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Brottier House for refugees: "Through many dangers, toils and snares..."

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“Through many dangers, toils and snares...”

The story of Tedros and Tehas — as told to Kitumaini Kuderhwa

My trip to Libya from the Sudan was on the back of a Toyota Hilux pick-up stacked with some 40 men and women. The truck crossed the dunes in the desert with no trace of a road. The burning heat of the sun, the waves of hot air from the wind, and the blinding reflexes of the sand, without one single tree in sight, are terrible memories of that trip.

To escape the border-police, our driver avoided the oases until Kufrah. There we were traded to another driver who asked us for more money before taking us to Eji Dabya. Here someone with a scimitar threatened us to pay a ransom of \$150 – \$200 each, or else we would be taken to the police passport control.

The next leg took us to Benghazi in a Peugeot open in the back. There were eighteen of us, packed together and asked to lie under a covering tarp, tightly secured by ropes so as to look like it was carrying an ordinary load. You can imagine the suffocation, the sweating and the bumping of the car. The same during the last leg of our trip: we were asked to lay flat on the floor of the truck covered with a layer of wooden boards, on top of which a shipment of tomatoes was loaded. After three weeks, at a cost of \$1,000, we reached Tripoli.

Eritreans in Libya

The driver dropped us in an area where it was easy to find Eritreans. Lucky us — they took us in, let us have a shower, drink fresh and clean water, allowed us to sleep in their own beds and helped us through the first weeks until some money came from family members in Europe or America.

Life in Libya is hard: street boys threaten you to give them quarters. If you give it to them they ask for more, if you do not give they threaten you with drawn knives. At night policemen regularly raid the area where refugees live. If you can bribe them in time, they let you go; otherwise you are taken to detention centres. Generally, Eritreans just take in all these abuses because they are defenseless, and cannot count on anyone to stand up for them.

There is no document processing system for asylum protection or refugee status. You cannot work without a regular work permit. The only alternative left is to risk crossing the Mediterranean to Europe, which many of us do, well conscious of the dangers.

Getting across the Mediterranean

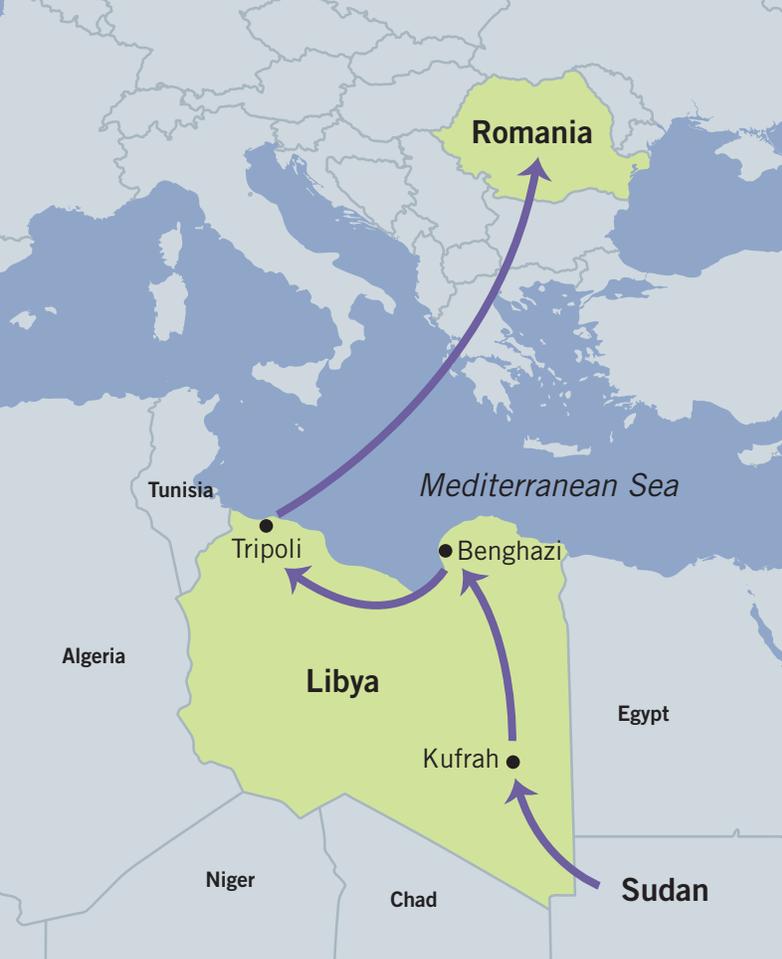
I myself tried three times to cross that sea. The first time the rubber boat was overloaded and I had to step out. Unfortunately,



