time. My daughter needs medicine for itching, it's 370 million apiece. When I don't have any money, I can't buy it for her. I went to the family health centre, but they don't prescribe it. Apparently, it is a special kind of medicine. So, I kindly asked the mukhtar, sending over my ID. I said, "My mukhtar, I get myself listed for social aid, but it gets cancelled. I kindly ask you to help me". He said, "OK". I apply for some aids, but they get cancelled. If I talk to the mukhtar about it, I just might get it once every two months.

Recently, I got a wire of 500 million thanks to the mukhtar. I had a pile of water bills to pay, making 250 million in total, so I paid my water bills. With the 250 million left, I bought my daughter's medication. She needs two medicines; one is 35 million and the other 75 million. I could only buy the cheaper one this time. Because there's nothing. You have to use that medicine all the time. You put it on her once in the morning and once in the evening. Well, my daughter

is a bit older now, her body a bit bigger. The cream is not enough for her body anymore. It's just one drop in a box anyway. I call the social assistance to apply for pandemic aid, but they say I used it once and I can't get it a second time. How can that be? One guy who owns a house and a car gets it, but I don't. They help those who aren't in a bad shape, but not those that are – I don't get that. People think it's child's play. For example, that guy, the one I just mentioned, gets a card for 400 million. I get 200 million, but he gets 400 million. Can you believe that? 400 million. On top of that, he goes to work every day. He has all these properties and a car. A car means bread and butter, too. I can't wrap my head around it.

You know, it's impossible for us to win with the state. In fact, there is all this aid, but we can't make use of it. I don't know why that is. For example, I applied for COVID-19 support 3-4 times. I got rejected over and over again... When it gets rejected, this time my husband gets angry, he gets down. So, I go there. The ones at the social (the District Governorate) don't talk to you properly. They, like, talk down to you. I called the District Governorate and said, "Sister, I had an aid (application). I want to find out, is it approved or not?". The woman said, "Why do you keep calling? How dare you mess around with this place? Everybody's got work to do". It's not like she's talking, she's yelling. "Sister," I said, "I didn't say anything. I just wanted to find out about my aid. We can't come in because of the COVID-19 disease, so I wanted to find out over the phone". "Never," she said, "mess around with this place like that again!". I mean, I am 30 years old and it gets to you. I mean, this District Governorate doesn't attend to us properly. We can't make use of any District Governorate aid, either. For example, do you talk differently than me? No. I am a human being, too, but I don't know if it's me who can't get my point across or it's them who don't get me. Let's say I go to the Red Card to get listed. All these people get good things coming their way, but it's never me. Why is that, though? What is the reason? They say, "It's because of the car". And I say, "That car isn't mine; it isn't even parked outside my house!". Before I got married, my now husband took over the registration of his friend's car. His friend is now in prison and so, all the back taxes landed in his lap. It's a black hole. They don't get it; I say it's not mine, but the guy says, "You have a car?". What is it to anyone except God?

My daughter turns 2 in August. I've been thinking about giving her a birthday, but I can't even do that. All you need to do is to go and buy a cake, a small one, put some candles on it, and then, blow them. For example, a cake is 30-40 million. I mean, when your friend, a person you love has a birthday coming up and your pockets are empty and can't make it, you get so upset... This is the same thing. I also want to buy my daughter a proper dress. I can't buy a proper one. She doesn't have slippers, either,. She pricks her feet on glass. One pair of slippers is now 20 million, 25 million. Well, I can't afford that. You tell me how that won't destroy you as a mother. I don't care about myself, but my daughter... I can't do anything for her, I can't take it. We celebrated her birthday once. We'll see if it will be possible to celebrate a second time? My sister brought a doll from the bins for my daughter, a doll with hair. She plays with it all the time. Every mother dreams of raising her child well. She even dreams of buying something for her daughter. This is exactly what we don't have. We dress her from the bins, if we can find some

stuff. This is how we are; we are Roma. You see? We go to the bins and we live on what we can find from the bins... For example, I don't have pillow cases. If I find linens in the bins, I cut them into pieces and I sew them into pillow cases. I don't have a pan or a teapot. You see them on the displays, but you can't buy them – you don't have the means. You sure want to do nice things, eat and drink well, go out and about, I mean, live as a human being, but we don't have any of that. We fell, we fell into our lives. You eat a piece of bread and you fill your stomach – there's nothing beyond that, for us.

My priority is my daughter. As long as she's OK, I try to be OK, too. My daughter gets scared at night. I agonise over her until the morning. I get her beside me, I nurse her. Look, she's still breastfeeding; she does it all night long. I can have milk in my breasts only if I can eat well. But how can I have milk for her if I don't eat properly? She constantly wants milk all night long. She sleeps in my bed anyway; she doesn't have a separate bed. I can't get her a separate bed. My house is swarming with mice. I'm scared of mice. When my daughter couldn't get full with milk at 6 months, I started to feed her yoghurt. I would normally get yoghurt from the shop. I could feed her with it for maybe one day or two days. Yoghurt would go sour and I couldn't buy another then. So, I would feed her yoghurt one day and make her two or three spoonful of soup the other. I would put pieces of bread in. This is how she feeds still. She eats fruits for example, she likes it, too. She likes watermelon for example. Well, what can you feed her if you don't have anything? You can't feed her nothing. You can feed her in small portions only as long as you have them at home, in your fridge.

I had COVID-19 a few months ago. I caught it at my poorest. They called me on the phone, saying, "You have COVID-19". "Good heavens!" I said, "I have COVID-19. I have a baby of 6-7 months. Well, how can I breastfeed her now?". I got no proper answer. Nobody asked me how I was, if I was OK. In fact, whoever heard of my disease even stopped going by my door.

This is your toil if you don't have an income from somewhere, but if I could have something proper from somewhere... For example, my husband wants to get a job at the Municipality. He can't get it because he doesn't know how to read or write. So, what can I do then? Is it my fault that he can't read or write? Should I rub his nose in it all the time? Should I remind him of it constantly? What should I do? Should I bring him down? I have two wishes in this life. The first one was to have a daughter. God granted it and sent her to me. Now, my only wish is for, like, a small house... What a dream! If I have one bedroom and one kitchen, I will ask for nothing more. A kitchen is the best thing to have; you spend your whole day there. You cook your food, bake your bread, and do whatever you like. Sometimes, you feel like baking a cake. But we don't have an oven. We don't have the proper ingredients. So, you can't bake it. You can have it if you can find it from someone else, but not if you can't. This is how it goes. What I mostly dream about are a kitchen for one thing and the future of my daughter for another... I suffer, but may God not allow my daughter to suffer and bring her to good people. I live in a tent, but I hope she will not. She should have a house, a proper life, an income. I mean, we don't have any of that.

RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.”

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24.1)

“States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.”

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27.3)

“States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.”

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27.1)

“Our research study shows that 7% of the interviewees think that they are able to access enough food, while 84% think that they are not. Their responses to a question on the most common food groups they consume in a week focus around pasta/rice, legumes, breakfast foods, and bread.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)

“49 out of 103 households interviewed need diapers or baby formula. 74% of these families say that they find it difficult and, at times, impossible to buy diapers and formula, while 21% say they can’t buy them at all, and only 4% say that they are able to buy these supplies. We also asked them about the level of their access to diapers and baby formula without support from DYA or other organisations during the pandemic and in response, 12% said that they would be able to access these supplies without the supports, while 87% said that they would not.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)

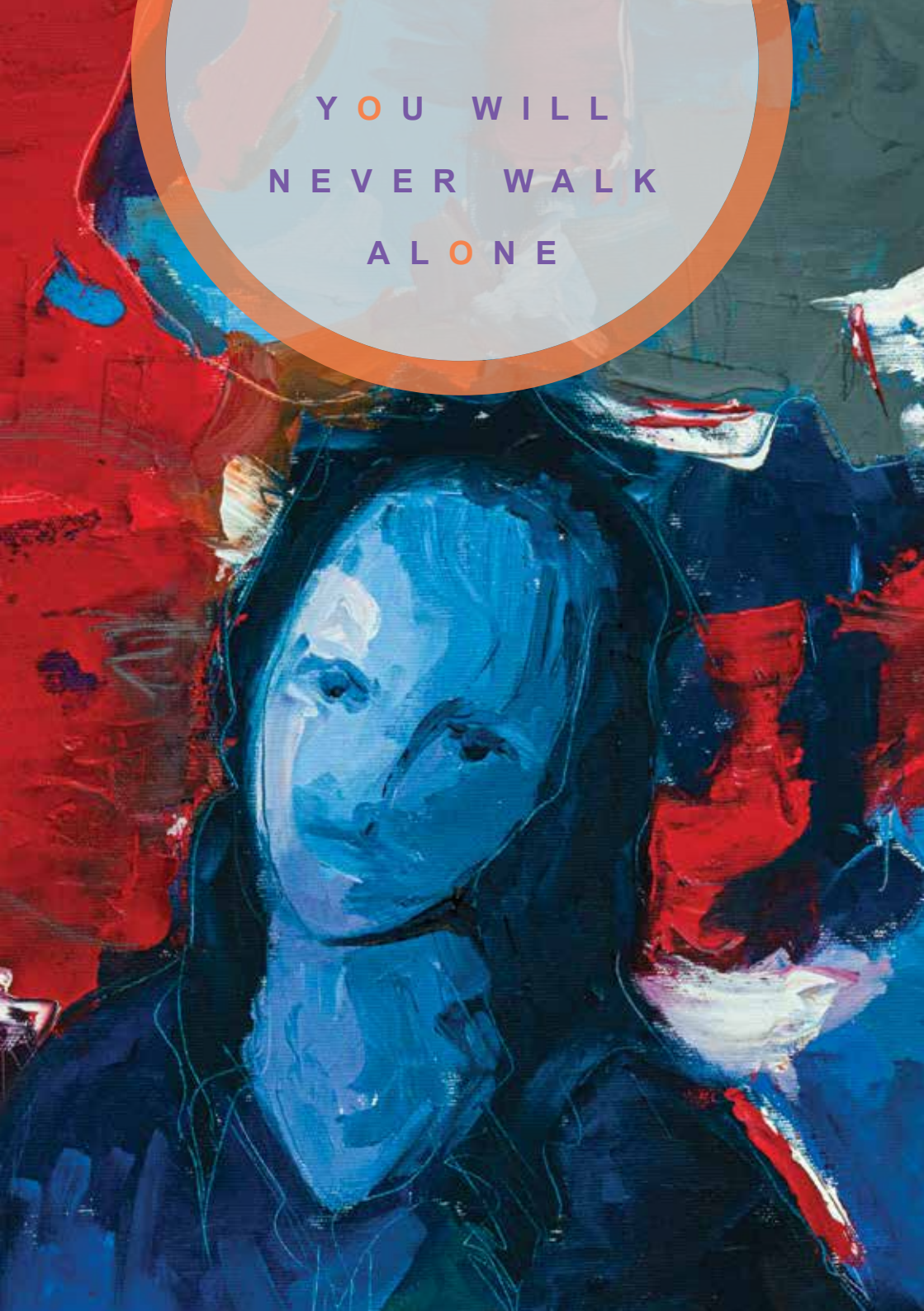
“During the pandemic, the market price of eggs increased by nearly 100%, of bread by 25%, of feta cheese by 40%, and of milk by nearly 50%. Among the interviewees living in conditions of poverty, 67.6% were able to consume eggs every day before the pandemic, while this rate dropped to 43.9% during the pandemic. The same research study tells us that 57% of the interviewees state that they were able to consume vegetables every day, while only 33.5% state that they have been able to consume vegetables every day during the pandemic. Similarly, the ratio of interviewees that are able to consume fruits daily decreased from 55.7% to 33%.”

(Consumer Rights’ Association, Access to Staple Foods among the Poor in the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020)

“The monthly food expenditure required for family of 4 to have a healthy, balanced, and adequate diet (hunger limit) was announced as TRY2,864.82.”

(Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş), Hunger and Poverty Limits, June 2021)



An abstract painting featuring a central figure rendered in shades of blue and white, set against a background of vibrant red and dark blue. The style is expressive and textured, with visible brushstrokes. A large white circle with a thin orange border is positioned at the top, containing the text 'YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE'.

YOU WILL
NEVER WALK
ALONE

Y O U W I L L N E V E R W A L K A L O N E

OWNER OF THE STORY: ECE DEVRİM

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEVVAL ŞENER

I was born in Germany in 1961. When I first started to discover my sexual identity, my family was not equipped to understand it. I had friends. My father was a tyrant. You have these tyrants of fathers in old Turkish movies; he is that type of a guy. He is also a man caught between two cultures. I went to school for nine years and I liked school. I was a very quiet, gentle child. One day, I was with my friends and my father saw me in make-up. He brought me home, saying nothing. He then took me to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist said, "This is not a condition to be treated; this is not a disease. This is her nature. Either you accept her as she is or you live separate lives; I can't make that decision for you". My father went off, fixating on how this was never seen and there was nobody like that in his family. Then, he sent me to Istanbul for a change of scenery. It was as if I had been in military service and were out on a leave to pull myself together. Some opt for marrying their child off – what a pity for both the person and their spouse... Thankfully, my father didn't try to marry me off at 15-16 years of age.

I was supposed to leave Istanbul and return to Germany after this change of scenery. My father and I had a quarrel over the phone and we hung up on each other. Since that day, we haven't seen each other ever again. I had nothing to support me. My whole life changed. I was a well-behaved, quiet child – what you would call a mother's boy. Then, I entered a brand-new world. I ended up a street child. When people used swear words, I would just stare at them with blank eyes, wondering how they could speak like that, although I still can't accept swear words, especially those concerning the body. I had no plans – I was just a child of 14-15. But, you know what? Nobody reached me or asked after me. My father apparently looked and asked around twice – that was it. They already wanted to get rid of me. Then, I lived on the streets. I didn't have a home for 4 years. After the age of 18, I started to understand what life was. I worked as a dishwasher and a busboy. I also worked as a Dj and a barman in night life. There were times when I was forced to have sex for money with a heavy heart – I don't want to call it sex work. I couldn't come to terms with it for years. Sex is one thing, being forced to sexual intercourse for money is another.

I was dumbfounded when I found myself at a police station because of my trans identity. There was nothing like this in Germany; you were able to go out and about however you liked

– in your make-up and dress. They don't care about your sexual identity. Even at school, I would leave home in my normal attire, but put on my make-up at school and nobody would bat an eyelid. At the police station, I asked them "Why have you taken me in?". They said, "Aren't you this way and that way?". Oh my! I said, "What if I am this way and that way?". It was 1981. I had no idea that being a trans individual could be seen as a crime. I thought it was a family matter until I came to Turkey. It is a crime to be a woman in this country anyway. "Why are you wearing a mini skirt?" "Why are you wearing shorts?" "Why do you go out at that hour?" "Why do you want to get a divorce?" "Why do you want to work?" "Why do you want to study?" There, I gave you a bunch of crimes. "Why don't you get married?" "Why don't you have kids?"

I had my gender affirmation surgery in 1992. They used to give you this surgery on demand. My sex already bothered me. I felt like a woman and let's say, I harmonised my body with my soul. After the surgery, you go to the civil registry and start legal action to get your new ID. I don't know much about the current procedure. It is essential to have mental health support before and after the surgery. I got my new correct ID in 1994 and I appear as a woman in legal records. But I have always experienced discrimination at public institutions; I have never got along with the system, the government. It is a major illusion to assume that everything will change once you leave the operating table and everybody will treat you as a biological woman, because we live in a patriarchal and capitalist system. If you have the mental strength to carry all that burden, you don't get a lot of trouble. I didn't, because I didn't have the surgery just so that some people would call me a woman. I didn't have the surgery just so that I could have a boyfriend, a husband, or somebody to marry me. I became a woman because I'd always wanted to be a woman. These are far removed from each other.

I wanted to make a life for myself, to have a profession. I was researching professions like an investigative journalist. After 40, I attended a professional healthcare training at those vocational courses organised by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). First six months focused on theory and the next 6 months covered an internship. It is a programme supported by the Employment Agency of Turkey (IŞKUR); you receive the training and get a certificate in the end. Then, IŞKUR finds a job for you. I couldn't find a permanent position. I completed my 6-month internship at a centre taking care of children with Down syndrome, but I couldn't find a permanent position. I got along well with nurses or rather, I get along well with people. I can strike a conversation with anyone quiet easily. Anyhow, I started to work as a private patient companion / carer. When nurses saw patients that couldn't be cared for regularly by their relatives, they would refer them to me. This job was, of course, without social security. We can call it a private care job. I had social security only during my internship.

I hadn't had my accident then; I had a congenital disability, which was at 40%, due to orthopaedic issues. I was able to walk at that time. I was able to take care of myself. After I had a traffic accident in 2014, my physical disability rating went up to 70% initially and then to 90%. But, of course, I didn't lose anything of myself. I am still the same Ece. I used to

do whatever I needed to do walking back then, now I do everything on my battery-operated wheelchair.

I was living with my dog, Lodos. Lodos was just two months old when I adopted it; I hadn't had my accident then. It is now nine years old. We've never been apart. When it first arrived home, it went to the bedroom and peed on the floor. I pressed a diaper – you know those housebreaking diapers for dogs – and placed the soiled diaper on the toilet. I said to it, “Look, baby, this is where you go potty”. It was only three months old then. It once again peed inside. I put the diaper on the toilet again. In the end, it tore down the diaper and started to do its business on the toilet. You know what Lodos does if it finds the bathroom door closed and it needs to go? It comes up to you and stares at your face. You will then close the door, turn on the light, go to the living room or wherever you were before, and sit down and wait. You'll wait for five minutes and after that, you will get up and open the door. It will go out by itself. If, however, you stand at the door waiting instead, you can wait for two days and it will still not go. It is imperative that the light is on. It is my companion; Lodos (Southwester) blows deep...

Anyway, I had friends from both the platform and the party who took care of me. I was bedridden for nearly one year and then, I started my life anew on a battery-operated wheelchair. I wasn't able to work at the time. I had no money coming in except for my disability benefits, but the bills, the rent, and the food expenses were piling up, making it impossible to get by. I was looking for work. I wasn't able to work as a patient companion anymore, the reason being quite obvious...

I survived with support from those around me, but I felt that I needed to do something. I wrote a project and applied to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (KOSGEB) with it as a woman entrepreneur, but there was no response. I wrote one more project, but there was no response to that, either. One day, one of my friends came for a visit. I had gradually left the bed and started to sit up. I was able to use my battery-operated wheelchair. I couldn't find a job as a trans individual and I didn't know where to work. “Girl,” my friend said, “can you work as a peddler?. Some peddlers don't work for themselves. There is a big boss, who buys the goods and you sell his goods on the street. Then, he gives you 10 percent over the sales, you see”. So, I started to sell this man's goods... Light-up toys, mobile phone accessories, charging cables, I mean, all those knickknacks. I started to work for him at 10 percent commission, but then I started to save up some capital. I started to buy my goods directly at Tahtakale and to sell them for myself. I would get on my battery-operated wheelchair and take the disabled lift. I would go down to Haliç, to Eminönü. The warehouses there know me now. I would say, “Give me this, give me that – 20 of these, 20 of those”. I had a big bag in the back, I would have them put everything in. Then, I would stride back home. Of course, you're bound to have problems with the municipal police while peddling. Municipal police give you a hard time. I said, “Then, rather than putting up with that, I should get a simit stall

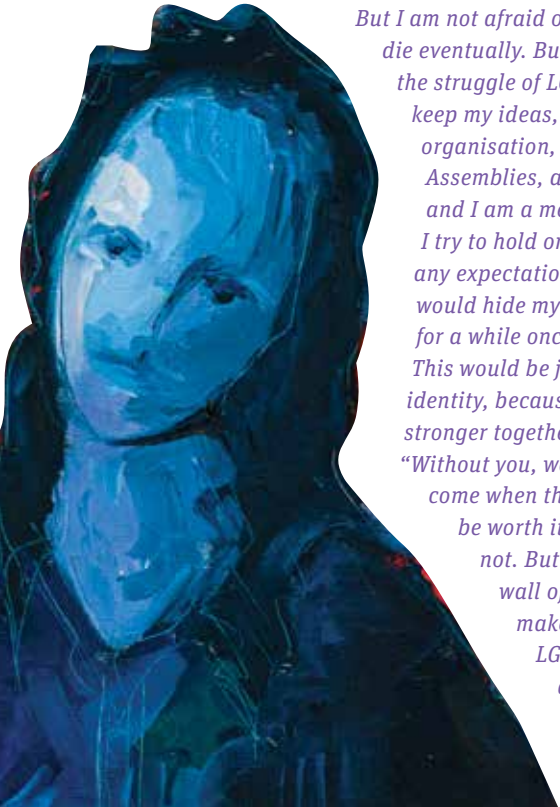
and apply for a licence. It should all be over the board". I applied for the licence, but couldn't get one. I applied over and over again to be legally able to sell my products on a stall.

