

Summer 2024



Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group

Working with asylum seekers and refugees



In this Issue

- Refugee Week 2024
- Rwanda update
- Eritrea: The buried and hidden homeland
- Sanctuary of Song
- World Stages Now
- Fundraising dinner 2
- Members' fundraising
- Giving blood
- FA Award
- Book review: *My Fourth Time, We Drowned*
- Recipe: Uzbek Qabuli Pulao
- Achievements and qualifications
- Donations

Refugee Week 2024

Elly Kilroy

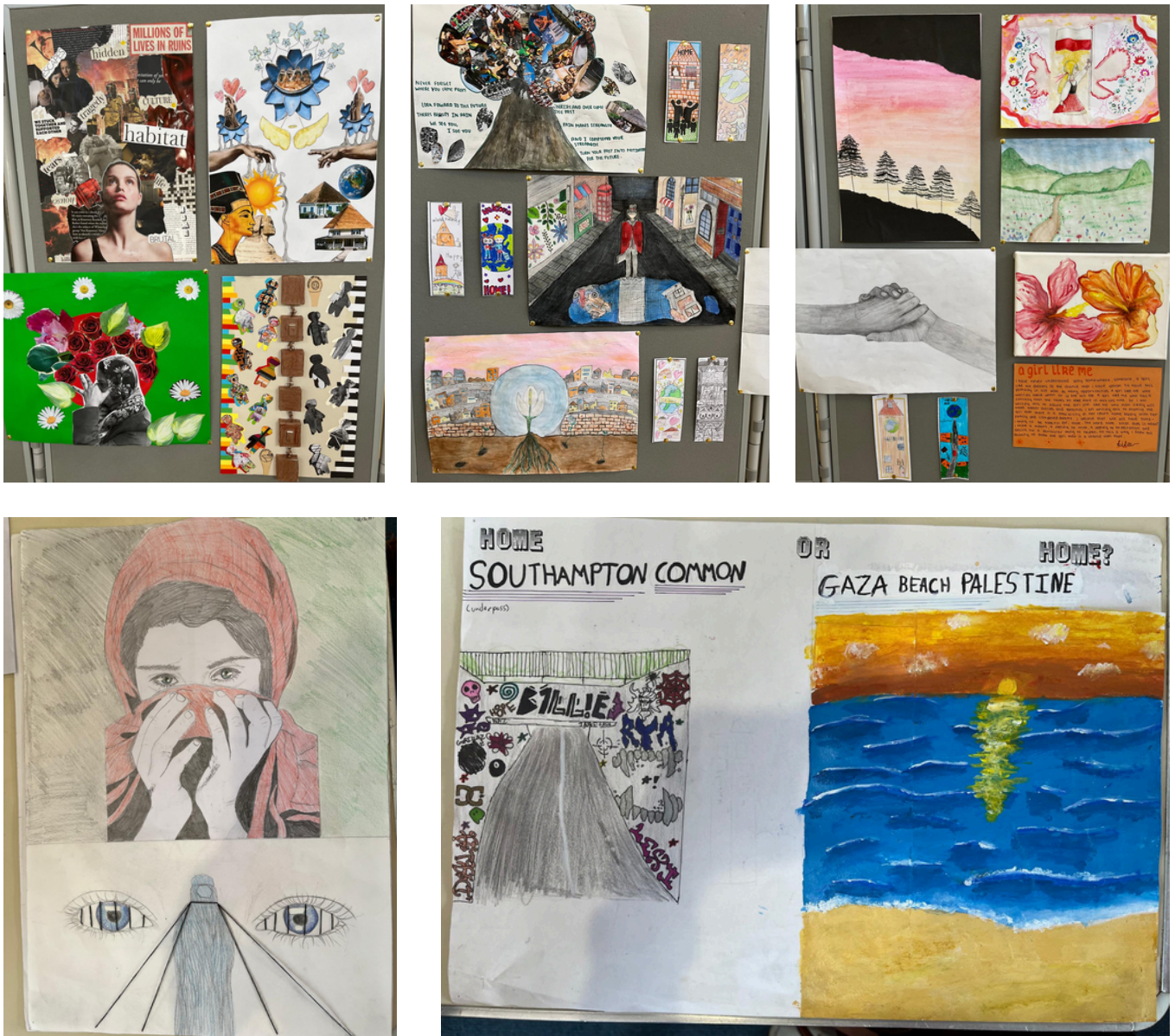
17-23 June

A community celebration of the creativity and resilience of refugees

It was serious, fun, committed and celebratory. It featured the best of humankind alongside the best of kindness and was a lovely reflection of what community can really mean. We all felt that our voices were being heard and celebrated alongside those of the people we work with. As we face ever more vicious rhetoric accompanied by performative cruelty over the asylum and immigration system, the team responded with creativity and community.