Great Reasons to support Brottier House

- You opened the gates to Canada for me. I was like a new child and you taught me how to eat, speak and write. You showed me the way and brought joy to my life.
- Your kindness will always be remembered. You have a way of touching the lives of others with your thoughtfulness and kind acts.
- Truly you have made it feel like home. Really, Fr. Alex, Fr. Obinna, Fr. Tony, Neil McNeil Young Spiritans, Margaret Kerr (Principal Wexford Collegiate), Hanna and members of St. Joseph's Outreach Team have been like brothers and sisters to me. For all you have done and have been, I say thank you a hundred times. You are such wonderful people set aside to mend broken hearts, love and encourage people of a different kind.
- The time spent in any shelter is not the best one can have, but the caring, attention and respect that we received at Brottier House made our stay much easier.
- We shall surely come back and visit from time to time because we are never going to forget the people who gave us the first positive push into our new lives.
- Before I came to Brottier House I knew no one. I had no idea where to begin but I am so thankful for the way you looked after me. To me Brottier House is like my family ... Words cannot express my gratitude.

— Kitumaini Kuderhwa



The third time I tried it with my wife. On our way to the appointment we were stopped by the police and taken to prison. I paid a bribe and was allowed to go, but my wife was kept in jail for one full year and three months. She was there with many other men, women and under age children.

To Canada via Romania

Fortunately, while in detention she had an interview with the UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees), was accepted as a refugee and therefore we were moved to Romania. The Canadian government granted us a Visa, the Spiritans sponsored us — and so here we are.

Being a refugee

Many wonder why some people become uprooted. Why are they refugees? What happened to them? Why are they on the run? Why are they homeless?

Conflict and war continue to play a major role in uprooting people and making them refugees. Both cause tragedy and disaster in the lives of millions of people. As they escape, they struggle to cope with the loss of family, friends, possessions and everything familiar to them. In conflict situations the lives of many people change abruptly. For example, a bomb dropped in one community causes destruction and violence. Depending on the severity of the bombing, it costs the lives of many people.

Finally, those who remain behind are forced to leave their communities as war and conflict become unbearable for them. After a long journey to a safer place, refugees find themselves in the tent cities of Refugee Camps waiting in unbearable conditions and uncertain of what the future will hold for them. They are stuck living in the most appalling conditions, in refugee camps, in isolated areas or a desert place where no one else lives except refugees. While they are refugees, they still hope to find ways to get out of their uncertain situation and continue a normal life. Without a country, stateless, no place to call home — life is far from easy for refugees. ■

half an hour after leaving the shore, the boat drowned because of a strong wind and high waves. There were no survivors. In the boat was a whole family: husband with his brother, wife and their daughter, along with a woman and her five-year-old daughter. The ones piloting the boats are people with no experience, just two or three days training and they are ready to go.

The second time, I had already paid the fare. To be protected from the police raid we were taken to an abandoned old store for three weeks. All of a sudden the police, informed of our plan, came in full strength. The few who could run away were saved; those who were caught were taken to prison.



Brottier House

Each year I can't help but reflect on all that has passed. It seems like only yesterday when we opened our doors to welcome our first guests. A lot has happened in the past three years. Over 60 new comers and claimants from a total of 14 different nations have passed through our doors. People from all walks of life have called Brottier House "home". The one thing they all share in common is a fear of persecution in their homeland and a need for safe refuge.

Brottier House is blessed in the sense that all the claimants that passed through the House have been accepted as Conventional Refugees in the process of becoming Resident Citizens in a very short time. Some of those we sponsored have made great improvements in their new home and country. Some work in various offices in Toronto and Montreal; others have gotten jobs in line with their trade.

Within the past three years, Brottier House has welcomed four "grandchildren", one born while the mother was still in Brottier House, the others in their new homes. That makes me a "grandfather".

As I sit in my office feeling the many unshed tears, I also remember the strength and resilience of many newcomers who have passed through our hallways and have successfully settled in Canada.

— Alex Osei CSSp, Director