Before the pandemic started, I had a problem in my intestines due to paraplegia or spinal cord paralysis. This time, another trans friend supported me to have an operation privately, because the state scheduled my appointment for six months later. Then, the pandemic started. I had a perpetual curfew anyway, as I had 3rd-Stage COPD. My doctors wouldn't let me, because peddling means that your hands exchange money and you are in close contact with people. Too risky. Anyway, I went outside only to go to the hospital for a whole year, until I had my vaccination. After my second dose, I went outside for the first time to take part in the demonstration "We Will Not Give Up on Istanbul Convention" on 19th June.

I can't do my old job as a patient companion; I can't work as a peddler, either, due to the pandemic and the curfew. I can actually work as a patient consultant, but it just doesn't happen. In this country, there is still a group of people that are always ignored. People with disabilities are ignored just like women and LGBTI individuals. There is a local solidarity group of volunteers active in my neighbourhood. In addition, I have friends from the platform and the party. I also have you. I am currently able to get by with all this support.

If COVID-19 catches me, it will take me away. That part is certain.

But I am not afraid of going. In biological terms, everyone will die eventually. But I want to support the struggle of women, the struggle of LGBTI+ individuals and I want to be able to keep my ideas, my thoughts alive. I am involved in an LGBTI organisation, in the provincial coordination for Women's Assemblies, and in the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, and I am a member of the Labourist Movement Party (EHP). I try to hold on merely for this struggle. I no longer have any expectations of my own. If I had, I would keep silent, I would hide my identity from my family. I would stay there for a while once they are retired and have the life I wanted. This would be just saving myself. But I choose not to hide my identity, because I say, "You will never walk alone and we are stronger together," and I believe that wholeheartedly. I say, "Without you, we are one down". My family says, "The day will come when they put a bullet in your head. Will your struggle be worth it? Will you live to see that it is worth it?". I may not. But if I can, at least, put one more brick onto this wall of our struggle, if I can put in one more brick to make life easier and more free for one woman, one LGBTI individual, one oppressed individual, or a disabled friend, that will do for me...



RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

(United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2)

“Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2)

“Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 10)

“No one shall be required to perform work unsuited to his/her age, sex, and capacity. Minors, women, and physically and mentally disabled persons, shall enjoy special protection with regard to working conditions.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 50)

“Public agencies and institutions must take measures as necessary to ensure that workplaces and their annexes are accessible to persons with disabilities and facilitate their work and provide assistive and supportive tools and equipment required, on the basis of the nature and extent of the disabilities involved, for persons with disabilities to fulfil their tasks as specified for their respective positions.”

(Regulation on Disabled Public Personnel Selection Examination and Employment of Disabled Persons as Civil Servants, Article 16 (1))

“120 women’s organisations’ call to Istanbul Convention meeting: We carry on shouting out, We Won’t Give Up on Istanbul Convention!”

(Birgün, 14th June 2021, [link](#))

“Advocates of LGBTI+ rights encounter major challenges and threats to their own personal safety in their efforts to attract public attention to violations of the human rights of LGBTI+ individuals and to demand amendments to discriminatory laws. Collective action by organisations of activists in various parts of the world does produce results. Today, at least 43 countries have criminalised acts of homophobia as hate crimes. In addition, 28 countries have legalised gay marriage as of May 2019.”

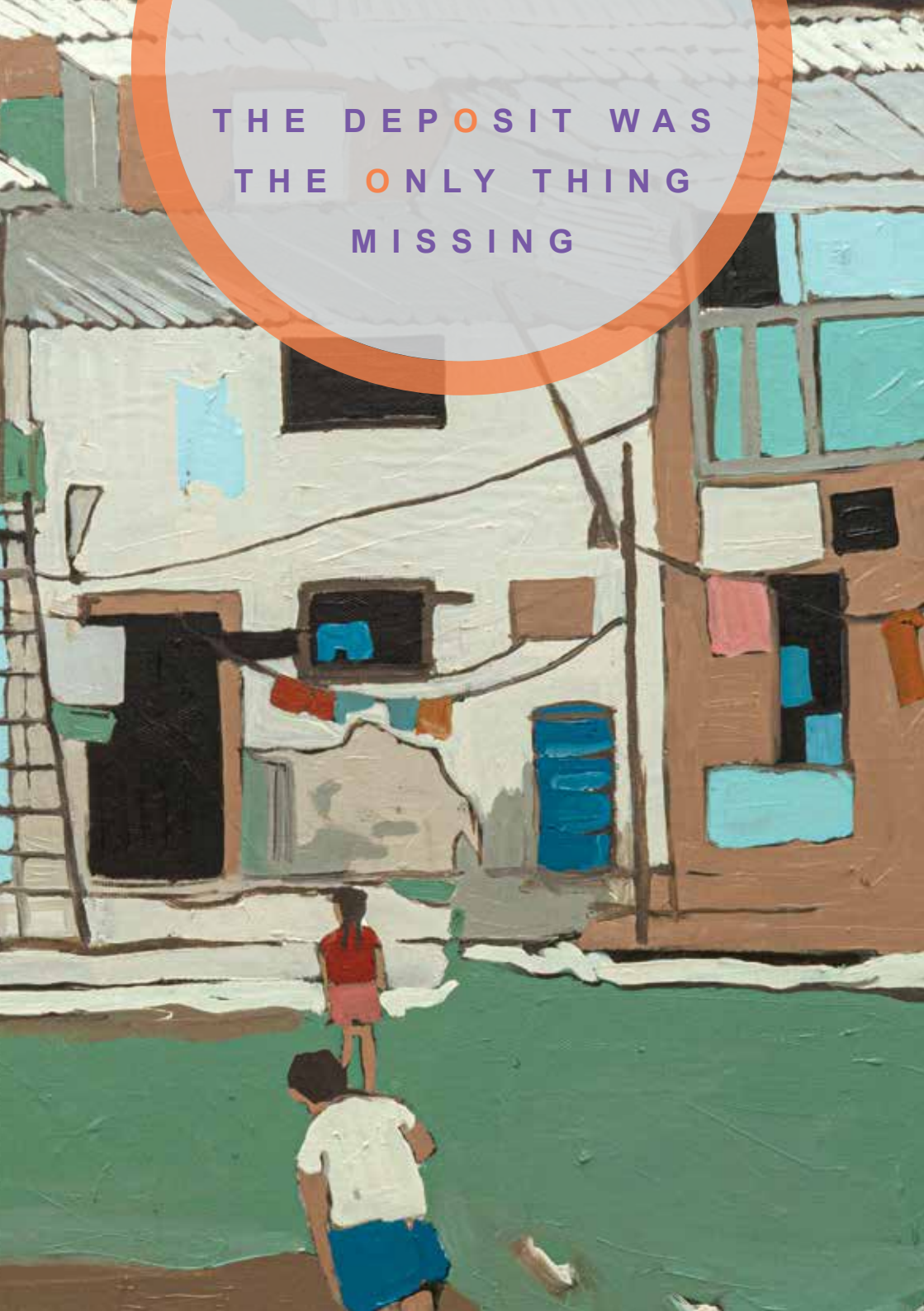
(Amnesty International, [LGBTI+ Rights, link](#))

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) individuals should be provided with the same rights as everyone else on grounds of the principles of equality and the prohibition of discrimination, which collectively represent the foundations of national and international human rights law.”

(KAOS GL, [LGBTI Rights Handbook for the Ministry of Interior, 2015](#))



THE DEPOSIT WAS
THE ONLY THING
MISSING



THE DEPOSIT WAS THE ONLY THING MISSING

OWNER OF THE STORY: BARIŞ

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEVAL ŞENER

I was born in Kadıköy, Istanbul in 2004. I am the third child in the family. I was born into a crowded home. In Fikirtepe. My mother's side, my father's side, my father's brothers and sisters, and their families... We lived altogether in a crowded home. I mean, I was a child who grew up together with his friends and his cousins – all that bunch; I had a good childhood. I grew up in a good home. It was good, but it was more about having my peers around. When you have that, you don't get bored. We would play together all the time. It was good for us, but the house, being that crowded, couldn't be free of minor problems. We didn't have the means to move into a separate house. I don't remember the exact number of rooms in that house, but... It had one living room and two bedrooms when my parents first bought it. They apparently added more rooms later and so, we had 4 rooms in total... In those 4 rooms... I can't say the exact number, but we were 12-13 kids. My cousins and I are only one year apart; we're like peers. We all grew up together.

Anyway, I went to school there until the fourth grade. I grew up there. Then, the neighbourhood was taken up by urban transformation and we had to move out. We moved into a rental home in Ataşehir. I started my fifth grade there. In my elementary grades, I would go to school, the one in Kadıköy, with my cousins. When we moved out, my cousins moved away, too. They started a new school and we were somewhere else. I couldn't warm up to the secondary school I attended after that. Then, our family grew – we were 6 brothers and sisters in the end. We found it even more difficult to get by. My father was peddling on the street with a trolley, selling greens, I mean vegetables. It wasn't a job that provided a stable income. He would park his trolley on a crowded street in Fikirtepe. I, too, would go out with him sometimes. Actually, in seventh grade, I started to work at a grocery store during the summer holiday. It was a grocery store in the neighbourhood. I spent the next summers working at a barber shop, a doner shop, a grocery store, and a car-mechanic, but they didn't last long. I also worked at a supermarket. That was it.

I couldn't warm up to that secondary school at all. For one thing, I wasn't happy there. I wouldn't go to school; they would force me to. In the last year of school, I mean in eighth grade, we had a science teacher. She found out about my situation and took a special interest in me, supporting me to pay for the books I needed. You know, it was the year before the (high school) exam. Seeing my teacher's interest and support, I focused hard on my science classes

so as not to disappoint her. My grades went up; I started to score 90 or 100 and come first in my class. Then, I showed more interest in my other classes and started to study more for them, too. I hadn't qualified for any certificate until then, but I received a certificate of appreciation and honours in eighth grade. I then sat the high school placement exam, but it didn't go well. I would work after school and during holidays, etc., and I couldn't focus on the exam. I couldn't spend enough time on it. Anyway, I somehow sat the exam and got myself a place in high school, but the one I qualified for was too far from where I lived. I needed to take three buses to go there and I finished my ninth grade doing exactly that. Then, I had to choose a track. As I was in a vocational high school, tracks available to me included IT, accounting, marketing, and office management. I was indecisive at first, but then I did some research and looked into the IT track. It appeared to be a profession with good prospects for employment and earnings. I was also interested in ethical hacking; it's about the security of a Website, a bank, or an app. A hacker can hack into a bank, hack into a Website, or spoof accounts. But an ethical hacker doesn't use these skills for evil, quite the contrary! For example, they would warn a bank saying, "You have this vulnerability in the system, making it open to attacks". In other words, they actually hack systems to secure them or to improve their security. I was interested in this field but I still went back and forth between accounting and IT for a while. IT was the best track in the school. I said, "This suits me but it is a tough track. I'll study hard and come through". I was studying IT. I was in 11th Grade and would move on to the 12th.

I mean, my science teacher was a turning point for my life in education. Before her, I never studied for a class and wouldn't go to school regularly. After that, however, I left all my grades with certificates of achievement. She was a very good and attentive teacher. He would take an interest in our problems and in us. For example, the school organised a graduation night. It was a bit costly and we couldn't go. That teacher made sure that we went. I have an older brother, who dropped out at 8th Grade. It's the same with my older sister. She dropped out at the 8th, but enrolled in open education later. I am in school now. I have two younger siblings and they're in school, too. One is now at the 7th and will start the 8th. Then there is the one who will start school this year. She was to start school this year, but she was able to follow up e-learning and so, we didn't send her to school. She doesn't even know how to hold a pen yet; she's not ready for school. The others are younger, they're just toddlers.

Now, I have my upcoming mandatory internship for my last year. I will attend my internship three days and the school two days a week. There was nobody dealing with IT around me. I didn't know anyone who could offer me an internship. But I am a good student at my high school. We used a neighbour's Wi-Fi for e-learning and you offered us a computer at the time. With these possibilities at my fingertips, I never miss a class. There are times when I find myself as the only student in a class of 30. My teachers recognize my efforts. I am showing an interest, studying by myself after classes, and trying to better myself. My teachers referred me to a Web design company for my internship. I went in for an interview. They said, "OK, you're in. You'll start in September" and I said, "OK". So, I went there for my internship. It was actually a good thing with my teachers giving me a reference. This company said, "If you make an effort, you'll learn a lot here and have good prospects". My only problem is, all programming languages were in English and I am bad at it. My teachers are amazed at how

I've been able to use the programmes despite my level of English.

I would actually like to study computer engineering at university, but to be frank, I don't think I can qualify for a programme at this moment. I mean, I am good with maths and science classes, but I am behind with my social classes. So, I may not score high enough at the university exam to qualify. I will go on with my self-study through YouTube and test books. I will see what I can do. I will qualify for a two- or four-year programme. If not, I will spend one year to prepare for the exam, because I do want to qualify for this programme.

There was a person who wanted to give me a scholarship. She called me and asked, "What do you think? If you like, I can get you enrolled at a preparatory school for the upcoming university exam". I said, "I can't say it will be a 4-year programme, but I can qualify for a 2-year one". I had already discussed this with my family. They said, "Save it now, you'll need it at university". I was undecided between using it for a preparatory school or for university. In the end, I chose to use that scholarship at university. I never attended a preparatory school – I'm not used to it. I would study again by myself at home at high school. I think, I'll do the same for the university exam. I have cousins who took the exam before. I will pick their brains and if it doesn't happen this year, I will set aside a whole year to prepare for it. Then, maybe, I can use some support for a preparatory school. This summer, I will work at the green grocer's or take care of my dad as he had some problems in his treatment. Something happened with his condition. It's relapsed, spread. He will go back into treatment. He needs some taking care of during his treatment.

I used to make time for myself. I had hobbies. Now, I can't have any time for myself. My older brother works at a restaurant and my father is in treatment for cancer. I take care of my father and take him to the hospital. I babysit my younger siblings, too, if my mother has chores to do at home. I used to draw, for example, in charcoal – not any more. There's actually a story I forgot to tell or I skipped. At high school, I used to draw a lot and wanted to study fine arts at university. My father was working at the time and he had no health issues.

"Dad, come on! Let's go together to apply for the talent exam. Please, let's go, Dad!"

"Sure, sure."

He was fencing with me. Anyway, he actually said "OK" in the end. Then, we set off. "You need to turn in these documents". Apparently, it was the last day for applications. The applications would close at 17.00. The school was off, but thankfully, I had my student certificate. There were a few other documents required in addition to the student certificate.

"You'll need to deposit the exam fee at a bank."

My father said, "I'll take care of it".

We said, "OK".

Then, seeing how much the fee was, I said, "Never mind, Dad".

My father said, "If you want it, we can go to the bank", but I went back home and he went back to work.

Then, I was at home, but the thought didn't leave me. I wanted it so badly! I checked my documents and saw the deposit was the only thing missing. I thought, I could go back to the school and tell them about my situation. I brought my cousin along. I walked to the school, intending to renew my application. It was around 16.30.

I explained my situation at the school. I said, "Let me give you these documents. I will deposit the fee later".

"We need a receipt showing that you've deposited the money. We can accept your application only then. Otherwise, we can't." I checked my watch; it was 16.30. The banks were about to close. I didn't have any money. We couldn't make it.

They said, "You can try again next year".

Once I started vocational high school, it all blew over. I was good at drawing. My teachers and those around me would love my drawings. It just didn't happen, I guess.

There has been no moment that I felt alone in any of this. I have a bunch of cousins I got beaten up together and I shared everything with, be it joy or sorrow. I love them all, too. I get along well with all of them. Beside my cousins, I have my siblings. I have a brother and a sister older than me. There are a lot of people around me whom I can share my joys and sorrows with. We're a large family. I have no issues whatsoever in that sense. I'm not a lonely introvert, but I can't say the pandemic has been very good for me. There have been a lot of difficulties with my dad being ill and not able to work on one hand and my brother having been laid off due to the pandemic on the other. I'm not very big on spending a lot of time home, either. I don't like staying home. The walls were closing in on me every day. Initially, before I met you, I would worry a lot, asking myself, "How will I attend my classes? How will I catch up with my studies?". In addition to my cousins, I have some friends in the neighbourhood, but we don't see each other a lot any more. They're working and I have my own stuff to deal with. We only get together some evenings and that's about it.

My dream for 15 years later is me with professional success and a good career. I dream about developing a very popular app used by people everywhere around the world. It may also be a social media outlet, a game, or an app.... I like working with these things. This is my dream career. In my personal life, I dream of a happy place where my whole family is peacefully and happily together, standing on our own feet. God willing, my dad will still be alive and in good health, as will my siblings. In my dream, everybody is happy, has their own job, a good job. I see myself in a good place... I'll still be in Istanbul, but this time living by myself in a two-bedroom apartment on the fourth floor of a building close to my family. If I get married, I'll have a happy life without any problems or financial worries... That's it!



DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- *Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;*
- *Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children.”*

(United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28)

“No one shall be deprived of the right of education. Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools. The State shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education. The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special education so as to render such people useful to society.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 21)

“Students from remote areas, low socio-economic background, disabled, refugee or other non-native Turkish speakers, and from homes with parents less able or competent to support the home education efforts, face a higher risk of falling further back in their educational performance. Students from poorer social background, with large families in crowded households will find it particularly difficult to access and follow the distance education schedule.”

(Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, Safe Schooling and Distance Education Project - Environmental and Social Management Framework, 2021)

“Students belonging to the poorest socio-economic quintile performed 87 PISA points (roughly equivalent to two years of schooling) behind students in the richest socio-economic quintile. The gaps will likely increase by 9 percentage points due to the school closures by the global pandemic.”

(Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, Safe Schooling and Distance Education Project - Environmental and Social Management Framework, 2021)

“We take our school classes online between 09.00 and 16.00 with 15-minute breaks in between. I have a sibling in preschool, as well. They take two online classes every day. Thankfully, we have two PCs and my tablet at home. I turn my PC on as soon as I wake up. Once I’m done with my live school classes, I take 40-minute online classes at my preparatory school. Then, I do my homework in the evenings. We have online pilot tests at the weekend. My school classes are less productive than the ones at my preparatory school. We can’t see each other as we’re not in a classroom. But, we still can turn on our microphones to ask questions anytime we want. Distance education makes it more difficult to prepare for the exam. If you can’t follow the TV or don’t have a tablet or a PC, it means you can’t even reach your teacher – I don’t think this is fair.”

(Education Reform Initiative, Coronavirus and Education in Turkey – V | Students discuss the digital divide, 2020)

“The share of Internet users dropped to 79.0% in the 16-74 age group in 2020. This represents 75.3% of last year’s figure. The breakdown of Internet users by sex shows the rate to be 84.7% in men and 73.3% in women.”

(TurkSTAT, TurkSTAT Research on Household Use of Information Technologies, 2020)

“Our study shows that 57% of children in 103 interviewed households state that they are not able to follow distance education, while 11% indicate that they will not be able to go to school in the upcoming academic year. According to the same study, 6% of the households depend only on the work of children, while 7% are supported with the work of both parents and children.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)





H A N D I N H A N D

H A N D I N H A N D

OWNER OF THE STORY: DİLEK

INTERVIEWER: ŞEYMA DUMAN

STORIFIED BY: ŞEVVAL ŞENER

My story is too long... I got married when I was 16. My first husband was my aunt's son. I had a child with him in my twenties. A sick child, who died after only four months... I was pregnant when I got separated from my husband. So, I gave birth at my aunt's, my father's sister's house. Those were difficult times. Then, I left them and lived in my father's house for about five years. In the meantime, I had started working at a recycling factory. I was around 27 at the time. I met my current husband at the factory. We fell in love after two weeks. Then, we eloped! That was the only way. I am Roma and my husband is from Zonguldak. My parents said, "We don't know them. They aren't from our creed, these complete strangers". I was extremely upset – how can it be about "us" and "them"? So, one day, I went out to take out the trash and eloped with my now husband.

Later, my aunt visited me in my new home, trying to get to know my husband and asking me if I would go back with her. I said, "No, I'll stay here". We were staying with my husband's aunt's daughter. We didn't even have anything to sleep on. My now deceased mother-in-law knitted us a blanket and gave us a bed. There, we bought a small pot and a few knick-knacks. Two months later, I was pregnant with my son. It was as if we were playing house, you know? We were working day and night in recycling at the factory. Being pregnant, too, I would be exhausted every day. Not having a proper place to sleep on, I wouldn't be able to get a good night's sleep and wake up well rested. Later, with regular income, we were able to make a home out of our small house. I was then close to my due date. They say, "There are two sides to everything, one good and one bad"; everything went well in the first nine months. It was right before my due date when my husband was laid off and spent the next one and a half years unemployed. We couldn't pay rent and had to move out. We went to live with our mother-in-law, but my brother-in-law was living with her, too. I found it gruelling there – there's no privacy to talk about. He was married, too. He had 5 children. My husband couldn't find work. At that time, my mother-in-law was everything to me; she was my rock, you know? My husband wouldn't contact my family, either. They were just at 1-hour distance; I mean, why wouldn't you just come and visit them with me? He would always say, "You go by yourself," and wouldn't come along. I did want him to come with me. Then, my daughter was born. You know, my children are the best gifts life has given me. They're my life and limb in this world.

I lost a lot of weight after my last pregnancy. I was 90 kilos before birth, but dropped to 50 kilos before my baby was 40 days old. One day, I had severe pain in my stomach. We went to

a hospital. I did take haemorrhoids medication during pregnancy, but it apparently didn't have anything to do with it. I gave blood and urine for analysis, but nothing came out of them. Then, they said, "It's appendicitis". But I said, "No, my appendix was removed". As I had given birth recently, they sent me to the OB-GYN. They checked my sutures and looked to see if they'd missed something. Then, they said, "There's nothing we can do here". You know what the emergency doctor came out and said? "You need a CT. We couldn't understand where this comes from". I spent that night and next morning at the hospital. They gave me a medicated drip for my pain.

I had a CT the next day. Tomography... Then came the result. I went to the doctor's office. He said, there was a mass. He said, it was bad, cancer... It needed immediate treatment. He referred me to another doctor. Just my luck, I never had any issues with doctors in my treatment. They always supported me. I don't know, maybe, I feel positively about them because I am still young. I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 37. I had a two-month-old and the pandemic had started then. Both of my doctors knew about my daughter. We would all worry about that. I was worried for my children, for myself. I was devastated.

In the beginning, I would also breastfeed my daughter. I had to wean her off when she was two months old as I had started chemotherapy. My breasts were swollen so badly that they reached my armpits. My daughter would cry to be fed. My younger sister had just given birth at the time and she breastfed my daughter for a while, but her milk wasn't enough, either. We started her on formula. Formula is so expensive like you can't imagine. Chemotherapy was hard on me; I couldn't even stand up. I started to use adult diapers, which, too, were expensive. That was when I reached the solidarity network.

I've been on chemotherapy for a year and I may have an operation, too. My doctor wanted me to get one last course of chemotherapy. First, I will have a blood analysis done and then, I will take one last course of chemotherapy. Then, I'll get my date for the PET scan... If PET shows a reduced mass, I will have an operation on my liver. If it's still the same size, we will go on with chemotherapy. As there is a high risk in my operation, my doctor says, "The smaller it gets, the better in your case. I am aware that chemotherapy is painful for you. I'm giving you more medication and you'll have even more later. I know you're in pain, but this is what's best for you; chemotherapy is the most helpful way". There's me thinking, "I wish I could have the operation and be rid of it", while he says, "Do you know that you may still need chemotherapy after the operation?"

I take medication at home, too. As my pain is too severe, I sometimes take a medicated drip for my pain at home. Keeping up with my nutrition is a bit difficult. There are some days when we eat nothing at all. Now, there's the pandemic going on. Everyone is unemployed. You can't get money even if you go out peddling or working with a cart. If you go to a supermarket, you can't buy anything as everything breaks the bank nowadays. My mother and my younger sister bring me some of their cooking, if they have it at home. My sister is four years younger than me, but it's her acting like the older sister, not me, you know? Being poor is hard. The doctor advises me to eat healthy; I know I should, but how can I?

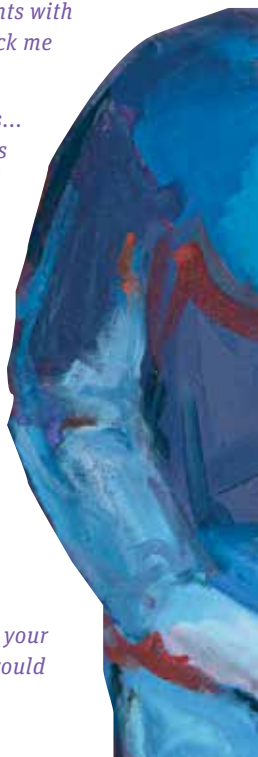
On top of that, I have my children to think about. My older is now of school age. I can't take care of him. My illness and the pandemic did affect him, too. He believes that my daughter, the younger one, had passed on the cancer to me in birth and he isn't fond of her for that reason. He never wanted her. Anyway, we did get the boy enrolled at a school, but the schools were later shut down due to the pandemic. The child couldn't go to school. He started the second grade before he could learn how to read. I can't spend time with him and my younger sister tries to do it. His father doesn't show any interest, either, but he loves his father a lot, God knows why.

My father was always by my side on my way to chemotherapy, to the hospital. I get my chemotherapy drugs through my neck. My father has been with me even in that. In fact, he fell ill after finding out about my cancer spreading to my lungs. We thought he had COVID-19, but it turned out to be a heart attack! He was taken to hospital in an ambulance. My father had an operation right that night and now has a pacemaker.

I don't have my baby staying with me as I worry that the drugs will be a risk for her. She's staying at my sister's house. All in all, what I'm taking is poison. It works to destroy cancer. It does burn through, too. But I try to stay well and I have a positive outlook. I try to laugh and make others laugh. For example, I now have my cancer friends, my care nurses. Of course, going to chemotherapy for a year does make you some friends. We love each other and try to raise each other's spirits. I'm generally late and all of them know that I'll be late every time. The distance is too long. The Patients' Rights Platform supports cancer patients with their transport costs. I reached them through another cancer patient. They pick me up and take me to the hospital whether for blood tests or for chemotherapy.

Beside my husband, my biggest support comes from my sister and my parents... You're there. The association is there. My doctors are great. I have new friends and nurses taking care of me. I'm hand-in-hand with all of you, hand-in-hand with all of you... It's been only a year since I moved here, but my neighbours are quite sweet to me, although I am Roma, but they aren't. There aren't any Roma people where I live now. We're all human, though. There are Alawi people, Sunni people, Kurdish people. I get along well with all of them. You know what I say? I wish all these great things had found me in the beginning, I had had someone to support me all my life. I also wish I never had this illness.

I feel strong. I am strong. If I weren't, I couldn't get on my feet. My husband was my rock. You know, I wouldn't have expected him to be my rock. I used to think he wouldn't take care of me or would leave me... Because my husband never showed me that he loved me before. Until we got married, I knew he loved me. Then, he said, "OK. We're married now. It's done". But he does love me after all. I sometimes tell him, "I'm no use to you. I'm ill. Leave me". You know what my husband tells me in return? "If I were in your position, would you leave me?" "I wouldn't leave you." "So?", he asks, "why would



I leave you?”. I still say, “Leave me. Build a new life. Get married again, if need be”. He gets mad then. Do you know how many times I threw him out? How many times I said, “Go!”. He wouldn’t go. He wouldn’t leave me. So, that’s where I was very wrong, you know? I used adult diapers for a while. I couldn’t keep it under control. It was my husband who removed my diapers, giving me showers, dressing me. I’m eternally indebted to him. I actually love my husband very much. But he just can’t see it. Either he doesn’t see it or doesn’t want to see it or he sees it, but feels that it’s better for him to look the other way. I don’t know. For example, if I go to the open market and bring back a t-shirt for my husband, he’ll like that. I buy stuff like that if I have money. If I don’t, that t-shirt stays in my mind, you know? “I wish I’d bought that for my husband,” I say. For example, I imagine my husband with that t-shirt on. I think, that t-shirt would look good on my husband. But my husband is either aware of this or not aware of this, or perhaps, he doesn’t want to know.

Once I’m out and about or in my last days, I want to go out with my children to Eyüpsultan, to Eminönü. I want to go here and there with my family. I want to have fun. I want to have a very good time in my last days. I want to be with my children and my husband at all times. I mean, how can I put it? Once I’m out of hospital, I want to go out, have meals, and visit places with them, free of arguments and worries. I want both myself and my children to have fun. I mean, I want to make myself and them happy at the same time. But it’s all about money, you know. Now, if you just get up and go somewhere, you’ll spend 50-100 lira even without a meal. It’s OK, though..



DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“A patient has the right to utilise healthcare services in line with their respective needs, such services also including efforts to promote healthy living and preventive healthcare services, within the framework of the rights of fairness and equity.”

(Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Regulation on Patients’ Rights, Article 6, [link](#))

“A physician is obliged to fulfil their duties without any consideration for differences among their patients in terms of political opinion, social status, religious belief, nationality, ethnicity, race, sex, age, and social and economic circumstances, etc.”

(Turkish Medical Association, Medical Code of Ethics, 1999, [link](#))

“The results of cancer screening undertaken at prominent general practitioners to identify any delayed health problems due to the pandemic reveal significant health problems and disease burden both associated with COVID-19 and independent from it in the post-pandemic period. It is clear that those living in poverty are the ones most affected by the pandemic.”

(Turkish Medical Association General Practitioners’ Division, Results of the Survey on the Pandemic and General Practitioners of 9th-14th December 2020, 2020)

“90% of all cancer screening stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, 6 million individuals lost their chance of early diagnosis due to the unavailability of cancer screening. We can say that at least 3 million people lost their chance of early diagnosis in colon cancer. The rate of early diagnosis dropped by 88 percent. However, early diagnosis gives patient a 100 percent chance of full recovery. We will see the consequences of these problems in coming years. We will see a surge in cases of cancer in a few years.”

(Sözcü, 07.02.2021, [link](#))

TBMM Bursa MP from CHP, Yüksek Özkan, issued a parliamentary question to the Presidency of the GNAT on 11th February 2019 to be addressed by the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, to find out the causes of the drop in cancer screening, the number of early diagnosis kits dispatched to general practitioners, and the measures taken to reduce the risk of infection in screening during the COVID-19 pandemic. The parliamentary question is yet to be addressed.

(GNAT, Parliamentary question No. 28791 and dated 11th February 2021, [link](#))

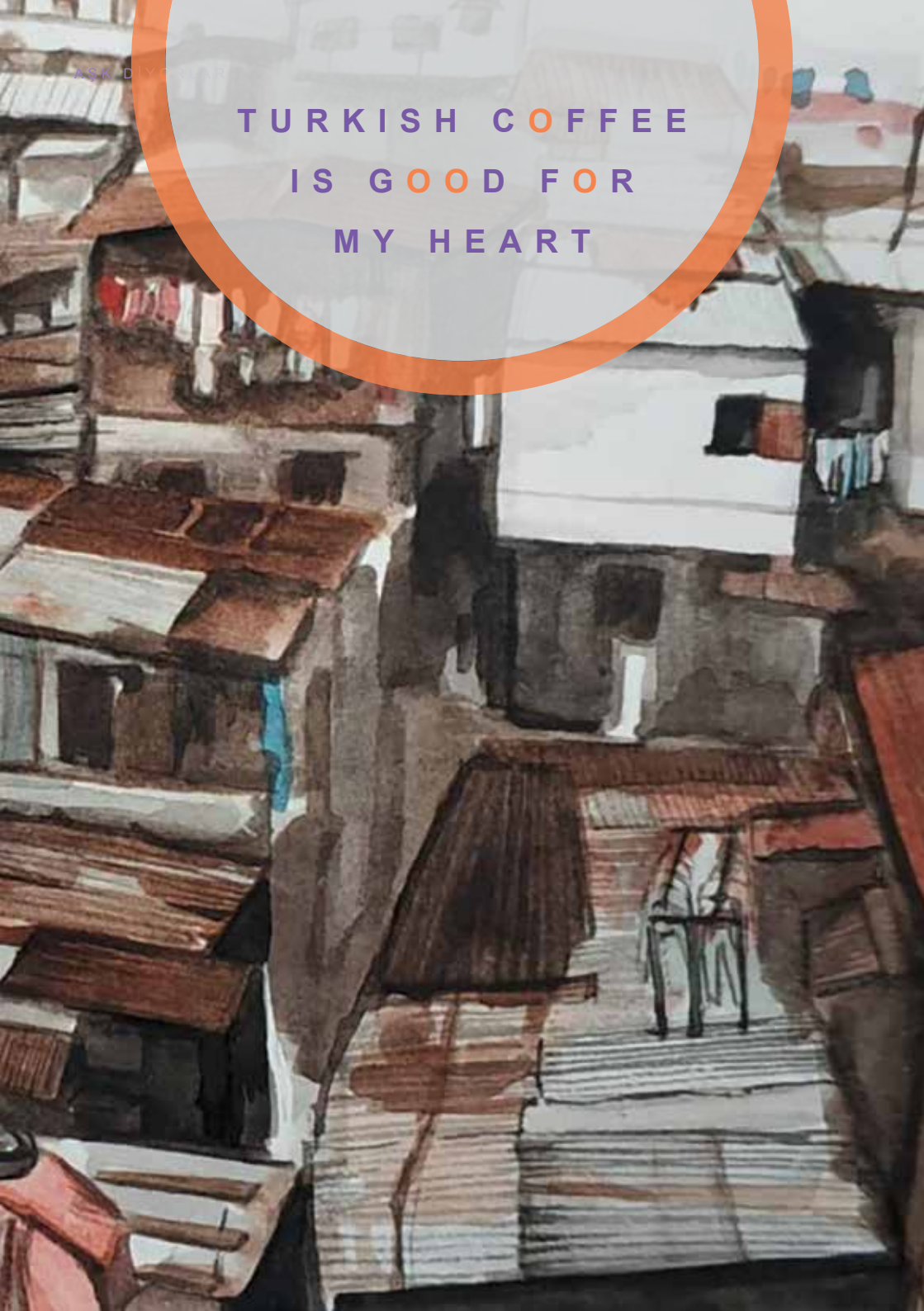
“Our research study shows that 67% of the interviewed households have at least one family member living with a chronic illness. Out of 92 individuals on regular medication, 23% state that they are able to access medication easily and without paying a deductible through health insurance; while 41% and 34% indicate their lack of regular access to medication due to their lack of health insurance and due to their health insurance not covering the medication in question, respectively.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study, 2020)



ASK D I Y

TURKISH COFFEE
IS GOOD FOR
MY HEART



T U R K I S H C O F F E E I S G O O D F O R M Y H E A R T

OWNER OF THE STORY: AYLİN

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEVAL ŞENER

My mother was in Urfa during her pregnancy with me, but I was born in Istanbul. Then, we apparently sold off everything we had in Urfa and moved to Beşiktaş, Istanbul. I was born there as the fourth child of my family. My younger sibling was born when I was 12. After childbirth, my mother had a psychological problem. She lost it. I had two older sisters and an older brother. They all got married and flew the coop. I was at school at the time. I never failed any of my classes. My teachers were very fond of me. I attended Büyük Esma Sultan Elementary School in Beşiktaş. We used to get a diploma after elementary school at the time. I was in 5th grade and was supposed to move on to the 1st grade of secondary school, but then, I had to drop out. I still keep my diploma. It's all a matter of fate.

My mother was an inpatient for a while. My father would take me to the hospital. I would make sure she took her medication regularly. When I was 16-17, my mother did get better for a while, but then fell ill again. She died at the age of 49. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

I had to single-handedly take care of both my younger sibling and my mother until I was 26. My father was working, but what he earned wasn't enough. So, I started to work as a day labourer when my sibling was at school. This is how I got to my age of 26. My younger sibling grew up with me and I made sure that she finished high school. I would work as a secretary at a PVC firm. Then, I worked in the aisles of a supermarket. My last job was as a tea boy at a vehicle company in Osmanbey. I'd never had anyone in my life before, no boyfriend, no one, until then. I met my ex-husband at my last place of work. We loved each other dearly. I actually didn't want to get married in this state of the world. I'd taken care of my younger sibling since my own childhood. As I'd had enough in life, I thought a marriage would be too much. Then, I warmed up to the idea of being with someone and sharing the life with them. But it turned out that I had chosen the wrong person for it. I realised that three years later. We had a lot of issues. I was stabbed in my back while I was pregnant with my second son. We spent only three happy years in this marriage. Then, my father was taken into intensive care due to an illness. He was bedridden and needed home care. So, he came to stay with us. That

was around my divorce and my son had just been born.

I was given an attorney from the bar. The attorney at the bar told him that if he repeated what he had done before and insisted on refusing to go through with the divorce, he would end up in prison. May God bless my attorney; he was a wonderful person. I hope his ears are burning. Then, a single signature made the proceedings consensual and we got divorced. When I got divorced, my father was alone, without anyone to look after him. We then rented the house I am in now. My father had prostate cancer then. Thankfully, I saw to it that he's free from cancer. I was always on time with his medication and I would take him to his medical checks. Wherever I went for help, they said, "Don't come here with your children. If you can't soldier on, you can go to a women's shelter". I found out about the institutions that could help me and sent over my applications to them. We would all be scattered around if not for them. I would've left my father at one institution and my children at another. I will never forget the day of my divorce; we had nothing to eat at home. I hadn't paid my rent for two or three months. I did get a bit depressed, but I never let my children see it. I would just cry a lot at nights. It's not easy, but having carried your children for nine months and then, leaving them alone in desperation is no solution. Whatever happens, we have to take care of our children as we're the ones that brought them to this world.

