

I made the most of a bad situation

Every day I wake up thinking, this is my life now, I'm a free human being. The thought of others relying on me to help see them safely through the Coronavirus pandemic makes me shiver but I know I need to persevere.

My name is Hassan Akkad and I was born in Damascus in 1990. I became a secondary school English teacher at the age of 19. I took part in the first anti-government protest in 2011 and I was tortured and imprisoned in Syria by the Assad regime after being accused of being a spy for England because my English was so good. I journeyed far from war-torn Syria to the UK. I can't believe I went from nearly drowning in the sea crossing from Turkey to helping the UK NHS team.

I went from being this unknown refugee to helping others through these bad times. You can do the same. I moved to London from Syria during late 2015. I went on to win a Bafta after documenting my difficult journey for a BBC film.

I hope that if this pandemic teaches us one thing, it teaches us to be kinder to one another no matter where we come from. I hope this changes us for the best.

The least I can do is make sure that my neighbours and the amazing NHS staff are safe and sound, to enable them to do their part too.

I have been so overwhelmed after receiving so many beautiful messages from people saying "you are a hero" and "you're one of us" and "we value you", for all of those people out there you are your own hero! The reason I told you my story is so others think about helping their community. You don't need to put yourself or anyone else at risk but you could do something nice for the elderly, like delivering food or even writing a letter to cheer them up.

I hope that this will change the discussion on refugees.

I wanted to share this story in detail because every day is eye-opening when I interact with the patients and my colleagues. Right now, my priority is disinfecting that ward and cleaning those toilets because that is what I was hired to do and I do it with pride.

I feel so privileged to help support the country that accepted me and made me feel safe. Even though what I've been through was a bad situation I still want to help others that need my help and I will always be here for them and never take for granted this second chance!

I went from being invisible to telling my story to the news. For me the scent of success fills the air. If everyone became as brave as me (as brave as a tiger) they would soon realize that life isn't about just protecting yourself but also by protecting others as EVERYONE is worth fighting for!

Sophie Pepper