SWVG Chair, Mark Courtice

Southampton showcased Refugee Week throughout the week with its exhibition of schoolchildren's beautiful and incredibly moving artwork at the Central Library. The primary school children's bookmarks with messages of hope and welcome will be gifted to refugees.



Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

On 17th June, the packed audience at Southampton Central Library were treated to a unique performance by refugee community theatre group, World Stages Now. The performers used their own experiences to create a short piece of poetic drama in response to this year's

Refugee Week theme. The characters came together for a picnic on stage, to share thoughts on what home means to each of them:

"Our new home whispers tales untold, of resilience, courage and stories bold."



On 19th June, MAST Mayflower Studios hosted an evening of art, film, friendship and solidarity. It was a wonderful opportunity for people of all backgrounds to celebrate the extraordinary creativity and resilience of refugees, as well as their inestimable contributions to Southampton and the UK more widely. Before the night's film screenings, pupils from St Anne's Catholic School showcased their artwork created in response to the Refugee Week 2024 theme, 'Our Home', while Leila, Nasim, Roya and Parisa displayed a stunning collection of 'Treasures from Home' on MAST's mezzanine.

In front of a full house, Southampton-based World Stages Now kicked off the selection of three short films with their feature film 'My Fair Share Too' reflecting on systemic racism

and resistance through the Black Lives Matter movement, followed by an enlightening and lively Q&A with cast members and the director. Then the audience were entranced and moved by the beautifully-shot documentary 'Little Pyongyang', (dir. Roxy Rezvany). With exclusive access to one of the world's largest communities of North Korean defectors, it was a tale of the struggle of one North Korean living in a London suburb to leave behind his homeland, the tension lying in his desire to return to the land that betrayed him. The final film was 'I Carry it With Me Everywhere', (dir. Arwa Aburawa and Turab Shah), a mesmerising and lyrical meditation on multiple experiences of immigrant life in London, shot entirely in black and white, in contrast to the saturated colours of the previous short.

The parade and community picnic on 22nd June marked the culmination of the week's celebrations. We congregated in Above Bar Street around an information and art stall displaying a selection of the artwork by the schoolchildren from Southampton and Winchester who had responded with such imagination to the Refugee Week theme. Many local children got into the spirit by enthusiastically decorating willow and tissue heart-shaped banners to carry in the parade.

After interviews with ITV News Meridian and Unity 101 radio, and music and dance by the enchanting children from the Ukrainian Language Club, the carnival parade set off, led by the Lord Mayor of Southampton, several SWVG members, former councillor Victoria Ugwoeme, and Jayanti Shah MBE. It was a large, celebratory crowd made up of many different communities who marched to Palmerston Park to the sound of Chinese and African drums.

We'll let the photos by SWVG's Igor, mentored on the day by Solent University 3rd year photography student Holli Kalina, speak for themselves.



At the park were a number of displays and stalls, including the popular JoyD Kitchen - freshly made and mouth-watering African cuisine. Thank you also to the wonderful people at Abu Bakr Jamia Mosque who delivered a fresh batch of delicious vegetarian biryani.

A lively atmosphere was created by the inimitable MC Coco P, with Unity 101 Community Radio and Ram Kalyan Kelly who managed the stage, musicians and entertainers, including an Afrobeat singer, a Ukrainian band, Southampton Ukeleke Jam, and Afghan and Chinese music.



Photo by Julian Benjamin



Photo of Igor by Holli Kalina

Schools Stream

Working with young children is so important: they are naturally empathetic and compassionate, and, without any prompting, welcoming towards people seeking sanctuary. As one parent said to me on the day of the parade and picnic, "Our daughter doesn't stop talking about refugees at home!"

A dedicated team went into eight schools: St John's Primary, Newlands Primary, St Peter's Primary, Woodland's Community College, Bitterne Park Primary, Cantell Secondary, St Anne's Secondary, and Bevois Town Primary, to deliver assemblies and classes on Refugee Week and the reasons why people seek sanctuary.

Bitterne Park Primary School told us: "Following a fantastic assembly from Lesley and Elly from SWVG, highlighting the experiences of refugees who seek sanctuary in Southampton, we explored the theme of 'Our Home' and thought about what it means to us, before creating a plan for our artwork. The children demonstrated their teamwork skills to showcase their compassionate natures, and their final pieces were amazing, including a fantastic poem written by two of our older children!"

Thank you finally to our sponsors, Go! Southampton and Southampton City Council, who helped make this week such a success.

Our Refugee Week partners: MAST Mayflower Studios, Southampton City Council, Southampton Stand up to Racism, Medina Mosque, CLEAR, Southampton Action, SCRATCH, World Stages Now, Persian Cultural Centre, Above Bar Church.

Press: ITV News Meridian, BBC Radio Solent, Unity 101 Community Radio, Daily Echo

The Safety of Rwanda Act became law on 25th April 2024. It passed against the judgement of the Supreme Court, which unequivocally decided that Rwanda is not a safe third country. Then on 28th April, the *Guardian* reported that detention of people at risk of being deported would start on Monday 29th April: 'Officials plan to hold refugees who turn up for routine meetings at immigration service offices and will also pick people up nationwide in a major two-week exercise.'

Volunteers from SWVG, Southampton Stand up to Racism, CLEAR, and other local groups immediately mobilised in solidarity with those seeking asylum here, to ensure a presence outside the immigration reporting centre at Portswood Police Station. We handed out information cards carrying emergency phone numbers in case of detention, since immigration officers confiscate smartphones, and the advice, 'If they say you can go to Rwanda "voluntarily", you can say no. Do not sign anything. Call a solicitor'. We took details of those entering the station, with their permission, so that if they were detained, we could act quickly to offer support.

It was a terrifying situation for members of our communities across the country: some people were driven into hiding, while hundreds of people were locked up in remote immigration detention centres, confined in what can only be described as prisons, separated from their friends and family. Many people were subsequently released as a result of legal casework.

After the Labour Party won the 2024 General Election the Prime Minister said that the policy had been scrapped. At a hearing in the High Court on 9th July the

Home Secretary confirmed that no flights to Rwanda are currently scheduled or are intended to be scheduled; however, her lawyers were not yet able to confirm that the Rwanda policy is, in the PM's words, "dead and buried". Consequently, it has not yet been withdrawn. As a result, Asylum Aid's legal challenge to that policy remains live, while the new Home Secretary undertakes a review. According to the *Guardian* she will set out her position on the legislation on 1st October. Asylum Aid said that the Home Secretary should 'urgently confirm that there will be no flights ever, withdraw the policy and all Rwanda notices of intent. She should also start the process of repealing the Safety of Rwanda Act, which is an affront to the rule of law'.

As Right to Remain warned us ahead of the election results, 'Regardless of the outcome of the General Election, it's clear that we need radical solidarity for the migration justice movement more than ever. Even if the Illegal Migration Act is repealed, even if the Rwanda Plan is dropped, even if the Nationality and Borders Act are repealed, we are still left with the Hostile Environment for migrants. Immigration detention is expanding, destitution is baked into our daily lives and migrant exploitation remains rampant.'

The Home Secretary needs to review the whole policy of inadmissibility, and Labour must abandon all plans for 'offshore' processing. Thousands of people have been left in limbo, unable to progress their asylum claims here. These people must be admitted to the asylum system promptly. In the words of asylum & immigration lawyer, Alasdair Mackenzie ([here](#)): "Anything less will set a grim precedent for this government's future plans."