I noticed the problem in my eye after I gave birth to my son. Apparently, I had night blindness for a long while. We're five brothers and sisters and four of us have this night blindness. I find it very hard to see at night. My older son was going to school and I would go with him. My older son also has a similar impairment in his eyes and he couldn't see well then. He would sit in front rows as he was short-sighted. At school, he had a hard time getting used to the glasses and was always trying to come home without them. I was married at the time, but I would wait for him at the bathrooms or in the corridors of the school until he came out. Then, they approached me and said, "We have a Parent-Teacher Association; would you like to join and help us?". This is how I joined the Parent-Teacher Association. I finished elementary school together with my son. Those were the days. Anyway, it all became a memory.

I got divorced one and a half years after the birth of my second son. The divorce did me so much good!

My son was different in some aspects. I didn't know what autism was before I talked to a doctor, but I did have my suspicions. He would shy away from eye contact and cry all the time and any loud noise would make him close his ears with his hands. I said, "What if he is affected by what my mother went through?". He had a cardiac problem, as well. He was born with four holes in his heart and he had two angiographies. I pulled through it all by myself. Anyway, I first visited the general practitioner, asking "Why won't my child look into my eyes?". The doctor examined him and said, "He may have autism. Take him to a psychiatrist".

The psychiatrist said, "I'll give you a special development report. He should definitely have special education". They said, "If you don't start to deal with it now, it may get worse. There are children having it worse, but you can see progress with the right education and attention".

I see some other children attending special education. I see an 11-year-old with autism. His brother has it, too. His family didn't do something about it initially, thinking that it would go away, and they are too late. The child is non-verbal. The special education Guidance and Research Centres (RAMs) offer is not enough by itself; you need speech therapy, sensory integration, and ergotherapy, too... There are various education programmes available. I pay 600 TRY a month for ergotherapy. I missed my payment this month, but it's OK. They're understanding people. I try to pay the fees one way or another. My child shouldn't be confined in the house – that's the most important thing. So, one day we're at home and the next, we're in special education. On Fridays, we're at that thing, the one I pay for. There's a shuttle for both services. They pick us up from home and give us a lift on our way back. All in all, we have 9-10 hours of special classes a week. My child should actually start preschool, but the nursery won't take him in. The nursery won't enrol him as he can't speak properly and has autism and so, they are worried that he won't be able to protect himself.

I was a bit scared after his initial diagnosis. Then, as time went on... There was this TV series about doctors, "Miracle Doctor". I saw Ali Vefa there. What is more, the special education centre shows us some films while the children are in class and we're able to ask them our questions. We consult with them there. They show us videos of children followed up for years showing progress, as well as informative videos and videos that inspire strength and hope in us.

After the videos, I talk to the other parents waiting there for their children. For example, we have tea in the garden. It feels really good. It's as if we needed to talk to each other, as if we'd yearned for it.

I believe that he will be able to speak and meet his own needs. It may only be a physical difference, too. My only goal is for him to live on and to express himself. Otherwise, may God forbid, he may not be able to walk and even then, I will carry him around on my back. Some cases move on to epilepsy, may God forbid. I always monitor his every behaviour. I make a mental note of anything that goes wrong. I then talk to the doctor and the teachers at special education about it, because I sometimes can't recognise my own son. He may be very easy-going one moment, but become disastrously bad-tempered the next.

My son loves playing with water. He's afraid of the sea, but when you put him in water or bring him water in a cup, he puts his hand in. He fills one cup with water from the other. As his muscles are underdeveloped, he can't use two fingers on one hand much. But this game is practice, let's say an exercise for him. And I never say, "You're getting wet!" or "You've spilled it!". I try to do whatever he wants. I don't say yes to everything, but... For example, the fridge door can't stay open for hours. He can sometimes fixate on that. For example, he wants to throw things out of the balcony. Every child does that, but it can't happen. Recently, he tried to throw a small pot out. It may hit somebody on the head. I mean, the small pot.

My older son is in puberty. I was an adolescent myself, but I was never like this. I don't remember my puberty. I didn't have the right to be an adolescent. All our boy thinks about

now is the sea. I start with "Son..." and tell him why we can't go to the seaside, trying hard not to hurt his feelings or to stress him out. He wants to be at the seaside and go swimming. He saw his father's photos online and they were on holiday apparently. I try to tell him why we got separated, trying hard to choose the right words. I try to tell him about our divorce, saying, "We had to get separated. Anybody can go through that. We weren't getting along, as you yourself felt was the case". I give him examples from our neighbourhood. There are families fighting all the time. "Look at them," I say. We have a child, 13-14 years old, in our neighbourhood. His father tells him to "Go and work". The family doesn't take care of him. They have their own problems, too. In the end, the child was taken away from them by Social Services. I mean, it's for the best, if you ask me, because that was no life for him. The child wouldn't have any food or water the whole day. They wouldn't give him any money and he would be in the streets until the night. Whenever I looked out, I would see him outside. From time to time, I would say to him, "Come in, son, let's eat together". It wasn't because they didn't have the means, but because they wouldn't look after him. I wouldn't hesitate to look after him, but a child needs their family's attention. All I could do was to give him some food. Whatever God gives us, we can always add one or two seats to our dinner table. But, what about that child's life? His life was no life for a child. I mean, all that arguing and noise... They were always fighting. So, what happens to that child then? Some people from the neighbourhood visited him. Apparently, he's doing pretty well. He said, "I would never leave this place and go back there". I hope he'll be happy there. This is what I want my son to understand – how this was the best and most peaceful option for all of us. I will now find an attorney from the bar. I will take legal action against my husband for alimony, as he's not paying.

I have disability benefits coming in for both myself and my son – it makes 1500 TRY in total. This is a rental property – 900 TRY a month. I use natural gas for heating. During the winter, I paid 1200 TRY just for the bills. My natural gas bills were for 600-650 TRY on average. We had to use an electric heater to make my father comfortable. It was on constantly for four, five months. That was the only way we could keep warm. Turning it on meant higher bills, but keeping it off meant freezing for my children. That's life. I try to explain the situation to them (organisations offering aid), but they won't understand. They say, "OK. We'll support you", but I don't have any additional support for my rent.

Getting by is a real challenge. You need bread, water, yoghurt, shampoo... My children sometimes crave for meat-type food. So, what else can I do but borrow some money from someone and pay them back at the end of the month? Then, you end up with nothing in your hands. I can spend a whole day on bread and cheese, but the kids can't. They need more food. They need meat, chicken, fish once a week. There is a child in this household who needs fish. I'd rather spend my life like this than live in a shelter away from my children, though.

I run a tab at the shop. My father's illness flared up again. He needed to stay at a hospital, with a carer by his bed, for 15 days. I couldn't stay at the hospital with him, so I had to find a carer. 100 lira a day, for 15 days. I had to borrow money to cover it.

Life sometimes feels too heavy, but I somehow manage to say, “Aylin, you have to stand on your feet”. Love is the best medicine. I try to raise my children well as long as I live. I try to protect them from evil so that I can rest in peace in death. I feel crushed to see my children upset. We have illnesses in the family or problems to solve some days. I never want to see their feelings hurt. There were times when I felt a riot coming up inside me, against all the bad things we had to go through. I wish I could work. I wish I could provide more for my children. When they ask for something, I try to make them understand the situation, saying, “OK, we can’t get it now, but maybe some other time” or something like that. I also tell them to keep hope alive. I try hard so neither I am nor they are dragged into pessimism.

After I wake up, I wash my face. I put cologne water on so that I can really wake up. Then, I set off for the shop. My older son is never one to go to the shop. Daily, we’re generally able to buy bread and eggs only. Then it’s time for breakfast. It’s sometimes a challenge to get my younger son to eat. Autistics are known, at times, to be fussy when it comes to eating or to refuse to eat altogether. Then comes noon. I clear the table and tidy the house. As I do all my chores, lunchtime comes. After lunch and all the chores, the kids want to go out. On certain days, we go to special education and I take my older son along as I don’t want to leave him home alone or with the kids of the neighbourhood. Kids outside generally use swear words while hanging out during the day. It’s bad. I don’t want him to feel depressed or to string along with them, because to them, this is normal behaviour. Everyone has their own lifestyle; I’m surely far from judging them. But I don’t want my kid to be like that. That’s why. If you don’t deal with it from the outset... This is all I try to do for them.

Then comes the evening. After 1 or 2 am, I thank my stars if we can all go to bed. There’s my father to think about, too. He gets worse and is in pain sometimes. Then, I have to give him additional medication. When he needs to go to hospital, I’m the one taking him.



I can't have any time for myself. For example, I haven't had a shower since yesterday – sorry if it's too much information. But I will definitely have one tonight. I've had enough with the heat. Because I'm a human being, too. I should be clean so that I can be a role model for my kids. Because this is how it goes. A child will take in whatever they see.

I like listening to music very much. I used to listen to arabesque-type songs a lot. But those songs get you even more depressed, so now, I play songs that are more suitable for my kids. Because if I listen to arabesque songs, they will get depressed, too. I like coffee, Turkish coffee. It's also good for my heart. I get too sleepy sometimes and I can't get some rest whenever I want to. I don't have to have it every day – if I can, I do, but it's OK if I don't. A good night's sleep is a luxury for me. It's my greatest luxury. I thank my stars when I can sleep well.

There is this sweetest piece of music. I've found two hats – one is a bear hat. I wear that one and give the other to my older son. It's like a pilot's hat. There's this Apache devil dance – we try to do that dance together. I said to our special education teacher, "What am I like?". They said, "I mean, you look like an introvert, but you can play with them like a child yourself". Of course, I'm approaching 40 now. Life did tire me out. I do feel that I'm getting older every day, but children can't see it for what it is. They always want to play. I feel that playing does me good, too. I'm surely not as young as before, but maybe, a reasonable person seeing me dance the Apache dance would wonder if I was crazy... I don't know, but maybe they would think about it a little and say, "Perhaps, she's doing it to raise the kids' spirits". What matters to me is for them to be OK. I'll do anything as long as they're OK. Every person surely has a child within them, a child that never grows up. I mean, we always have this child within. It's not just me, this is true for everyone.



Now, my kids have somewhat decent some toys; I didn't have anything like that while I was growing up. We didn't have this much stuff, either. I only remember a hand-sewn doll. I had this doll that was taller than me; my father had brought it from another country where he worked. I remember that. Apart from it, I didn't have any Legos or educational games to play with or a slide to ride down. We would be thankful for riding a donkey. Now, there is a toy slide right in this house. Recently, my kids said, "Mom, ride down! Ride down!". But I said, "The slide would break, son". Yet, I did ride down the slide once and it didn't break! I sometimes do it in the park, too. My older son says, "Come on, Mom! You should ride down, too!". I do it when there's nobody else around. I'm too shy to ride the swing, but I will do it one day. Everybody does it, actually. I don't know why I'm this shy. I feel like I'm too old. I worry that people will reproach me. So what if they reproach me? Others get on the swings, too, and people aged 45 or 50 at that. I have this timidity in me. Sometimes, I look at people around me and see how they dress well... I feel bad then. I want to look like them, to be as comfortable as them.

Can I spend my life debt free? That's my biggest dream, you know? Now, it is very difficult for a woman to ask to borrow money. I have my pride, but when I do ask, I do it for my children. I do it for their needs or an emergency. My biggest dream is to be free of these situations. It is, of course, a very good thing to work. But if you can't work, then you have to ask someone for support, for help. And you can't knock on a stranger's door. I mean, I sometimes get extremely anxious thinking about this helplessness. I even felt like I was losing it once.

When I was a child, I wanted to finish school and become a nurse, but I couldn't amount to anything, anything but a mother. I took care of my younger sibling, my mother, and my father for years and now, I'm taking care of my son. This is, perhaps, a bit like nursing...

I have other dreams, too – dreams of coastlines, of the sea... I, like my older son, love the sea a lot, but since my younger was born, I could take him to the sea maybe once – and that was thanks to the short distance. We were at the seaside and I could only get my feet in the sea. But, I mean, spending time and playing with my children in the sand just like that... And I would also like to go for a picnic or something around here. I would like to do something different. I'm sure it will do a world of good for me and my kids. Spending a whole day to our heart's content, being outside just like they want to be. I would like to see them to have whatever they want to eat and drink, to see different places. This is my biggest dream. God willing, I will do it one day.

DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.”

(United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23)

“With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

a- to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;

b- to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary.”

(European Council, European Social Charter, Article 30)

In the U.S., the country offering the most comprehensive package of services to autistic individuals, these services cost around 236-262 billion dollars a year. A significant part of this cost relates to services for adults (175-196 billion dollars), while the remaining part represents the services offered to children (61-66 billion dollars) (Buescher et al., 2014). The relevant research indicates that early diagnosis and intervention may lead to a 2/3 drop in the lifelong cost.





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W E ' R E E V E R Y W H E R E , F O R E V E R Y O N E

OWNER OF THE STORY: AYHAN AK

INTERVIEWER & STORIFIED BY: ŞEVAL ŞENER

How did I get introduced to baglama? I was a child living in Iğdır. I noticed that the Public Education Centre has musical instrument courses on offer. The one available at the time was the baglama course and so, I enrolled in that. There's no one in my family playing an instrument, but I was interested in it. That's how I got started. All in all, if you do have a talent, it gets you somewhere. All you need to do is to practice and make an effort. That bard inside you is the one that gets you somewhere so to say. You say, "I will be this and that when I grow up". I was in school and I qualified for a NCOS School in Izmir. We did have the means for it at the time, but I didn't opt for it. Our friends have become police officers and specialised sergeants now. They pursued other professions, but I said, "I will be a musician. I will tread my path that way". As we said, the bard inside you is what gets you there. I had a number of chances to go for better working conditions and better earnings. But that bard inside you doesn't let go, saying, "This is where you're meant to be".

Now, it's a whole world and it takes much more than five or ten minutes to understand music, notes, musicians, and artists, believe me. Even if you had the talent in the first place, your work is what brings it forward. Most of us have to practice every day. We have to exercise our muscles constantly so that we can do our job well. However good a musician you may be, just one month off will mean that you'll stagger on stage. Having to be away from the stage is the worst, though. Let's say you do your exercises at home; it won't amount to much, as the stage is our home just like wrestlers finding their home on the mat. They call it muscle memory and you lose your reflexes. You don't get to play on stage, but you actually need to play right in the middle of that sound. Exercising at home does make the stage easier for you, but you should definitely be on the stage. I mean, we haven't been able to go on the stage for one and a half years. We have to keep songs in our memory, we memorise them. As we play them every night, it means that the brain is constantly exercising. Now, we started to forget the side melodies of the songs we used to play, just like our names. What was the tune? Was it in Uşşâk? It all gets mixed up. For example, it will take three months to get everything back together, to be ourselves again. 1.5 years of financial gains lost don't matter as much as the 3-4 months we need to put this together again.

I had to go to Iran once. I stayed there for about 2.5 years. We weren't making music, of course. I took my instruments there with me. They were at home. Believe me, I practiced saz for 15-16 hours a day in our house. Even after all that, I staggered on the stage my first time coming back. So, being on the stage is a must. For example, if you play the instrument for studios, you have other issues to deal with. If you don't play for one month, you lose your footing. For example, we should read musical notes. If you don't read for 1-2 months, you lose your reflexes. On top of that, this whole pandemic has brought us all down and you even lose your motivation to practice on your instrument. Imagine a man thrown out of his house,

away from his children, who are back in their hometown. He has very young children, maybe 2-3 or 4 years old. He's been thrown out. Imagine that! How can he bring himself to practice on his instrument at home?

If you are a concert musician, you must be playing for Ibrahim Tatlises, for example. Then, you have a set list of songs to play. You write down both the repertoire and the notes and you go on the stage, play those notes, and then come back down. There's no issue there. But what about those running after shows to play in daily? It is so that you may be playing in a bar, where every table asks you to play something else – maybe from classical Turkish music, Turkish folk music, or something else entirely. What is more, there are a lot of different ethnic identities in Turkey. Let's take the Black Sea as an example. Trabzon and Rize, albeit provinces quite close to each other in the Black Sea, will have entirely different songs for their horon. When you go further east, visiting Diyarbakır, Batman, and Bitlis will have you hearing different songs for their halay. Even within Kars itself, there is a distinct tune in Iğdır and an entirely different one going upwards to Arpaçay. In Konya, for instance, there is a different tone to follow and you have to play by that tone. In the Aegean part, you have your zeibek. Then, imagine playing in Istanbul! You'll have people from all parts of Turkey together in a given venue – from the Aegean, from the Black Sea, and from the East. Go figure! You can't separate the styles from each other, either. We're all too intermingled. You should stay away from dividing the entire country by smaller regions. I've been living in Istanbul for 32 years now. In the past, a person frequenting a Turkish folk bar wouldn't go to any other. People who listened to the Black Sea music wouldn't visit a bar playing another style of music. But this separation has disappeared over the years. You have this element to music. Music is a very important power that brings people in the world together and unites them.

Our social security was optional before; you could choose to have it or not. Now, they have merged the systems and call it artists' insurance. We pay the premiums for it. Actually, the venues we play for are supposed to register our work for insurance, but you have the de facto conditions to think of. In artists' insurance you appear to work for less than ten days a month. The state pays for the rest. There's also the inflation to think about; it's said to be 10% annually. Then, though, they increase the insurance premiums by 40%. Currently, the monthly premium of an artist's insurance is 1.190-1.200 lira on average. This is the money we have to pay out of our own pocket to have social security. On the other hand, musicians can only work three days a week. Look, it's Friday, Saturday, and maybe, just maybe Sunday. Working doesn't mean you can actually make money. Let's say you've talked to a venue and you work for them on the date agreed upon. Let's say, you are a builder. You do the plaster, you take your money, and leave. In a musician's life, the situation can get so bad that you can go to a venue, play for a show, but leave the venue only with your travel allowance and no other pay if the venue didn't do well that night. For example, everyone has a shuttle or commute support or something to make their way to work. We don't have that, either. If you play the baglama, you can easily hang it on your shoulder, and go to the venue by metrobus or something. But, it's a whole different story if you play the keyboard. It weighs 20-25 kilos. You can't take the metrobus; you can't use public transport. The current state of public transport is already obvious. You can't ride just by yourself, let alone with a large instrument. Imagine that you need to go to Taksim from Sefaköy to play for a show. Twenty kilos will weigh two hundred and twenty on that long route. Every 500 meters adds to it 5 kilos. So, there is also the law of gravity at play. Now, the musician has to pay the fare out of pocket. What do they do? They take a taxi. They can't get a regular taxi, either. What should they do? They opt for pirate taxi cabs. Then, imagine that the venue doesn't do well that night. They yet again pay the taxi fare out of their pocket and come back home empty handed.

Then consider, if this person wants to rent out an apartment, they will have to pay at least 1.500 lira in Istanbul. There aren't many apartments left at that price, though. So, it will be 2.000-2.500... Let's say we go for the worst one and rent it out for 1.500 lira a month. Then, you need 1.000 lira for bills and 2.500 lira for food... I don't even add to this the cost of schooling for the children. How will this person manage to pay the insurance premium of 1,200 lira? Our demand is to have this amount paid offset against our taxes. It would make an additional 200 lira or 300 lira a month. We ask for it, because it is pretty obvious that the state will not be able to get better with this small insurance premium they collect from us.

Let's say, you've got this artist's insurance, okay? You've paid the premiums regularly. Then, you go to the bank. Let alone a loan, they do not even give you a credit card as they don't take that insurance seriously. You can't get a credit card. They say, "Show me payslip. Is it artist's insurance? Then, no". Can you imagine? We told the political parties, "We musicians are the common value of the society. We do not have a political agenda, either". Mind you, there are those among us who make their views known, asking these parties for pens or something. But we, the people who work as musicians in daily shows, are the common value of the society. When we go on stage, we never say, "You're from this political party. We won't play the song you've asked for!". We try to please everyone there. We don't tell anyone to leave because of their political views. We go and visit political parties. They say, "Oh, Sir, we can't settle your business here". Look, we aren't approaching you to solve our problem. Let us come in and tell you about our problems. Provincial headquarters of political parties are the bridge between us and the government or the opposition. We go there, we tell them about our problems. You should then go and report it to those above you. We already have the text written in specific titles filling only one side of a A4 paper. There are three items there, nothing else.

One – insurance premiums should be reduced. I've already told you about this. Even if we have to pay our own insurance premiums, it shouldn't be as high as 1200 lira a month. It should be affordable.

Two – retrospective borrowing. The technology was not as advanced in the past as it is today. We couldn't follow up our insurance payments back then. We weren't able to pay them ourselves in an optional scheme, either. We couldn't use healthcare services. We would go to a venue and tell the owner, "I'll work here. How much do you offer?" "100 lira." "OK, let me get only 80 off you and you pay my insurance premium for one day." Let's say I have worked at a venue for 3-4 years. It then may turn out that the owner paid your premiums for only one or two months, but not after that. They didn't pay your premiums... So, we want to have a scheme to make it easier for us to use retrospective borrowing. This is possible for construction companies and producers, isn't it?

Three – longevity pay for retirement. Let's say you are a journalist; you can still work as a journalist at the age of 70. There would be nothing standing in your way. But we can't do this job after the age of 50 because our anatomical structure and our reflexes will not allow it. After the age of 50, we become idle. Although it looks very easy from the outside, it falls into the category of hard labour. We are in the same category as our friends working in mines. Because we work at night, our order in life goes out the window. After the age of 50, your muscles do not allow you to continue. You can't play as fast as a 20-year-old and if you're 20, when you listen to a piece once, it stays in your mind, but as you get older, you have to listen to it many times. As I've just told you, we've been in music since we were 12-13 years old. I started playing on stage at the age of 14. Think about it; you spend hours in high-volume music most nights for 40 years.

Our voice has never been heard during the pandemic. We reached an MP and he issued a parliamentary question. I mean, our names are still not mentioned there. Our workplaces are closed. We fall victim to the circumstances and they ignore it. Brother, we are citizens of this country, too. We're everywhere, for everyone. For example, if you get engaged, we'll be right there at your engagement. We'll be right there at your wedding. We'll be there at your henna night¹. If you have your wedding anniversary, you'll go somewhere to celebrate and see us right there. When you graduate from school, we'll be there right in the middle of your celebrations. We're right in the middle of your happy moments. If you need a musical piece for your political promotion for upcoming elections, we'll be right there in that piece.

We've had a hard time during the pandemic... Do you know, you can't have unemployment benefits as you haven't paid into the unemployment fund while registering for artist's insurance? Did any of us know about this? The insurer is the one telling you the exact amount to have to pay and you pay it. Anyway... There were other kinds of help available... But we said, "Brother, thank you. First, open up the venues so that we can work again. We don't want your help otherwise". Because they gave us 1.000 TRY each as aid. So, should we use it to pay the rent or the bills? Apparently, our friends abroad haven't had that problem as we heard it from them. Okay, they weren't given crazy amounts of money, but at least, they weren't left alone as victims of the circumstances. Other countries are organising concerts, festivals, and events, taking all necessary measures, and so, they don't leave you without work.

You saw the bills in winter. Natural gas bills were around 600-700 lira. "Stay Home, Turkey!" Who will pay the bill if I stay at home? You turn off the gas, but there are children in the house. You see? Our business is completely shut down. Other professionals did have some relief, but we were shut down completely. What kind of a solution could be provided? People who are out of their jobs due to the pandemic - not forgetting those who are in day labour - should submit a petition to the district governor, so that they aren't served any bills to pay during this process. What would happen if you didn't have any bills to pay and the state offered you 2.000 lira in aid every month? Let's say, I live in a rental property. I would go to my landlord and say, "The situation is so and so. I can't work. How much rent do I pay you? 1.500 lira. Look, there is a dry spell in our business and I can't pay that money right now. I wouldn't want to cause myself or you any trouble. Let me give you 750 lira a month during this period. After it's over, I will pay your full rent again". Then, with the rest of the money, I'd keep myself going.

With the pandemic, we felt the need to come together, start an association, and stand together in solidarity. While we were preparing for this little by little, silent vigils began in Izmir. Artists put out their instruments. Just a few days later, we started it in Bakırköy, Istanbul. There is this picture. It is actually our turning point. When all this happened to us, we started a silent vigil in Istanbul. There were all these walls built by people, saying things like "Oh, no. We can't pull together". Musicians are normally individualistic people. You can't chain them down like that. We were like 15 people, though. A week later, we held it in Şirinevler. We went up to 50-60 people. After that, we were 80 the next time. We went to Taksim, to Mis Street, with 150 people. Gradually, these organizations moved forward. We were silent and we said, "Be the voice". There was satire there. You know, we silenced our instruments. The instruments were in the middle and we were standing for our vigils. The police... They should be mentioned here, as well. We had major difficulties. For example, one day, we were about to go for our silent vigil. Despite our legal right, we sent over two volunteers from among us. We said, "Go to the governor's office and tell them, 'We're going to have a meeting over there. At least make sure we're safe.

Just so you're aware of it". The district governor said, "I won't sign any documents. I won't give you the permission, either". Now, the closest institution to the public is the district governor. Would a sensitive district governor say that? He could have said, "Brother, come on. Is there a problem? Have a seat and let me hear you out. If we can't solve it, then take the street". This was the starting point of the series of events that pushed us towards taking up the silent vigils. They didn't hear our calls. We couldn't go anywhere for a solution. We couldn't go to any official institution. I have a list of needs as you know. I went to the municipality. I needed that help that day and as did my friends. Oh, but twenty days passed, then a whole month. No response. Brother, there was an emergency. People couldn't find 10 lira to buy bread. We needed to solve this. So, we went on the silent vigils. It was about to make quite a noise. This time, though, some people took a step back. Then, the state announced these new aids. Some friends, for example, took ownership as if they had done it themselves and they tried to take it over. In fact, it wasn't as they made it out to be. If these musician friends of ours had not taken to the streets, no one would have given us this 1,000 lira, to be honest.

It's not just the pandemic. The entertainment industry is under a lot of mental pressure. There's no work around. Then, you have high taxes, increased premiums, property taxes, rents, and so on... The owner of a venue is taxed under 40-50 items. Then, they charge these taxes on the patrons, adding a lot to the price of a night out and pushing patrons away. Okay, you may not have banned entertainment altogether, but you've effectively ended the entertainment industry mentally somehow. You buy a bottle of raki in Germany for 70 lira, here it is 270 lira. Why, though, brother? Isn't that so? Then, you start to suspect that it must be on purpose. You see, a venue may end a night with just 3-4 tables. So, brother, how will he pay his rent? He has other staff to think about than musicians, like cooks... One venue means at least 40-50 people earning their living out of it. In other words, this approach turns music, art and entertainment into a luxury. In the past, a person working in textile, in ready garments could go to a venue to have fun once or twice a month. Not so now. Now, for example, a family is expected to pay at least 1.000 lira for a night out, meals, drinks, and entertainment included. On the other hand, my brother, the minimum wage is 3,000 lira.

They say, "Midnight is the time – no offense to anyone. It's forbidden to make music after midnight. Don't disturb anyone". Take an entertainment venue as an example. When you go to get a license, if you want to keep it open until 4 or 5 am, you pay a certain amount of money additionally. They charge you 300.000-500.000 lira, saying, "I'm giving you the license, but you have to pay me this much". Now, this means that you will get your 500.000 lira from the owner of a venue to give them the permission and the license and then, you will say, "You can have live music until midnight, but it's forbidden after that". The venue has a license just to keep it hung on the wall. At midnight exactly, the police visit the venue and stop live music. Customers remain, though; they don't tell them to leave. "Brother, the customers are still here." The police say, "By God, even we don't know what to do!".

We're not about keeping live music on the whole night, because a whole set of songs needs to be played out and finished in 3 hours. This was how it was 30 years ago. Live music would end at 1 or 2 am. We don't want to go back to those days when we had to play until 5 or 6 am. We have some friends that work in those musical-style places. They play their instruments until 7 in the morning for 100-110 lira a day. They start at 9.30 in the evening and stay there until 7 in the morning. Think about it, it's an ordeal. They stay in all that noise. They lose their mental wellbeing after 2 years. But it shouldn't end at 12.00; you know why not? When you say you are going to have fun one night, you get off work at 7 in the evening. You go to your house, change your clothes, and set off for the venue. Then, it's 10, 11 pm. Then,

of course, you pretty much know what you'll pay at the end of the night. If you're by yourself, you'll pay at least 500 lira. Now, my question to you: would you pay 500 lira for one hour only? Would you go in just for one hour?

They want to end music in this country, but this is the Republic of Turkey. Nobody can have it their way just like that. This is such a country that you have people from all walks of life in the society. I've just told you; we see this first hand, because we are always among them... There are people who pray regularly, there are deists, there are atheists, there are Armenians, and there are Jews. Who will you ban and based on whose decision? I also don't understand how they can impose this on people. As I've just said, I went to Iran for a while. It's forbidden there. Believe me, they drink more than us. Because it's forbidden, people go after it. This time, you find illegal ways to get your alcohol, your weed, or whatever you can think of... You get the best of everything there, you know? Even if you ban it, they're there. I mean, if you actually gave people a break, people wouldn't do any of that.

Hope, we need hope. There have been many people who got depressed, committed suicide, or spent all their savings just to stay alive after losing their jobs. We weren't living in luxury before, but perhaps this is the first time a musician has experienced such a thing in his life. You can see people looking under the cabinets in hopes of finding 1 lira, you know? Let's say you have a car, okay? You'll sell that car to get by. When business is back on, you can commute by metrobus. You can do that, no problem. You can spend 50 lira just to go to work. But, let's say, you've been forced to sell your instrument and venues are open again the next day. What will happen? The cheapest instrument is 15.000-20.000 lira, not 50 lira. Some artists did sell their instruments. They had to; what else would they do? People went and took out loans, thinking "The venues will open in three months", you know referring to what he said last year. "We'll pay it back when they're back on." When they couldn't pay it back in time, they turned to loan sharks. They could not pay back what they took out from loan sharks, either. In other words, the state has now left people in the hands of loan sharks.

If these conditions prevail, you will not be able to find a proper musician in this country after 5-10 years. Because we no longer recommend this profession to young people. Instead, we say, "Oh, brother. Go and get an education. Go and do another job. Don't get into this business". Why is it that I can't recommend the profession I love to young people? Would it be possible to resolve all these years' experiences, troubles, and suffering without a struggle? No. We still have a lot of work to do. Musicians' lives will no longer be the same as before the pandemic. We will raise our working conditions, the way we work, the money we receive to a standard. We will fight on that issue; we will get together under one roof. We will have music in the rest of our lives again; we will move on from where we left off.

My dream is to gather musicians under one roof. We should have such a platform that everyone can find some space for themselves there. We have experienced the problems that come with this profession. We want young people, the future generations to enjoy more humane working conditions in this profession, which we have devoted ourselves to. Hopefully, business will be good again soon. You supported us during this period, and we will support you when business is good again. We can set up a nice orchestra and organise concerts. We can also leave the earnings to you so that you support those who do other forms of day labour. We will also have a place in these efforts...

DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“The State shall protect artistic activities and artists. The State shall take the necessary measures to protect, promote and support works of art and artists, and encourage the spread of appreciation for the arts.”

(Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 64)

“Artists involved in films, theatre plays, stage performances, shows, and vocal artists and instrumentalists; those working in any branch of fine arts including painting, drawing, sculpture, and decoration; and thinkers and writers employed by one or more people on short-term work contracts in areas to be designated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism shall be able to pay their insurance premiums themselves as long as they work less than 10 days a month as calculated on the basis of their hours worked. These insured individuals shall be considered to have coverage under the contract of employment as defined in the Law.”

(Law Laying Down the Procedures for the Restructuring of Certain Receivables and Amending the Law on Social Securities and General Health Insurance and Certain Other Laws and Decree-Laws, Article 51 and Additional Article 6, 2011)

“The UK, USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy offer various state support lines for artists and art institutions who lost their sources of income due to the Corona (COVID-19) epidemic, which has turned the whole of Europe into a quarantine zone. Some of the supports will be paid in the form of interest-free loans and some in the form of compensation.”

(Duvar, 25th March 2020, [link](#))

“Trial concerts attended by 5 thousand people were held in Paris, Barcelona, and England in accordance with social distance and COVID-19 measures. According to the test results, there are no signs of COVID-19 transmission at these events.”

(Euronews, 21st May 2021, [link](#); Euronews, 27th April 2021, [link](#); BBC News, 3rd May 2021, [link](#))

“Currently, there is only one line of support, but it is not a remedy for any wound; the state will give 1,000 lira per month for three months. That is reserved for those who can apply online and prove that they are musicians with a video...”

(T24, 15th March 2021, link)

“Musicians who committed suicide during the epidemic were commemorated: Music Won’t Stop. Musicians sang the song “Müzik Susmaz”, which is dedicated to the 103 musicians who committed suicide due to economic difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

(HALK TV, 31st May 2021, link)

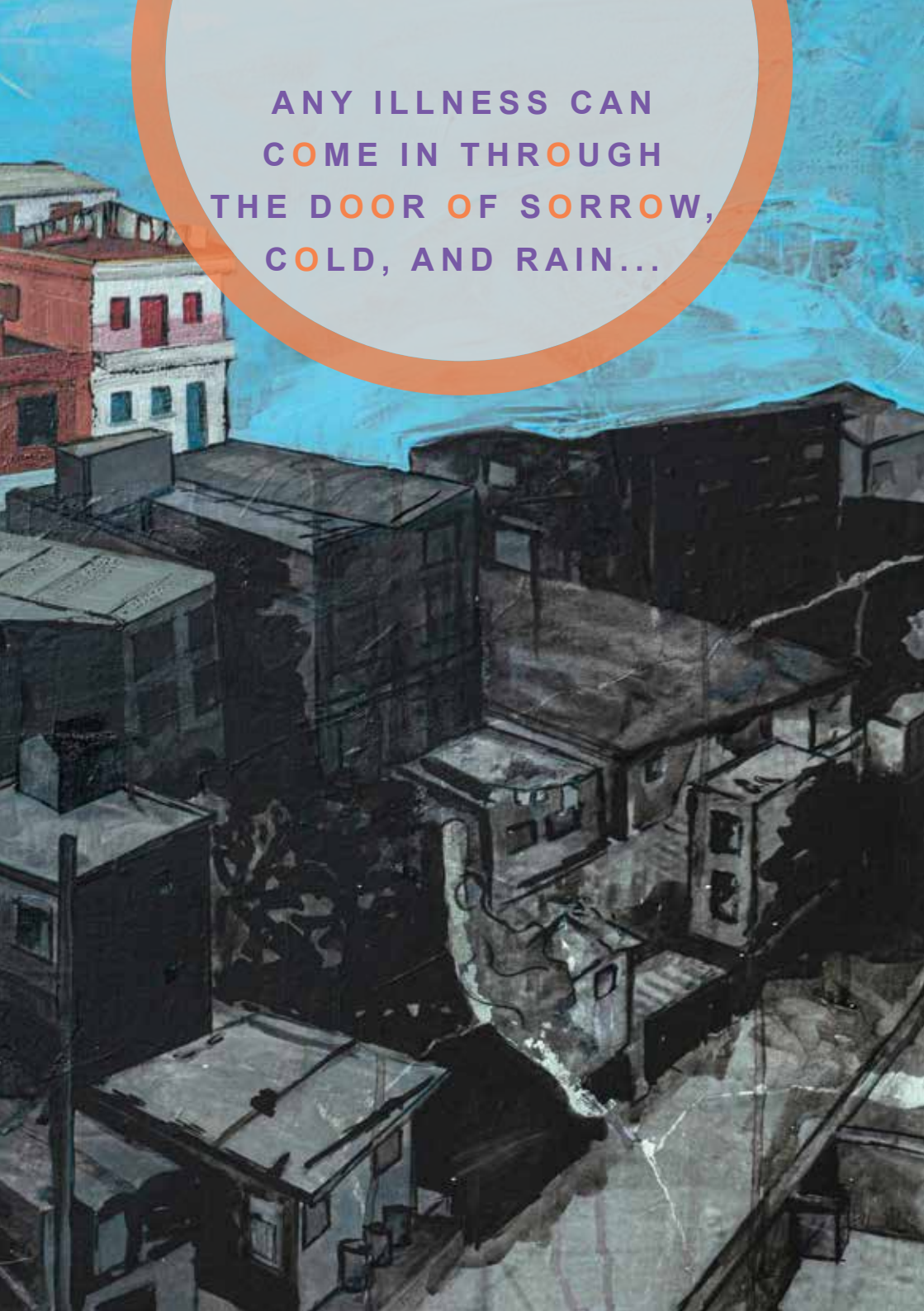
The ‘silent’ demonstration of musicians in İzmir is on its 12th day: “Describing that during the pandemic process, culture and art workers tried to make a living by working other jobs, Türkmen said, ‘Musicians have already used up any savings they had from the past, that is, if they did have any. We’re at a point where we can’t even buy bread. We want the ban lifted. We want to provide financial support to venue owners, employees and artists who are in a bad place due to the pandemic.’”

(Özgür Manşet, 11th November 2020, link)

“Speaking after the cabinet meeting, which coincided with June 21, World Music Day, President Erdoğan also made a statement saying, ‘We are pulling the restriction on music to 00.00, which is one hour later. We’re sorry, but no one has the right to disturb anyone else at night.’”

(Yeniçağ, 21st June 2021, link)



The background is a dark, textured illustration of a city street. The buildings are rendered in shades of black, grey, and brown, with some windows and doors visible. The overall style is gritty and somber. A large, semi-transparent orange circle is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing the text.

ANY ILLNESS CAN
COME IN THROUGH
THE DOOR OF SORROW,
COLD, AND RAIN...

ANY ILLNESS CAN COME IN THROUGH THE DOOR OF SORROW, COLD, AND RAIN...

OWNER OF THE STORY: SEVİM

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: ŞEYMA DUMAN

**The names of neighbourhoods were changed for the story.*

I was born in 1955, making me 66 years old, I think. I was born and raised in Istanbul. I did not go to school. I learned the letters myself. I can combine the letters to write my name and surname. I can read as much as I need to in life.

I got married at 17. I have 4 sons. I had 3 daughters, but they didn't survive. Two of my sons were diagnosed with schizophrenia.

We used to live in Bakkalköy, but then urban transformation knocked our doors, and houses started to be demolished one by one. We had our slums there. Well, then, everyone went their own way. Some went to Alemdağ, built their own sheds, those with some money bought houses, and some moved to rental properties.

We moved to Yenimahalle at that time, to a rental property. You can't buy a house there, even if you have the money. At that time, we couldn't buy a house there even though they were going cheap. I lost my husband at work in 2005 in Bakkalköy. In 1991, he had a heart attack and was paralysed. Initially, he wasn't able to move his legs and arms. "It takes time. They will come back," the doctor said. Indeed, just like he said, they did come back and he was able to walk and to meet his own needs afterwards. Then, he passed away in 2005, at the age of 52. If he had social security or something, we would at least have his pension. It did not happen, though. He was buying and selling flowers; we would get by somehow. The children were young then.

My younger son was 16-17 and the older 20-25 years old. He had come back home from military service; whatever happened to him happened in the military service. He had four children, but they didn't know he has this illness. I couldn't take them to the hospital. They were always at home, with no husband, nothing – I mean, no man. Then, in a coincidence or God's miracle, they both fell ill. I brought them to Erenköy Hospital in an ambulance. They were both hospitalised. After that, the doctor said to me, "Why don't you get a report for them?". And I said, "When I get an appointment from the hospital, they refuse to come in and I can't bring them in on the day". With me frequenting the hospital, I had become a sister to the doctors. "Okay," he said, "I will help you". God bless that doctor. God bless them all. Those doctors were both there. They had them picked up in an ambulance one morning and brought them to a board of doctors for the issue of their reports. Both of them were issued a report for 85 percent

(disability). Normally it takes a month and a half to get the report, but they got it in 10 days. After that, the doctor said to me, "What are you going to do with these reports now?"

The older one was married with four children. The younger one is single. Well, I didn't know about these nursing homes then, either. I said, "I can't find the strength to support us all. It would be good for these kids if they could get regular disability benefits". I couldn't say anything for my older son, seeing as he was married. "Go to a nursing home for the younger one," the doctor said. I didn't know where the nursing homes were. After that, they told me about Sancaktepe. I went there and found out it was the wrong place. Apparently, I should go to Üsküdar District Governor's Office. I went there, made an application, and waited a month and a half or two. My son was given a spot in Yalova Nursing Home. I asked them if Yalova was a good place and they said it was fine. I thought, I would go to visit my son from time to time and buy some flowers there at the same time. Then, I'd sell those flowers and support them a little. We said Yalova was a good place and got him admitted to Yalova. A car came from the nursing home and took my son away. These processes take a long time. It may sound easy while I'm telling you about it now, but it wasn't so back then. So, we managed to put the younger one in a nursing home. The older one had it bad, too. I mean, he would talk to the walls and see things. Then, I said to my daughter-in-law, "My daughter, let's get him admitted. Maybe, he will get better with treatment". So, we got him admitted, too, but we would take him out from time to time because he had a wife and children. At the end of one year, on 21st November, at 3 o'clock at night, we got the news. "Come here," they said, "and take your son's ID with you". They said they would bring him to the hospital. I lost my older son there.

They said it was a heart attack, a sudden death. That's what it says on the report. COVID-19 hadn't started yet. This disease came in after March, you see. We then took him from the hospital just like that... So, I was out of Yeniçamlıca. But, I still have a child in Yalova. With that report, they put him on regular disability benefits, which are actually collected by this nursing home; they don't look after him for free there.

Anyway, then I came here and I rented out a house. Now, the landlord is evicting us from this house. He says, he will move here himself. Our landlord is a doorman in another neighbourhood. He said, "They are demolishing the building I live in and we will move to the house". We don't know whether this is the truth or a lie. Now, he gave me time until August. I don't know how to find a house until then.

I have two more sons. Look, one of them has 6 kids, the other has 3. The one who has 6 boys works at a supermarket for minimum wage. He is the only one that works in the household; all by himself. He also lives in a rental property, paying 800 million lira a month. He's having a hard time keeping himself afloat. He's still up and about, though, and able to do his job, thankfully. My other son also has aortic regurgitation. So, he has a problem in his heart. He stayed in military service only for 2 months, after which he was given a disability certificate by a hospital and got discharged. He is also able to go out to sell flowers, and to support his family that way. Still, he doesn't have a permanent job, one with social security.

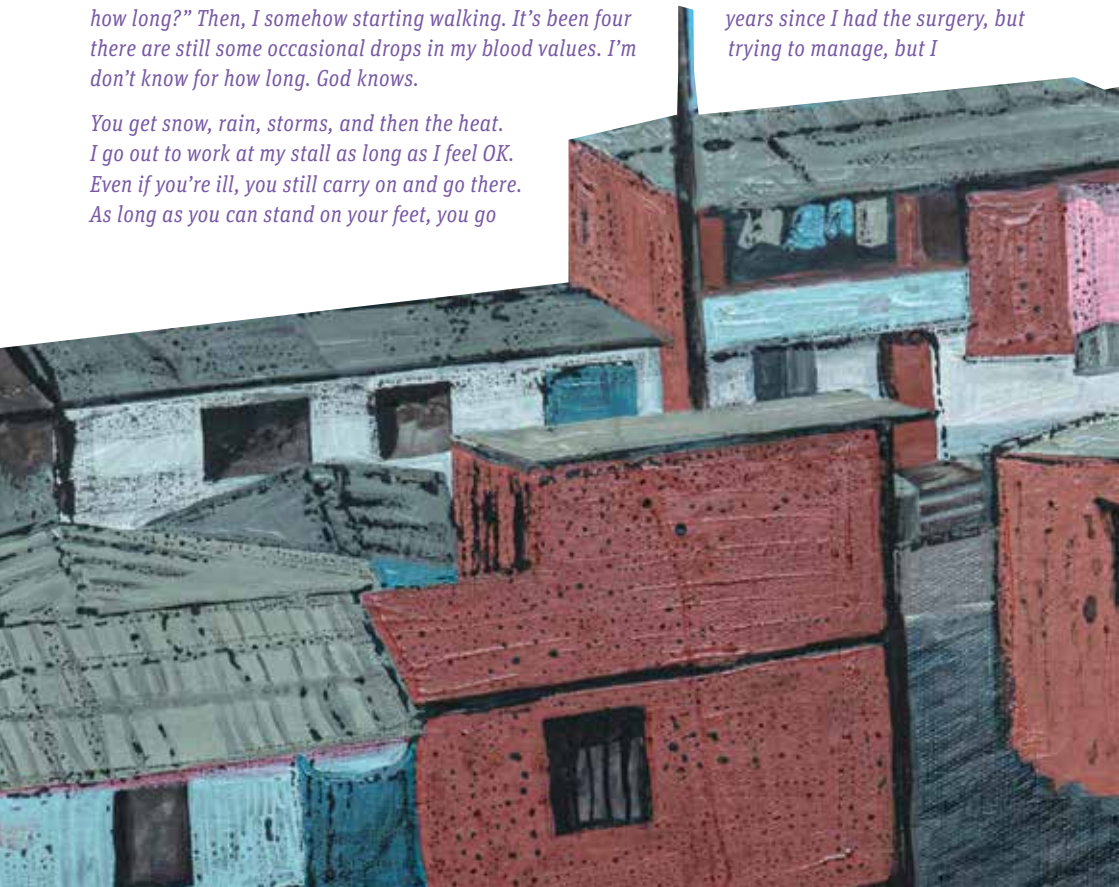
I have a stall where I sell flowers. I've been there maybe for more than 30 years. I mean, I was doing this job along with my husband back then. I can't do any other work. Thank God. I can't go begging. I'm glad I have this place. Whenever I feel up to it, I go there and sell my flowers.

Now, let's say, I don't have money, but I need to buy flowers to open up the stall. My friends buy flowers on auction. So, I borrow flowers from them. I run a tab with them. I tell them, "When I sell them, I will pay you back". When I sell them, I can get by for some time. You know, you have the rent and so on, but God helps everyone out. I sometimes pay them back in flowers or with my earnings. That's how I live. When I go to visit my son in Yalova, there are greenhouses on the way back. I go to the greenhouses. There, I buy some flowers, like a parcel of them. I put them on the bus and I get off here in Şamandıra. Then, I come home and in the morning, I go to my stall to sell the flowers I have bought. I can still do it all at this age, thank God. After I get up in the morning, there is a minibus from here, I get on at about 10 am. I get on three different lines on my way there and three different lines on my way back. I close my stall and set off for home at around 7.30 pm. I get home at 9 or even 9.30. I leave my flowers on my stall and nobody touches them. God bless them. Any illness can come in through the door of sorrow, cold, and rain... Anything can come in, my child. May God protect everyone.

I have both COPD and lung cancer. I had a surgery the year I got my son admitted. I had pneumonia first. After I had my pneumonia dried out, I was diagnosed with cancer. They said, I needed emergency surgery in the lung. I had an operation, I couldn't walk. They would walk me little by little with a walker. I said, "This will be the end of me! If I can't walk, how long?" Then, I somehow starting walking. It's been four there are still some occasional drops in my blood values. I'm don't know for how long. God knows.

they will all be miserable, but for years since I had the surgery, but trying to manage, but I

You get snow, rain, storms, and then the heat. I go out to work at my stall as long as I feel OK. Even if you're ill, you still carry on and go there. As long as you can stand on your feet, you go



and work. I have a customer. Knowing how ill I am, they brought me an umbrella. I did have one, but it had nothing to cover the sides. I would get cold in stormy weather. So, this customer just went and had an umbrella done for me and had it covered with tarpaulin on the sides. It's like a tent. God bless them. When I'm at the stall and it rains or snows, I pull the tarpaulin down. I can manage it that way. Otherwise, given my health, I can't stay there, my child, I can't.

My dream now is only for my children and my grandchildren... May God give them a house. I'm on borrowed time. How will they pay their rent? How will they get by? I only dream about a house, nothing else. A house costs a lot; well, a life costs a lot. The rent here is 800-900 now, but it will go up to 2000 lira then. Where will they find the money to pay for it? How will they manage? I lost one son and had one son admitted with my own two hands. I lost my husband, too. What can I ask for at this age? I want nothing at all for myself.



RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“According to the QualityRights 2019 Institutional Evaluation conducted in 18 institutions, Turkey represents a negative picture, especially regarding the personal freedoms and independent lives of individuals with mental disabilities.”

(Yeniler, BOUN Haberler, 2021)

“The European Council Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) issued a report as a result of its visits to mental health hospitals and rehabilitation centres in Turkey and says urgent action is needed to put the mental health law into effect.”

(Bia News Desk, 2009)

“Despite the struggle of mental health associations since 2006, there is no mental health policy or mental health law in Turkey.”

(Korkut, 2006)

“YADA’s research points to the concept of “Unequal Aging” in Turkey. Research shows that with old age, individuals are at a higher risk for poverty, poor living conditions, diseases, and psycho-social problems.”

(Yaşama Dair Vakıf, 2019)

“65+ Restrictions No Longer Grounded in Law”

(Özbek, Bianet, 2020)

“1 out of 5 older individuals is poor and 1 in 3 doesn’t have access to communication technologies.”

(Özbek, Bianet, 2021)

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 12)



An aerial, top-down view of a dense urban area. The buildings are rendered in a stylized, blocky manner. Many of the roofs are a vibrant blue, while others are grey, brown, or olive green. The buildings are packed closely together, with narrow streets visible. In the upper right, a road with a white car and a red truck is visible. A large, semi-transparent orange circle is centered in the upper half of the image, containing the text "WE WILL SEE BETTER DAYS" in a purple, sans-serif font. The overall scene suggests a city undergoing renovation or a specific urban planning project.

WE WILL SEE
BETTER DAYS

WE WILL SEE BETTER DAYS

OWNER OF THE STORY: RABİA EGE

INTERVIEWER: ŞEYMA DUMA

STORIFIED BY: SELEN YÜKSEL

I will soon turn 41. I am a mother of three children, one girl and two boys. I came to Istanbul from Mardin in 2002. We came here as my husband was working in a textile workshop. Living here is more difficult, more burdensome than in the village. When we first came here, we had nobody around us. We rented out one house and we bought one piece of furniture every time he got his weekly wages. But again, thank God, we now manage to earn our bread and raise our children. Our first child was born in 2003. At that time, we were living in Tarlabası, then we moved to Şişli. My three children are in school now. The eldest is going to finish high school this year and is going to a vocational high school. He wants to study aviation but we don't know how it will turn out. He wants a 4-year degree. Now they are building drones. He's working with drones, doing his internship. Whatever a person does, even if they collect garbage for work, they're good in my book as long as they do a good job of it. But if I were asked, "What would you like your child to be?", I would like them to study medicine. It's my unfulfilled desire, you know? I couldn't go to school. If I had, I would have wanted to be a doctor. I probably wanted it for my children because I couldn't do it, but this time, they didn't want it. I couldn't go to school. I enrolled in high school on open education, but then, I got married. Every year, I said, "Come on! I'll start this year". Unfortunately, it escaped me then. If you ask me, "Do you still hold on to this dream?", yes, I do.

My younger one says, "I'm going to be the doctor for animals". She loves it. "Child! Be a dentist, be an eye doctor," I say. "No," she says, "I'll cure cats and dogs". I try to get her to talk like that. In fact, it is a very nice thing to find out what children think. I love their ideas. "What do you want to do? What are you going to do?" I ask. I occasionally ask questions like this, but without putting any pressure on them, because one has to have a goal and one cannot walk on without a destination. If I could go to school again, I would become a doctor.

My husband works as a tailor now. Let's call him a neighbourhood tailor. For example, he repairs holes in trouser legs, unstitched parts, and broken zippers. He does alterations. Business stopped along with the pandemic. "There's no business coming in right now," he says. Although he's complaining, we make do nowadays. Otherwise, he did not work at all for 3 months in the pandemic. After his business reopened, people were still afraid to spend their money. They didn't have jobs. It is a bit difficult now, but we'll see better days, God willing. I started working during the midterm holiday 7 years ago. My older daughter wants to work with her hands. She has a good hand for crafts and she was the one who found the job. "Mom," she said, "let's get to work". I was thinking about it too, saying, maybe I'll do

some beadwork or something. You know, they make wedding candies or things like that. Then, I saw my neighbour doing it. We went in and we started working. I did it for a few months, but then, I quit when I got pregnant with my little girl. I quit and I couldn't carry on, because I was very nauseous and vomiting a lot. I couldn't eat for 4 months. Those days were really tough on me. I quit the job. When the baby was 1 year old, my daughter said, "Bring in some materials, Mom. We'll work a little, we'll play around with it". So, I did. I heard about my neighbours working and I went in and started. Later, my other neighbours saw what I was doing and said, "I want to do it too". After that, our office moved to Eminönü. Our employers left it to me to manage. So, I shared the work with those who wanted to join us. This is how our business venture started.

There was no business coming in during the pandemic. We didn't work even for one minute. But last summer, we saw a slow start. We had one or two jobs coming in for 2-3 months, because apparently, the work we did was taken abroad and since they couldn't go out, we only made them to be sold to the stores in Turkey. But you know, according to what they said, they weren't selling fast. For this reason, our volume went from 10 thousand pieces before to one thousand now. Sometimes it was one thousand in a week, sometimes one thousand in two weeks. It was hard, is still hard. They all came to a halt with the midterm holiday. We have only just started again; it's been a week. I mean, our team have three people. Two of them hasn't started yet and one only works here and there. We make these imitation necklaces and rings, you know. We do the binding part. In the past, the pieces would first go in for engraving and then, we would take them apart. Now, though, they don't come to us to take them apart, because apparently, the business is slow in the workshop and they have taken over that part, too. I mean, when the business is slow, they themselves take apart the pieces. But we used to do that ourselves, as well. Then, the pieces are placed in packaging and sold to retail stores.

Sometimes we earn 15 a day, sometimes we earn 50. We make a thousand of them for 11 liras and they are all finished in two hours. We were working with 20 people 2-3 years ago. I would even give some the chains and others the ends. They would all work well together and it was great. Everyone would come to me once they're done with their task and I would take down their name. Then, after the pay-out from the boss, I would give them their shares of it. That was my job. But now, it's only me and a friend working because of the pandemic. Sometimes we have another friend coming in to work. My neighbours ask me, "Do you have a job going?". There are actually other employers wanting to get me additional jobs, saying, "Sister, these women talk very highly of you. When we give you a job, you deliver". But, hey, you can't work with just anyone.

Once a man called in to give us a job. There's been a drop in my boss' business. He apparently called him and said, "I am looking for a person to do the work". My boss then said, "We don't have anything going now. The lady who does the work with us is available. You can take her if you want". He said, "OK". I asked him, "When do you pay?". He said, "Friday. Every Friday". He brought the work in. Three sacks, big sacks of fifty kilos, filled with pendants, 150-160 thousand pieces. I divided it among 20 people and they finished it in 3 days. We delivered them. After that, I called the man. He stalled me for 2 months, saying, "Sister, okay, I'll get you your money". I realised that he was lying. So, what was I to do then? The women who worked on it worked for me, not him. They did it out of their trust in me. Then, our boss gave us a job. I worked on it by myself, day and night. I don't remember ever having such a hard time with it. I did it, because I think it amounted to 1.000 lira. At that time, we were working for 9 liras.

I then made a list. Whoever was in a difficult situation, I put them on the priority list. I paid off one of them every week. "No," they said, "you should give us the money when you get it". But my heart was ill at ease.

I can't say to my neighbours, "No, I can't pay you today. Come back tomorrow". For example, I am currently working with them. We work for three men and sometimes, even if one man does not pay us after we've finished a job, I immediately pay the women with whatever payment I've got from another job. This way, nobody takes away from anyone else's share. Because my father used to say, "You'll pay the workers before their sweat dries, my dear. If you work with a scale, you will always tilt the scale a little towards the side of the workers". So, the weight will be the other side of the scales. Only then, you've earned your way, you've won. If your heart is at ease, it means you've already won. It's not always about money. If it weren't for the bad, the good wouldn't mean anything, I think. For example, if I didn't experience anything bad, I wouldn't know the meaning of good things. I used to think it would all be good. I now believe that it's a beautiful sight to see the bitter together with the sweet. I mean, if we didn't know how bitter tasted, we wouldn't be able to taste the sweet. I hope we will also hand down good morals to our children and we teach them what being human is all about, how bad cruelty is, and what evil is.

Now we have some problems in the neighbourhood. I went to the village when my father passed away. When I came back, I thought I should clean the windows. I looked down and saw 50 people in the street. Turns out, they were selling this thing to each other. Oh, I can't even explain... I didn't see it in their hands, but it was that thing. In other words, those men coming here weren't good people, nor were they the people of this neighbourhood. After that, we called the police. The police came in, looked around for 5 minutes, and left. Neither did the police see them, nor did they see the police. I don't know if they took them away. The whole neighbourhood is complaining, but the police do nothing. I am having a hard time with this. I now started to say to my children, "If you hear a noise, don't look out the window". We're stuck in our home right now. I mean, I tell them, "Do not look out the window even if you hear a noise". Our friends apparently have approached the mukhtar about it. The mukhtar is not here, either. The mukhtar says, "I report it too, but nobody shows an interest". I don't know what we should do. How long can you keep the kids inside? We are always inside, but my older boy is on an internship or he has to go out. I pray for his safe return until he comes back. But when something like this happens right in front of our eyes, it terrifies you. Where should we go? What should we do? I myself called the police three times. The whole neighbourhood talks about it and I called them so many times. But they never came in.

Actually, I have a dream. There are a lot of people in our neighbourhood. There are so many people who really need help. We are able to work a little, thank God. For example, I earned 11 lira today. But some can't even earn that 11 lira, either. I wish there were more jobs; then, people would work. I would love to help. But when I increased my workload – which I tried twice – my children ended up suffering at home. In that equation, children came on top. Because I have to take care of them too, I have to see to their needs. What can we actually take away from this world? Nothing. What I leave will be good morals and a good thing. After I go, I would like people to say, "God bless her! She did these good deeds". I mean, I would like to touch a person's life...

RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 6.1)

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure, in particular:

(a) Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with:

(i) Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work;

(ii) A decent living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant.”

(United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 7)

“If men and women were equally represented in sectors impacted by COVID-19, 112 million fewer women would be at risk of losing their jobs or income right now.”

(OXFAM, Information Note: The Virus of Inequality, 2021)

“During the COVID-19 epidemic, almost one out of two women lost their job and the number of unemployed women increased 5 times in a year. During this period, female employment decreased by 9%, while broad female unemployment rate rose to 45.3%.”

(DĪSK-AR, Report on the Outlook of Women’s Labour Force in COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020)

“According to the field findings of Deep Poverty Network, women are not working in at least 66% of the households interviewed. 55% of unemployed adults say they are unable to work because of their childcare responsibilities.”

(Deep Poverty Network, Deep Poverty and Access to Rights in Times of Pandemic Research Study)



An abstract painting with vibrant colors and a circular text overlay. The painting features bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of red, yellow, blue, and purple. A large, light-colored circle with a dark orange border is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing the text. The background is a dark, textured blue.

BEING A STRONG WOMAN
IS NOT A GOOD THING;
IT'S BEST TO BE
ORDINARY

BEING A STRONG WOMAN IS NOT A GOOD THING; IT'S BEST TO BE ORDINARY

OWNER OF THE STORY: DOESN'T WANT TO SHARE HIS NAME
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND STORIFIED BY: GÜLİZ KALENDER

I am 47 years old. My daughter is 15 years old. She has autism. I am alone in my struggle with everything in life. I also worked during my university years, so I am used to the struggle of life. You know, they define us as “strong women”; some people call me that too. You are a “strong woman” because you work extremely hard to get your due. Being a strong woman is not a good thing; it’s best to be ordinary. Why should she take on all that burden and responsibility? I take this responsibility because I promised Güneş, “I will do good by you as a mother”. She doesn’t have anybody but me.

I come from a family of six children. I qualified for the science track in a high school outside of Istanbul, but they did not allow me to go. In my second year, I qualified for an evening business programme at Istanbul University. Thinking that I would need somebody to pick me up after my evening classes, this time they said, “Go out of Istanbul, to this province to study. We have a relative there”. I went to school there, got the Prime Ministry scholarship, and worked in the summers. But don’t get me wrong - I got my education with the support of my mother. My professors asked me to stay at the university as a research assistant, but my family did not let me, saying, “What are you going to do there? Come back to Istanbul. You can get a different job here”.

So, I worked in the press for a while. I also have a background in banking. Most recently, I was working at the projects department of a private company. Then, Güneş was born. I was alone. Güneş’s father had already abandoned us completely. He lived a bohemian life, sold off whatever he had, and his health deteriorated. He passed away during the pandemic. Actually, he had a good education; he was an engineer himself. After his father left, I could not go back to work and I had a lot of financial difficulties. You try to get some support from your family, but you can’t. I had some savings, but I spent them all. I’m living in a rental property. Even people from my family told me that they would not introduce Güneş to their new families and that I should not come to their wedding.

If Güneş felt that she was accepted in the family and the society, she could make positive progress. If there were a little support, I could go back to work and put some time in for my retirement. I am not even in a position to leave Güneş with someone and go to the doctor for an hour. It is very difficult to explain this to people. I don’t see my old friends. As I’m used to paying my own way, I find it difficult to tell people how I’ve lost a part of my income. And if I do, they come up with suggestions without exception, saying, “Oh! If only you did this and that!”.

I told you, I was alone. With the guidance of a lawyer, I found out that Güneş needed a report to qualify for special education. The process of getting that report was very difficult, or rather a long one. I was able to get the appointment only after nine months. The system works like this; you make an appointment with a child psychiatrist at one of the public hospitals; then come some tests, MRI, hearing-related tests, and then the board... They put the report in front of me, without giving any information. It said, "80% severely disabled, needs help for life". I am completely alone with that report in front of me. Nobody came in to talk to me and to say, "This report is just a document. You should actually prepare yourself for this and that". I just looked at the report for two days, crying. Then, I said OK and moved on to acceptance so that I could come up with a solution. I accepted it; it's just Güneş and me now. There's nothing else we can do. I am a hardworking person; I love to work and I will try to keep this child's bond with life as tight as possible.

After receiving the disability report, the system tells you to go to the Guidance and Research Centre in your district. Contact the RAM so that she can attend the special education, which consists of only 8 40-minute sessions per month. Then, if there is a Ministry of National Education school suitable for the child, go and enrol her there. When I approached National Education, I thought they would have specific schools for her and she would work with a special education teacher, but that's not the case. Nobody gives me any information. I had to find out everything through meticulous research. Güneş is having tantrums on one hand, but I can see that she is in dire need of education. By the way, after the report, the Ministry of Family is supposed to provide regular carer benefits. However, there is a crack in the system; even if you meet the criteria, you're not entitled to it if you have a house. This now prevents the child of a retired teacher from getting carer benefits. This is grossly unfair.

There are people waiting for classes to be opened for children with autism in National Education schools for 3-4 years. The children either wait at home or go into rehabilitation. There are many rehabilitation centres that do not meet the required qualifications. However, all of the places that provide quality and proper education do it at rather high prices. After I received the report, I called a foundation that provides special education to children with autism and said, "My child is in this situation. This is my financial situation. I meet your criteria for the scholarship. Can I have an appointment for an interview? I want to apply for a scholarship". Then, they asked for money for an expert to evaluate my child's situation. It was 2013. I didn't go to the meeting. I couldn't go. My priorities were to pay the rent regularly, and then provide food and pay the bills. If I have some money left, I buy Güneş something that will make her happy, but that's it! As my budget is limited, I always go from store to store before I buy anything.

In short, we could not go for this foundation and we started her education in a rehabilitation centre. It was a place that was supposed to be good, it was suggested by the RAM. I thought that specially trained teachers were employed in these rehabilitation centres and special education classes in public schools. But it wasn't the case there; these teachers were in the minority.

I was watching my child, observing her. As I knew her, I would say, "She needs this or that". "Teacher, can we work on her voice?" "No, she won't do it". In fact, she did use her voice and the teacher would notice it if she were only to follow her a bit. You have a struggle waiting for you everywhere you go. You struggle with people, with teachers, with school administrations... Then, you agree with them half-heartedly. Don't get me wrong, but I try to convince people as if my child's life needed marketing. I've always tried to convince whomever I had to just so that she could get the education to meet her needs.

If these children don't receive speech training until a certain age, they cannot speak. I found this out over time. By that time she had already grown old. Güneş was 8-9 years old. I was very upset; I need to get speech training for my child, but the state report does not cover speech training. You have to find your own means to cover it. I went everywhere from the District Municipality to the District Headquarters of various political parties, to National Education and to Social Assistance. There was also a speech centre in Cerrahpaşa, and I went there with a letter from the RAM. I was doing all of these in a hurry, while Güneş was in class.

One day I went to the District Directorate of the Ministry of Family and said, "This child needs speech training and I am not in a position to take private lessons". There, a social worker said to me, "Why are you trying this hard anyway, Lady? Let her sit in a corner and paint. Does she have to talk?" I came home. I was fasting that day. I hadn't eaten for two days. I got stuck there. I was looking for a solution and I was struggling for it. I didn't want anyone to do anything illegal, either. Just give me what I'm entitled to and make it a bit easier while you're at it!

If she could get speech training, she would be able to finish high school – she should be given that chance. The system should make sure that she does. You need luck, you need the right environment, you need the right people... We're still trying hard with my friend to get a speech lesson. We've been friends since elementary school. Her being there lifts my spirits. I understand what Güneş says, but others don't. Yet, she can improve with a speech therapist.

We were still continuing our education in the rehabilitation centre I mentioned. One day they said, "You should hire a babysitter and get back to work so you can learn have more classes here. Get this many more lessons from the rehabilitation centre so that your child can improve". The system is so wicked... There is a pie on autism; while everyone is getting their share, people are looking for hope. I have friends who took out loans. There were people who sold their cars. I was heartbroken. On the Autism Day, a doctor lady came out in İzmir and said, "I use blue light on autistic children and they get better". I was gnawing myself here, thinking "I can't provide enough opportunities for this child. I don't have anything. There's a treatment for it, but she'll stay like this her entire life because of me"... As families are seeking a ray of hope, they want to believe every claim. I used to be like them. I am now aware that certain things affect their development positively and certain things negatively; I am aware of how she needs balanced nutrition, doing sports, leading a normal life with their peers, if possible, without being locked up at home and, in addition to these, special education and speech training are very valuable for these children. It's a teamwork, a chain; all must be fulfilled. This is how it is.

I approach the teachers in the rehabilitation centre with my questions. Some of the teachers play computer games in the classroom - they don't care, they pass it off... I don't have an alternative, but I see that this place is also rather inadequate. Anyway, the foundation where I went to apply for the scholarship before reached me through an acquaintance. This acquaintance was going to sponsor us. I was as happy as I would be if I'd won the national lottery, because the education given by that foundation came with a very high price tag every year. But his education was very systematic; one-and-a-half hour training for each child, three days a week. They included me in the class once a week and they trained me as if I were a teacher for my child. Sometimes, there would be seminars and I attended them all. It had a very nice library, where you could get free books and return them later. It was such an opportunity. Our scholarship lasted for 2.5 years. At the end of three terms, they told us to find a new

sponsor from the institution. If you want to continue to benefit from the special training they provide afterwards, you need to find new sponsors to join this pool. We could not find a sponsor and our entitlement to education there ended. When Güneş left there, she was very sad. Every time she passed by the building, she stopped me and told me that she wanted to go to training there, even though the education there means hard work both for the child and for the parents. The system does not allow you to waste any time. The education there did a world of good for me; I saw how my child was improving. She was happier. They were giving us her development reports.

We realized that Güneş has a special talent for painting. At the Children and Youth Art Biennial, the curator said, "Bring me her portfolio". They showed it to the painters, who said, "This child was a special talent in painting". She was 10 years old. I researched the conditions in Turkey to see if she could go to a fine arts school. There are two state-affiliated fine arts high schools on the European side and two on the Anatolian side, and they accept two students each year as disabled individuals; only two people from the disabled groups. We went in with Güneş bringing her portfolio with us. We met the board and they said, "All candidates are required to draw in charcoal for this exam. All candidates take the same exam. One child should have at least 2-3 years of charcoal drawing classes before they can take the exam". We couldn't take the exam.

We went to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Centre for People with Disabilities. They do not accept students under the age of 18. I took Güneş there when she was 10 years old, I reached the general director and I made him see my point on the phone. In the end, they accepted us. At that time, Güneş was the only child who broke the 18-year-old rule and so, the rule changed after her. I went in and tried in earnest for several months. They accepted us for evaluation. At that time there was a painter working there as a teacher. When they left, Güneş didn't want to work with their replacement at the school.

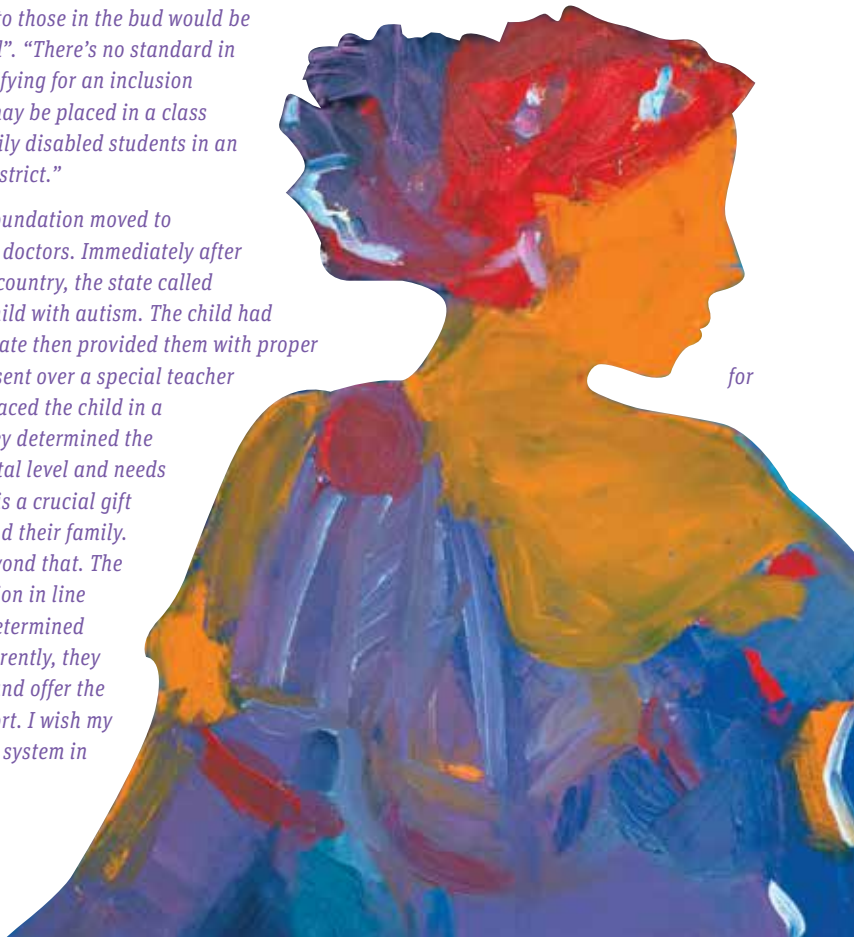
Incidentally, you meet with many institutions while trying to make something happen. People in the Municipality and at the parties take pictures with these children and they make promises, "We will do this and that"... Then, people believe that there will be a solution. No such thing; they don't follow through. In the foundation where we received special education, they said, "We want permission to use your child's photo and name," and I did not give that permission because I, my child or other disabled individuals cannot be a capital for anyone else. I don't want anything to be done by exploiting the images and videos of these individuals, these children; this is exploitation. I am a person who struggles alone with my child and does not like agitation at all. After all, serious funds are being raised for these children. Once, with a friend of mine, we printed the pictures drawn by Güneş on cloth bags and sold them in a cafe for income. Even then, how many times did I go over it on my own account to see if I had unintentionally exploited Güneş and abused her situation? The money we raised there was already for her speech therapy and special nutrition, but even there, I puzzled over whether I could be guilty of something like this against my child.

Finally, I was able to find a place for my child in the autism class of a school. It was a school in the centre; there was no shuttle and the school had gaps in their materials. We tried to better the inside of the school together with other parents and made the classroom more suitable for students with autism. Later, I found out that the school administration had declared that there was no need for a shuttle service... At that time, I wasn't aware of our entitlements. I wish I had been able to insist on an inclusion class.

I would always wonder why such a central school would find it difficult to recruit special education teachers and would instead employ retired teachers. As it turned out, the school didn't announce its open positions to allow teachers qualifying for special education to register their interest, as it should. Once I'd found out about this, I approached National Education and contacted other parents, too, urging them "to issue a petition for the school to announce its open positions to meet the students' need for special education". We penned our petitions quite well, but we ended up flagged for having submitted them. We were doing something to get what we're entitled to, but we were painstakingly careful so as not to put in the petition anything that would cause trouble for anyone... After I don't know how many petitions, the school managed to announce its open positions, which were immediately filled by special education teachers. Apparently, the school hadn't announced any open position for years. One of those teachers was quite the idealist, working hard for every one of their students.

There is immense value in handing over our experience to those that are about to start their journey so that they can shape their family lives and the lives of their children properly. People now try to get together in WhatsApp groups. My advice to those in the bud would be "Stand your ground". "There's no standard in place. A child qualifying for an inclusion class in a district may be placed in a class dominated by heavily disabled students in an entirely different district."

A family from the foundation moved to England; they were doctors. Immediately after their arrival in the country, the state called them about their child with autism. The child had mild autism. The state then provided them with proper financial support; sent over a special teacher home visits; and placed the child in a specific school. They determined the actual developmental level and needs of the child, which is a crucial gift to both the child and their family. There's nothing beyond that. The child needs education in line with what's been determined for them. And apparently, they do that over there and offer the family social support. I wish my country had such a system in place.



for

Güneş's father was quite warm in his approach to her in his last years. They were late to start getting to know each other, but were communicating quite well in the end. He'd used to call her once a year for years, but when she met the father again, Güneş enjoyed a very positive course of progress. She started to speak. She would talk to him on the phone, albeit in syllables. It turned out that Güneş knew how to read, and knew her way around maths... She'd come to me 4-5 times a day, saying, "Call dad, dad call". The child wasn't keen on greens and vegetables before, but then started to like them. For her father, she'd say, "I hope he likes me, loves me more". It is difficult for Güneş to accept the death of her father; she still remembers him every day.

We used to be very active, but we can't go out a lot any more for both the pandemic and her current state of puberty. I say to myself, this is how puberty is and this too shall pass. I have always tried to allow my daughter to make her own choices; I accepted that she is an individual. I also tell her; you have your own decisions to make. She goes to the supermarket, goes to the mosque, goes to Eminönü, to the free visiting days of Istanbul Modern, and to the Gülhane park... I can't take Güneş on vacation, but she also wants to go on vacation. She is now aware of certain things as a young woman. She likes to be well-groomed.

Güneş wants other people to see his paintings; for a while, when we were outside, we would hold his paintings in our hands so that people could see them... I dream of an art exhibition for her... I dream of arts education and speech training for Güneş and of writing a project for autistic children and seeing it through for myself; I want to make Güneş's dreams come true. I want a proper house, separate rooms for my daughter and me, a drawing room, a bookcase, a drawing table, and a chair. I would love to be able to work again, go to work or start a business, and then go on vacation...



RELEVANT DATA, NEWS, AND LEGISLATION

“Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.”

(United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23)

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.”

(United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24)

“In Turkey, a “Draft National Action Plan on Autism Spectrum Disorder” was prepared with the aim of meeting the needs of autistic individuals and their families; to improve the quality of life of autistic individuals and their families; to support families of autistic individuals; and to ensure that they are provided with systematic and high-quality care services. This draft was revised in line with the opinions gathered from the relevant stakeholders and the National Action Plan on Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016-2019) was published on the Official Gazette dated 3rd December 2016 and No. 29907 pursuant to the Decision dated 13/04/2016 and No. 2016/8.”

(Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2016b)

According to Attorney Sedef Erken, the society in Turkey is still generally unaware even of what autism is. There is neither any planning nor a supportive system in place for autistic children. This situation leaves them alone in their struggle with the problems they constantly encounter in all areas of life. “We are somewhere in the education system, but we don’t actually exist. Various ministries are mandated to be in charge of these matters, but the ‘Autism Action Plan’ has not been enforced in any way despite our efforts in nine years. Most families of autistic individuals were living in pandemic conditions even before the pandemic. It wouldn’t be wrong for me to say, ‘There’s no area in life where we’re free of problems’”.

(DW, February 2021)

Secretary General for Istanbul Autism Volunteers’ Association, Ms Başar, addressed the discussions held at the Plenary Session on the report issued by the Assembly Research Commission on Down Syndrome and Autism and said, “This is good news. We expect a chain of positive developments from now on”.

(Bianet, Ayşegül Özbek, Şubat 2021)

“With respect to language and speech therapy, graduates of the relevant programmes experience a significant problem in their employment in non-public institutions, i.e. in private centres. This tendency makes it impossible for individuals without the necessary financial means to access the services they need. Therapists graduating from departments of language and speech therapy should be provided with better opportunities to find employment at schools and training and research centres and to reach their potential clients.”

(Avcioğlu, 2012)

PART TWO



An impressionistic painting of a village scene. The foreground shows a brown, textured structure, possibly a roof or a wall. The middle ground features several buildings with light-colored walls and dark, rectangular openings. The background is dominated by large, textured green shapes representing hills or mountains. A large, thick orange circle is overlaid on the top half of the image, framing the text.

SCHOOLING,
NOW!

S C H O O L I N G , N O W !

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT, HACER FOGGO

It is the year 2006. Demolition is on-going in Romani neighbourhoods in Sulukule, Küçükbakkalköy, Kağıthane, and Yahya Kemal. I am shuttling back and forth between the municipalities and these neighbourhoods.

In Küçükbakkalköy, after the demolition, the Roma live in barracks and sheds on the rubble. That is where I get to know Halil and Gamze, whom we now support as Deep Poverty Network, and some of the other families whose members we have supported since childhood. There is one anecdote I never forget. It is the 2006-2007 school year. I am in the neighbourhood. I am approached by Gamze's father; Gamze is 7 years old at the time. He says, Gamze has been crying for days because she wants to go to school. Apparently, they've approached the mukhtar, and the mukhtar said: "I can't give you a certificate of residence, as your house has been demolished". Her father tells me that when their house was demolished, Gamze spent hours in the wreckage looking for her school uniform and bag. Both her father and her mother are paper collectors. There are dozens of children like Gamze in the neighbourhood. We go around the barracks with Gamze's father and identify a total of 45 children who are of school age, but are not in school. I write down their names along with their age in my notebook. Then, we all go to the mukhtar's office, and the mukhtar says, "We can't issue them certificates of residence, because their houses have been destroyed". However, legally, every child has to be enrolled in school and they can continue their education with a provisional certificate. Although I insist, "How can this be? These children want to go to school. You're obliged by law to give them their certificates!", the mukhtar merely says, "These are the rules," and makes a clean break. That leaves no doubt in my mind that this prejudiced view would never allow the mukhtar to help with children's schooling. We lay our heads together to figure out what to do. We decide to hold a press conference with Gamze's father and the locals in the neighbourhood on 20th September 2006. When I get back home, I have a hope in my heart for the press to write about this problem and for the children to start school finally. At home, I type the list of children who haven't been able to start school for the press and inform the press of our upcoming press conference.

19th September 2006

PRESS RELEASE:**SCHOOLS WON'T ACCEPT ROMA CHILDREN!**

The 2006-2007 academic year has begun. 14 million students in primary and secondary schools had their first lessons on 18th September. Yet, schooling seems impossible for Roma children in Küçükbakkalköy and Kağıthane, who either witnessed the demolition of their houses or waiting for the second wave of demolition. School-age children of Roma families from Küçükbakkalköy, who were left without their houses after the demolition on 19th July and are now living in the rubble of their houses, are not given certificates of residence on the grounds that “their houses were demolished” on the orders of the District Governorate. They can't go back to school without this certificate. We, as the Roma of Küçükbakkalköy, will hold a press conference to express their wishes, requests, and demands on this issue.

Roma People of Küçükbakkalköy**Date:** 20th September 2006**Time:** 12.00**Place:** Küçükbakkalköy Tevfik Fikret Caddesi Merdivenköy Yolu

Romani Neighbourhood across Istanbul Governorate Special Provincial Administration

“SCHOOLING, NOW!”

I'm in the neighbourhood. It's raining. All the children are ready in the midst of the gathered debris, waiting for the journalists. We joke around a little with the kids. “Are we going to go back to school?” they say. “Of course,” I say, “Now, when the journalists write about you, the mukhtar won't know what hit him and he will immediately give you your certificates of residence!”

All of them have stars in their eyes. Moms and dads are coming in. We are waiting for the press in the middle of the wreckage. Journalists start to arrive; we see more than ten journalists gathering around. We are happy.

Meanwhile, two people from Mazlum-Der come in for support. The children surround the journalists and shout in unison, “We want to go to school!”. I read the press release:

“The 2006-2007 academic year has begun. 14 million students in primary and secondary schools had their first lessons on 18th September. Yet, schooling seems impossible for Roma children in Küçükbakkalköy and Kağıthane, who either witnessed the demolition of their houses or waiting for the second wave of demolition. School-age children of Roma families from Küçükbakkalköy, who were left without their houses after the demolition on 19th July and are now living in the rubble of their houses, are not given certificates of residence on the grounds that “their houses were demolished” on the orders (!) of the District Governorate and therefore, they can't be enrolled back in school. While some of the Roma families can't send their children to school due to their current life in rubble and their lack

of financial means, the ones that go through hell and high water to send their children to school are faced met with an obstacle justified with their demolished house and their resulting lack of official residence. Children of school age have been living in makeshift settlements without water, electricity, and toilets since 19th July. They play here. They sleep here. Their families are too poor to buy them school uniforms. Every morning greets them with a fear of being removed again, this time from the wreckage of their houses. They don't have a school to go to, nor do they have a house to live in.

If we deprive Roma children of school age of opportunities for education, how can we share the same future with them?"



Once I have read the press release, I give the press both the text of the press release and the list of children who haven't been able to go back to school. I check the press outlets the next day. The news of the press conference doesn't appear in any of them except for Birgün Newspaper and Bianet Website.



I have no idea why I was so hopeful that the news would be covered in the press and on TV channels and the children would finally go back to school. Then, we visit Kadıköy District Directorate of National Education on 25th September and as a result of our talks, some of the children are able to enrol in respective schools. Yet the others go back to collecting wastepaper on the streets.

Now, add 15 years to the ages of these children. All of them are grown up. They've got married. There are some with children, some living in sheds under gruelling conditions, and some in prison. If it were not for the demolition of their houses, they would have continued with their education and today, they would surely have somewhat better lives than that promised by their current state of poverty. A lot of these children found me as adults during the pandemic – Halil, Gamze, and Zümrit to name a few. Zümrit told her story for this book. Gamze has two children, Halil a baby. Halil was 7 when I met him. His father was collecting wastepaper on the streets. Halil is also getting by on collecting wastepaper now. This is what extreme poverty handed down from generation to generation looks like.

I am now striving for one thing only. My only wish is for Halil, Gamze, and Zümrit not to see their children feeling the need to call me or anybody else when they grow up.

DAILY HUMAN RIGHTS STORIES

In this section, some stories are the verbatim accounts of their owners, and others relayed by the social workers who interviewed the narrators

SEPTEMBER 3, 2021

"I heard schoolbags were 49 TRY a piece at the supermarket. I went there before 9 in the morning and there was already a queue in front. Apparently, people had formed a queue much earlier. I was finally able to go in, but the cashier said they were out. I don't know what we'll do."

JUNE 25, 2021

"Do you know when scorpions breed? I do. Did you notice how everything in my home is high off the ground? They're up high, because when scorpions breed, I need to hunt them down just so they don't harm my child. My daughter and I can't sleep for fear of scorpions. My biggest dream is for me and my daughter to have a good night's sleep, free of worry."

JUNE 14, 2021

"I eloped and got married at the age of 15. I have a 2-year-old daughter and I'm still not officially married. As my marriage is not official, I can't get support from municipalities. I'm too scared to go to the District Governorate, as they may take my husband away. We don't have enough money to buy diapers and formula for my child."

JUNE 10, 2021

An elementary student, now in second grade, started his school life in distance education. This year, he was going physically enter a classroom and a school for the first time owing to the schools resuming face-to-face education. However, he is shying away from going to school as he doesn't have shoes, a bag, food for lunch, or school materials. He says he feels bad about this. We know that a school is a place of academic learning, but more importantly, they represent a safe space for children to be together with their peers, make friends, build social relationships, and take their first steps towards independence. No child should be kept away from this space merely due to their lack of access to basic needs.

MAY 24, 2021

A textile worker was laid off during the pandemic and started to work as a motorcycle courier to pay off his rent arrears and growing debts. An accident he had while trying to deliver an order on time has now left him unable to work for 2 months.

MAY 14, 2021

A mother of two cats and two dogs, who lived on belly dancing before the pandemic, but hasn't been able to pay her rent and electricity and natural gas bills since the pandemic: *"I had a string of bad luck after I lost my mother. Once the pandemic started, I was left without work. For months, I haven't had anything to eat other than the few bites my friends have brought to me. I don't care about myself, but my babies go hungry. I ended up in court for my unpaid natural gas and electricity bills. If I had the means to pay them, why wouldn't? But I don't. Believe you me, I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for my babies, but two of them are ill. Who would take care of them if I weren't here? I need to carry on for their sake."*

MAY 3, 2021

A street artist in Caddebostan. He lives together with another family in one house as he couldn't pay his rent. As he earns a living for his family through day labour, he is at a loss as to what to do during the upcoming lockdown of 17 days. The only thing he doesn't want to do is to sell his instrument.

APRIL 14, 2021

An account from field visits:

"My husband left us. Since he left, we've been collecting whatever we can find in the bins to eat. We also have a municipality aid card for 200 lira. You visiting us was the first time in a whole year our doorbell rang after the visit of the IBB teams, the first time we had visitors at home. Somebody actually asked us how we were for the first time in years."

MARCH 12, 2021

A ney performer's account: *"I've been playing the ney to earn my keep since I was 15. I haven't performed on a stage since last year. I no longer have natural gas at home. I had taken out a loan for my rent arrears, and I'm supposed to start paying it back. I still can't work. I only received one thousand lira in social aid once. I can't see a way out."*

DECEMBER 18, 2020

A young family in Beyoğlu; the father has been working as a dishwasher in a restaurant but he has been laid off. Now, he collects wastepaper. They are in growing rent arrears. The oldest child, who is 8 years old, has started to sell tissues.

DECEMBER 16, 2020

A woman living in Ağva; her husband has cancer and had a heart attack recently. Their electricity and water services have been cut off and their fines are growing.

DECEMBER 9, 2020

A couple, both with COPD, reached us. Their electricity was cut off because they could not pay their electricity bills. They were using their neighbour's line of electricity for their nebulisers. Now their neighbour is COVID-19+ and their power is off. They say, "*We want to breathe*".

DECEMBER 7, 2020

A single mother taking care of her four children cannot benefit from social support as she is not officially divorced. She used to work as a housekeeper, but her work stopped during the pandemic. She started making beadwork jewellery and selling them on the street. She has 5 months' rent arrears. She is at risk for homelessness.

NOVEMBER 24, 2020

Her baby was hospitalised for laboured breathing. She called us for the diapers that the hospital requested from her, and then we found out that their natural gas had also been cut off. Now she doesn't want to take her baby from the hospital because the house is cold.

NOVEMBER 20, 2020

A father in Çekmeköy, collecting wastepaper in the streets to get by: "*My new-born baby was going to be taken into intensive care because of jaundice; we were referred to another hospital from the state hospital, which had no space left in intensive care. Intensive care costs 600 lira a night. If we cannot pay the fee, my child will be discharged early.*"

OCTOBER 19, 2020

"*I have no stove; I couldn't find a stove. Today I visited all scrap dealers around me. 'If you find a stove,' I said, 'reserve it for me.'*" It is getting colder and these households ask the same question every night: "*Should we get a stove or some food or pay the rent?*"

OCTOBER 17, 2020

A family was thrown out on the street by their landlord because they could not pay rent. We stood by them as Deep Poverty Network; all they were looking for was 1 bedroom and 1 kitchen under one roof. Now, everyone refuses to take them on as tenants. October 17 is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

OCTOBER 9, 2020

A father from Çekmeköy: *"I couldn't pay my rent. The house I lived in was full of mice and bugs. It was almost in ruins. Now, they threw me in the street. With the kids, we spent the night in the cart that we use to collect wastepaper. I'm thinking of covering the top of the cart to make a house out of it."*

OCTOBER 6, 2020

Close your eyes and imagine a mother. She has a bedridden teenager at home. She takes care of him. She keeps her home afloat through day labour. The destitute has deepened with the pandemic. An arrest warrant has been issued against her due to her unpaid electricity bill.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

"Last week, I had a heart attack; I was discharged yesterday. I do have a green card, but the pharmacy refuses to give me my medication because of my social security debt. I don't mind the social security debt, but I need the medication"

SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

"They cut off my electricity, but we didn't send the bill to you; we didn't want to be more of a burden. This morning, my baby woke me up with its screams – there was a rat right next to it."

SEPTEMBER 12, 2020

"My daughter went away with relatives for a hazelnut harvest. I told her not to, but she went anyway. She said, 'I will work for a week, buy a smart phone, and realise my dream'. Her dream is to attend her live online classes for school."

AUGUST 31, 2020

"Our house is under quarantine. My mother, my children and I have COVID-19. We don't have food and they say, 'Don't go out.' So, we don't go out. Then, they say, 'Strengthen your immune system'. How are we supposed to do that? Should we die of COVID-19 or of hunger?"

AUGUST 25, 2020

“You just can’t fit yourself in anywhere. You string out your clothes and then, collect them when dry. Your hole-in-the-wall feels too tight. You get cast out again; all you are looking for is a roof.” The pandemic is not over. Another family has become homeless today.

AUGUST 21, 2020

Two stories:

“My daughter drinks milk all the time. The milk you brought in has run out. I ran a tab with the local shop so that I wouldn’t ask you for it. I am too embarrassed to ask, but when can you send some in?”

“We have been well since your support started to come in. At least, I have some legumes in the kitchen. I say, ‘I can cook some beans’.”

The right of every child to sufficient food is guaranteed by both the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which we are a party to. So, why can’t these children even access milk?

AUGUST 19, 2020

Two stories:

“I am 57. I used to work in textiles before COVID-19. They have laid me off. Now, I started to work again, this time as a cleaner. I couldn’t pay my rent. The landlord is asking me to move out. My husband is 67 and ill. When I miss the shuttle, I have to ask the bus driver to take me home for free.”

“I don’t sleep at night so that rats the size of cats do not eat at my 3-year-old. I want bricks, sister.” You have this movie playing out right in the middle of Istanbul; don’t let my mother know of my poverty, my sorrow.

AUGUST 14, 2020

A mother: *“I feel embarrassed to say, but I have formula enough only for two, maybe three feeds. I can make do until tomorrow if my baby doesn’t wake up at night.”*

AUGUST 11, 2020

“I haven’t been able to buy a doll for my 9-year-old daughter yet. My 5-year-old son has a toy car. He plays with it all day. My daughter draws dolls in her notebook. We have no food. Nothing. I got 50 TRY from my neighbour and got my children some milk. I wish I didn’t have to bother them for it.”

AUGUST 5, 2020

He attends the IT track in a high school; all he thinks about is technology. His father is a street peddler but cannot work due to his cancer. Somebody has given him a pretty aged computer and a neighbour provided Internet access. He placed the computer on the ground, as he doesn't have a desk. He will actually make it. But why should this child have such a hard time for his education?

JULY 20, 2020

A mother says, *"I've been outside with my 3.5-year-old baby. I left home early just to avoid a visit from my landlord. So, I'm sitting around in a park. I'm selling tissues..."*

JULY 18, 2020

"I haven't been able to sell flowers since the pandemic, but people around me give me tea and buy me breadsticks. When I come here, I have at least something to eat and drink. That's why I open the stall every day. Food is OK, but if I can't pay my bill, they will cut off my water. Could you see to that, my child?"

JULY 15, 2020

Three stories:

1st Location: Nişantepe – *"I collect wastepaper with my baby. We live on 30-40 lira a day."*

2nd Location: Karagümruk – *"I haven't been able to buy my father's heart medicine for two days."*

3rd Location: Ümraniye – *"We would go hungry, if my daughters didn't collect food waste from supermarkets."*

JULY 10, 2020

"My son couldn't pay his rent, so moved into my house with his wife. I can't pay my rent either. Now the landlord gave me a deadline too. I don't have a mother who can take me in with them."

JULY 6, 2020

He has a congenital cataract in his left eye. He is a chimney sweep. He was laid off during the pandemic and started to collect wastepaper. All the paper, dust, and thrash lost him one eye completely. When they ran out of food, he came home with one case of discarded tomatoes he found in front of the supermarket; apparently, they had sliced tomatoes at the weekend.

JULY 3, 2020

A night-time story: *"I sold tissues the whole day but couldn't put together the money for formula. I wouldn't want to bother you again. My baby wouldn't understand the situation, of course."*

JUNE 29, 2020

Poverty deepens for the precariat. *"He gave me time until tomorrow. He asked me to take my stuff out." "He took away my keys, as I could only pay a part of the rent. I am at my neighbour's." "I was thrown in the street with my baby on a rainy day." "The season of the homeless is here."*

JUNE 27, 2020

"I wouldn't call you if I weren't in dire straits. I can't buy milk. I feed my baby with sugary water. I can't look it in the eye anymore." No child should go hungry. This is the starting point of lifelong chronic diseases caused by malnutrition.

JUNE 26, 2020

A 16-year-old boy, who collects wastepaper and attends school online: *"My mother sold the TV at home as she couldn't pay the electricity bill."*

JUNE 23, 2020

"I sharpen knives in the streets for a living. I get 3 TL to sharpen one knife. I bring 30 TL home after a whole day's work. I couldn't work during the virus. I received a notice that my electricity will be cut off. I have nightmares about my electricity being cut off. My son has a mental disorder; he is afraid of the dark."

JUNE 21, 2020

"My mother and father are hearing- and speech-impaired. My father worked with insurance coverage for the first time in his life for two months before the virus. Then, they laid him off. At that time, the state cut off the disability benefits. I dropped out of school in 7th grade. I collect wastepaper for a living."

JUNE 19, 2020

"My baby is 3 years old. It's too thin. Send in size 3 diapers instead of size 5. My son is 8 years old but is like a 6-year-old."

JUNE 16, 2020

“You play your instrument behind a singer on stage for years to keep your children in school. You have no social security. One day, the pandemic knocks your door and you can’t pay your rent. You’re given a deadline to move out... Life hurls your art around. You decide to go back to your hometown. All that is left of you is a qanun solo.”

JUNE 15, 2020

A mother cannot pay her rent and moves into another, cheaper house in the same neighbourhood. She has a bedridden elder, a baby, and a young child at home. The change in her residence means the abrupt end of her social benefits. Social services are following rules, not human rights.

JUNE 14, 2020

“After the virus, one kilo of wastepaper sells at as low as 30-40 kuruş. We collect wastepaper the whole day and end up with 40-50 TRY. It’s not enough even for a bottle of formula. We even buy our diapers at the shop by the piece.”

JUNE 12, 2020

“I lost my food aid card; the one Istanbul Municipality gave me. My younger son went to the shop. We would buy 5 loaves of bread every day. He dropped them on the way back... This morning, I borrowed 10 TRY from my upstairs neighbour just so I can buy bread for my kids.”

JUNE 10, 2020

“My husband and I go to bed early nowadays – we don’t have a TV. While we were moving into this house, we sold off our TV to pay the remaining bills. Now, we have nothing else to sell off. I wish I had a job...”

JUNE 9, 2020

“There’s a bakery nearby. As the curfew ended, they’ve run out of suspended bread, too. Those who would gift bread this way went back to work. I was working as a cleaner at a textile workshop, but they haven’t called me back in. I asked the mukhtar and he said, ‘There’s no bread.’”

JUNE 8, 2020

He was just a child when his father had stomach cancer. He leapt into adulthood as he was promoted from busboy to waiter after dropping out of high school. After the cancer spread into the lungs, he went on working – and he still works – just so that the house is not left without electricity and his siblings without a home.

JUNE 7, 2020

A 74-year-old with COPD: *“My landlord knocks my door every day. I haven’t been able to go out for a paper run since the virus. He will throw us out in the street. I have my grandchildren. I can’t reach anyone.”*

JUNE 6, 2020

“Last night, a snake entered the room where I was breastfeeding my five-month-old baby. In the morning, the neighbours said, ‘The smell of milk must’ve attracted it’.”



“Extreme poverty is
a human rights violation.
Solidarity empowers.”
Etc. One poster and
for support....

