T H A N K Y O U

It's 3am Feb. 9, 2015 and I can't sleep. I feel like I am thousands of miles from where I should be.

I thought maybe I should share something with you because it explains why we do what we do. And because I promised a little sister of yours.

I'll start by saying that one of our little Yazidi sisters has asked me to say "thank you" (she is a child and a sexual violence survivor).

In Mosul we have 5 physical places. There are orphan kids; mothers who have come to trust us and even want to help; there is the main clinic where we now do every family health procedure, not just sexual assault patients, but every kind of ailment like broken bones; sprained wrists; colds; female problems; burns; cuts; aches and pains, whatever. There are no institutions that are safe for these people.

We created a makeshift school at our big building and have a small clinic there too because most travel is difficult and unsafe for certain people now. If we didn't do the classes, there would be no school for the youngsters, none.

We are not the only NGO caring for children and their families. But there isn't much help for anyone. We are inadequate but we try to reach out through the people we know to those in need of help.

If the children go outside on a school day the Daesh will catch them and ask a million questions and put them in a strict Islamic youth programme.

Then they would hunt down the parents. If the child would be female above 8 she would be raped and turned into a temporary wife or a permanent wife, if she got caught on the street or playing in a park or wherever.

You don't know the bad luck stories we have seen and I won't tell you. It's horrible what the Daesh do to just about anyone, randomly.

We have this large building that is smashed at the top but perfect at the bottom. It looks worthless from the outside. Everything works. It even has a good water tank. At the top of the walls there are small windows facing the west that let in light so even when the power is off we can see.

The Daesh have burned all the books in the city. They are insane.

We saved many. When I say we, I mean the security guys; the medical people we have hooked up with from the university; a couple of doctors; many, many moms who are just awesome; many more grand moms; some of the dads who we don't see much of because most try to go to work and at least score some provisions for their families.

We are good for books.

The mothers read them to the kids and we take turns doing lessons. Some lessons are life skills; art; domestic skills; math (the kids are extremely good at math), science and the favorite lesson is talking about space (they never did that before.).

When she is here and has time, Jessie is teaching them to bake cookies and other things. Yoshiki teaches them athletics and she does aerobics and yoga as well as some fundamental martial arts self defense. They adore her, but she is seldom available.

This building has a stainless steel kitchen but little or no supplies. Somehow the parents find stuff and bring it with big smiles. