Heartbreak and Hope: Refugee Stories from the Island of Lesbos

Santa Barbara residents Robin and Robert Jones have lived part of the year on the Greek island of Lesbos for over four decades. Lesbos is a major landing area for desperate refugees from war-torn Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The refugees arrive in rubber rafts, crossing the strait from Turkey under harrowing conditions; many die en route. Robin, an artist and photographer, set up a place where the children can draw pictures based on their experiences—pictures that are powerful, and tell harrowing, and sometimes hopeful, stories. She has put together a photographic exhibit of the refugees, their arrival and living conditions, and the children’s drawings, and has also developed a presentation of her photographs. She and her husband were intimately involved in providing assistance and support; they now want to tell the refugees’ stories. It is a story that needs to be told, and puts a very human face on what otherwise is, for most people, a five minute clip on the news. It also provides an important counterpoint to the “immigrant as terrorist” narrative that dominates the news these days.

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