Eritrea

The buried and hidden homeland

Nassir

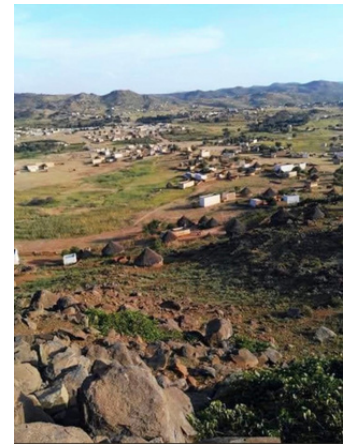
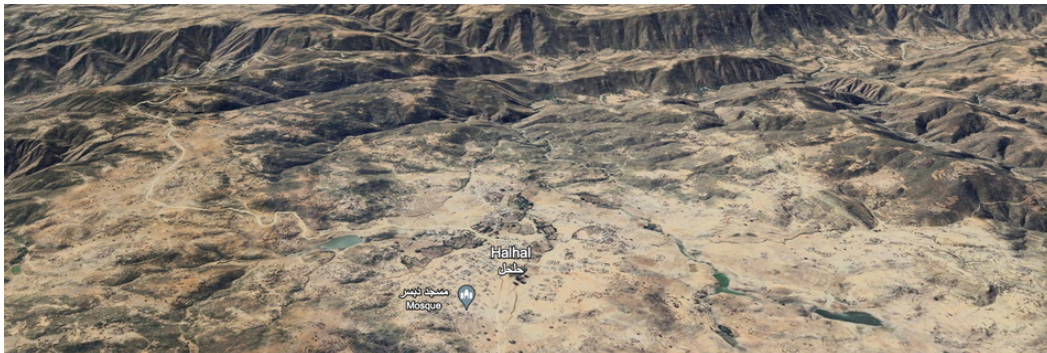
Eritrea is a dead rose for me. It took away the best times of my life, and my loved ones. As for your homeland, it should be the place where you live in safety and peace. But after you are 14 years old, they take you to military service, even if you are studying, because the ruler of the country always causes problems with neighbouring countries.

You do not receive parental affection. When you stand on your feet, everyone is gone. When the military takes them, they either run away or find themselves removed. Then you find them in prisons. Indeed, when you remember them, your breath narrows.

These wars are nothing to do with me. If they did not assault you, why would you assault them? If you refuse to join the army, either you will be killed or you will be imprisoned without judgement. And there is no solution. You will escape or you will die. If your age exceeds 14 to 17, they will send you a paper to report to the government army. After that you either join the army or run away. If you are over 18, you cannot live in your house, no matter how hard you work. If you fall into their hands, know to yourself that you are finished. I'm sorry, my country, but this is what our rulers do to us.

Oh, if our country were as secure as I am now. I would not have wished for anything else from this world.

Image: Google, Airbus, Landat / Copernicus Data, SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
10/04/2013-14/01/2024 @ Google Earth



I want to tell you the story of what brought me out of Eritrea.

I used to live in a small town called Halhal. I don't know anything else because they did not allow us to go to another city. I only heard about other cities. I lived as if it were not my country.

I left school because of my family's circumstances. I was the eldest in the house. You know, my father has been missing since 2016. After that they took him to the army. We have never had news of him. I wish I could just hear my father's voice. At least I would be checking on him.

But when I left school that was not the end of it. I had to leave the place where I used to live, and move to the mountains. I lived in the mountains for four years, with people who looked after the sheep and cows. It was a difficult period. Then my mother asked me to get married. When I asked her why, she told me, we have a war with Ethiopia, but you cannot live like this. You must get married and I must see my grandchildren. If you are in this country, one day they will take you. No matter how long it takes, they will catch you. I accepted that.

Then I was arrested at my wedding. I was imprisoned for 27 days. They have spies in the same town, so my wedding was kept secret, but I was betrayed. If the soldiers had not told me, when I was their prisoner, who had informed on me, I would not have known. Then they wanted to transfer us to another area. When they were diverting us we had an opportunity to escape, and we took this opportunity. Then I immediately decided to go to Sudan. And so I left my country.

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Sanctuary of Song

Juliet Offner

Members of our community have had the privilege of joining a music group supported by CLEAR, Southampton University, and Welsh National Opera. We have lifted our voices and our hearts together, singing songs from around the world, some taught to us by our marvellous choir leader, John Barber, and some brought by members of the choir. We have sung songs from Iran, Afghanistan and Africa, as well as sea shanties and traditional songs from England, and even a glorious opera aria by Mozart. We have composed our own song, combining lyrics from the whole group and melodies suggested by our members, all skilfully brought together and arranged by John.

We have been supported by music students from the University, who have also accompanied us on percussion, French

horn, and a traditional Chinese guzheng (a beautiful instrument a bit like a zither).

The group performed on 9th July in the Turner Sims Concert Hall to an appreciative audience. It featured stunning soloists Mehdi and Annette, as well as Oscar Castellino, an opera singer from WNO. The audience participated enthusiastically.

We thank Rowan Harris from CLEAR, who has been instrumental (hoho - Ed.) in organising this opportunity, Welsh National Opera, Turner Sims, Southampton University students, and John, who has managed the development of the choir so skilfully and given us so much positive energy and fun in the process. Watch this space for more exciting opportunities to participate in music projects next term.



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Hopes and dreams through drama

World Stages Now (WSN) is a Southampton-based organisation that for over a decade has provided a space for refugees to creatively address issues of migration through drama and performance.

In October 2022, WSN was invited by SWVG to join them in supporting Solent University's performing arts students with their project 'Hopes and Dreams'. The students gathered at MAST Mayflower Studios and took part in an immersive exercise in empathy, created and performed by members of WSN with lived experience of asylum.

The students were asked to walk the space as if on a routine activity; this was interrupted with a blackout and a command to lie down. In multiple languages, voices and whispers, expressions of farewell and fear of what was to come surrounded the students. They were then invited by WSN to talk freely about how they felt after the exercise and how it might help them work with vulnerable adults in a safe and respectful way. Several students revealed they had felt alienated and alone on arrival in Southampton and understood the

experience of missing their families back home. The morning ended with Sue Jessup from SWVG providing an overview of its work with asylum seekers. WSN are still developing active safeguarding as a methodology, and hoping to share it with others, as responsibility is at the heart of good practice.

Then in 2023, WSN produced a short film, 'My Fair Share Too', based on the real-life stories of those seeking sanctuary.

This June for Refugee Week, several World Stages Now members reflected on their experiences to successfully create a piece of theatre using poetry, song and conversation.

World Stages Now meets at Avenue St Andrew's on Friday mornings, and welcomes new members.

worldstagesnow@gmail.com

Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Fundraising dinner 2

Mary Bithell

On 6th July, Mehdi and Samrad kicked off our second fundraising dinner for the Cooking for Friends project with music that had guests on their feet, clapping and dancing.

Whilst our delicious vegetarian buffet was prepared by Nazir, Atiq, Parisa, Leila, Mohsen, Jonathan, Nathaly, Nuria and Doris, we completed a tricky quiz and attempted an even trickier competition of creating a fruit and veg display out of plasticine. Guests loved the bistro-style setting and atmosphere, and emptied every dish of delicious food. A variety of home-made desserts and a raffle (where you won only the prizes you wanted!) rounded off the meal.

We are extremely grateful for all the support and are very pleased to announce that we raised over £900. If you missed out on tickets this time, look out for our next fundraising dinner in the autumn.



Charity Number: 1183558. Patrons: Dr Shirley Firth, Miriam Margolyes OBE, John Pilkington

Members' fundraising

Southampton 10k, Mary Bithell

I decided several months ago to take up the offer of a 10k place in the Southampton Marathon on Sunday 7th April, to raise money for our partner charity, CLEAR. It then occurred to me it would be fun to run with my student Ambesajr, who I knew had always been a good runner. The day was sunny and warm but incredibly windy - we were almost blown off the Itchen Bridge on our return journey! I was hoping to finish in around an hour and I kept telling Ambes to go on ahead, as he is such a fast runner (he told me on the start line that he "always runs on tiptoes" and "never gets tired"). However, he stayed with me for the whole race, saying, "Come on Mary, be strong."

It was a real role reversal, as I am usually the one motivating him to speak English! His support meant we completed the race in 56:11 - well within my 1 hour target. I was totally exhausted and looked like a beetroot. Ambes hadn't even broken a sweat. We proudly collected our medals and finishers' t-shirts. The whole day was such fun; we were cheered on by CLEAR and Southampton Action who were marshalling part of the route, as well as musicians and bands. I could barely walk after our well-deserved coffee and cake. Only then did I discover that Ambesajr had run the 3 miles to the race start and was about to run 3 miles back again!!



Isle of Wight Randonnee, Keiren Phelan

The SWVG bike shed team has now sent 90 satisfied customers pedalling on their way

Your two doughty cyclists, John and Keiren, completed the tour of the Island on Sunday 5th May 2024, fuelled by energy bars, cups of tea and the fantastic amount of encouragement and money that sponsors so generously gave to SWVG's cause. Along with about 3000 other riders, we went for the whole 100k circuit, starting in East Cowes at 8:15, and finishing just in time for the 6:30 ferry back to Southampton. We avoided any mishaps

such as punctures, although not the rain and not the hills. Conquering the mighty Military Road was a highlight, and possibly not to be repeated: it's one of the most scenic routes on the Island and perilously close to collapsing into the sea. Contributions from supporters amounted to £1800 including Gift Aid. We're already thinking about next year's event, and hoping to take some of the people now riding bikes from SWVG along for the ride.

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Giving blood

Ahmad

Thank You

Ahmad has given blood three times, and here writes about why he does it.

It's a nice feeling when you can help another, for example someone with anaemia, or after an accident, even someone who might be close to death who will live because of your help. Every drop of your blood  will go to a patient.



When I was at school, a teacher showed us a documentary about how they use blood to help other people. The biology teacher took us to a hospital and a blood lab. Straight after this, two of my friends and I, we did a blood donation together.

If you would like to do what Ahmad did, you can find out about it here:

<https://www.blood.co.uk/the-donation-process/giving-blood-for-the-first-time/>.

You may have to wait a few months after arriving from certain countries.

Blood donors are needed from all ethnic backgrounds. Black, Asian and minority ethnic donors are very much needed because patients need blood that closely matches their own.

<https://www.blood.co.uk/why-give-blood/demand-for-different-blood-types/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-communities/>

Hampshire FA Foundation Award

A Hampshire FA Foundation Award recognises an individual, club, league, or organisation that has contributed to one of Hampshire FA Foundation's three key pillars: Disability Football, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, and/or Community Coaching. SWVG and St Peter's Church were recipients of this award for the 2023/24 season.

St Peter's Church in Winchester and the Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group (SWVG) have been working to support asylum seekers and refugees in the South Hants area for several years. In January 2023, 55 young men from countries all around the world were relocated to a remote hotel within the M3 southbound motorway services. David Marchant and Paul Bedford, with the help

of others, organised and delivered kit and weekly football training sessions to over 30 of these young men who were desperately in need of exercise, fun and friendship which the universal language of football can uniquely provide. They entered teams in Hampshire FA's Equality FC tournaments and made lifelong friendships through their football experience.

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My Fourth Time, We Drowned:

Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route (2022)

by Sally Hayden

Andrew Holton

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of this work will ultimately prove to have been in its timely uncovering of an efficiently hidden international scandal. The book, which reads easily, first saw the light of day in UK two years ago. Five years before the Italian government (sponsored by the EU) and the UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

The three aims were to secure borders, boost Libya's economic development and eliminate the irregular sea passage upon which human trafficking relies. At issue is how much the EU's desire to outsource migration management might have been exploited, Libya applying leverage to gain economic and political advantage. In the words of Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor in 2023, the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding was 'an affront to the fundamental human rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.' *E la quarta volta siamo annegati* was released eight months ago for the Italian public, in whose name this memorandum was signed. Other translations will hopefully follow.

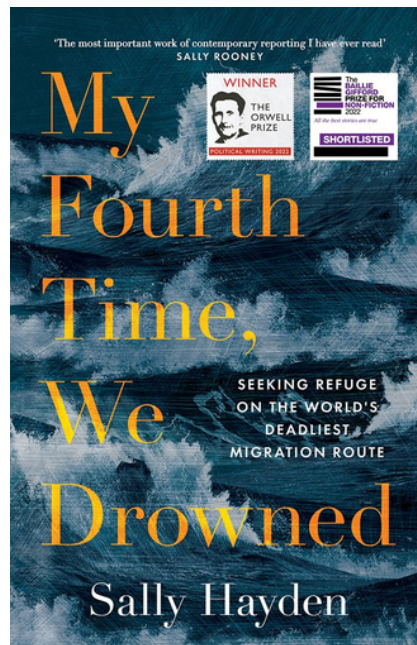
We learn early in *My Fourth Time, We Drowned* of Hayden's hesitation, born of the feelings we all share about being approached to do a difficult job without a guide. Those who appealed to her, victims of 'the twenty-first century's biggest human rights scandal', were repeatedly assured of Hayden's feelings of powerlessness.

In the end, righteous anger at injustice and the insult of duplicity won the day. Hayden reminds us that we are unknowingly lulled into something akin to indoctrination. It beggars belief to suggest that, but for Brexit, our government, those who represent us on

the international stage, would have used its considerable influence in Brussels to prevent the scandal portrayed by Hayden. After the 2016 referendum, the UK did not officially exit the EU until just before midnight on 31st January 2020. But it had been in 2015, before the referendum, that the EU had launched its Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, aimed at stopping migration to Europe. Members of SWVG do not need to be reminded of the proportion of migrants arriving in

Europe from Africa who are in actual fact not 'economic migrants' but something quite different, entitled, once the Home Office can get round to it, to all the conventions of asylum to which we signed up in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (The Refugee Convention), ratified by Parliament in 1954.

Hayden does not preach. The reader is warmly reassured she also could have been party to wanting not to know. Like all good writers, she invites us to identify with her. In some ways the nuts and bolts of her narrative are less important than her "Listen! This is what is going on, in your name, this very day". It would spoil the impact of the title if I spilled the beans here.



Recipe: Uzbek Qabuli Pulao Nazir Shaim

My Mother's Recipe

My mother used to cook pilaf once a week or when guests came. For each kilogram of rice or three cups of rice, she would use one cup of oil. After frying the meat, she would add cumin and salt to the meat, allowing the flavour of the cumin to infuse the meat and enhance its taste.

History of Uzbek Qabuli Pulao

Uzbek Pulao, or 'Qabuli Pulao', has a deep-rooted history in Central Asian culture. During the time of Emir Timur, in the 14th century, feeding large armies during wars was a significant challenge. Timur's chefs decided to cook a dish using large cauldrons filled with rice, meat, and local ingredients, to feed his army. This dish became famous for its practicality and ability to satiate soldiers. Consequently, Uzbek Pulao became widely used during wartime, and has held significant importance in the region for centuries. Traditionally served at large communal meals or weddings, it is considered an important welcoming dish for guests.



Ingredients

- 1 kg long-grain basmati rice
- 1 kg lamb (or chicken or beef)
- 2 large onions
- 3 large carrots
- Half a cup of raisins
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- Salt
- Spices (such as cumin and black pepper)

Preparation

1. Rinse the rice and soak it in water. This allows the rice to soften and cook better.
2. Heat oil in a large cauldron and lightly fry the chopped onions. Fry until the onions turn golden. Then add the chopped meat and fry until it forms a crust.
3. Add the julienned carrots to the meat and cook for a few more minutes, then add half a cup of raisins. At this step, add salt and spices like cumin.
4. After thoroughly frying the meat and vegetables, add water. Adjust the amount of water amount according to the meat's cooking time, and then add the rice to the cauldron. Ensure the water covers the rice by 1-1.5 cm.
5. Cover the cauldron with a cloth and cook the rice on low heat until it absorbs the water. This usually takes 40-45 minutes.
6. After cooking, let the pilaf rest for a while, then transfer it to a large plate and serve. It is often garnished with roasted dried fruits, nuts, or almonds.

Achievements and qualifications



Koorush, on top of his many other qualifications, attained a Higher Distinction in L3 Sports Psychology, attended a Hampshire Archery Association Coaching Group workshop on Coaching Archers with Hearing Loss, and completed a Sports Nutrition course from Skills Boost



Suba and **Gowry** learnt to swim, both achieving 25m front and back crawl.

Miriam gained a CertTESOL

from Trinity College London



Kennedy achieved Level 2 in Cyber Security Principles, Level 2 in Equality and Diversity, and a certificate in Theology with Formation School Southampton, and completed an Access module in Psychology, Social Science and Wellbeing with the Open University



Nuria achieved Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene



Parisa achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene

Javad achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene





Ahmed achieved
Entry 1 Functional Skills in
Mathematics



Hesam achieved Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene
and **Farshad** and **Iman** Level 2



Igor achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene



Ahmad gave blood (read his
article on page 13)



Nazir passed Level 2 ESOL in all four
skills



Atiq achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene



Mohamed achieved
Level 1 Food Safety
and Hygiene



MJ achieved
Level 1 Food Safety
and Hygiene



Sherif achieved
Level 1 Food Safety
and Hygiene



Doris achieved
Entry 2 ESOL
in all four skills,
and Entry 2 Maths



Samim passed his
driving test



Gabriel achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene



Brian achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene

Jonathan achieved
Level 1 Food Safety
and Hygiene



Hadi achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene



Amir achieved
Level 1 Food Safety and
Hygiene



Idriss achieved Level 2 ESOL in all
four skills

Donations

We are extremely grateful for the support we receive from funders, trusts and foundations, community groups and individuals. Amongst these over the last quarter we gratefully acknowledge: the **One Percent Scheme**; the **Girdlers' Company**, who continue to support Cooking for Friends; the **'Beyond Ourselves' Committee of St Matthew with St Paul's**; the **Knight Charitable Trust**; and **Winchester College**, who invited us to speak and take a collection at their lovely Pianofest.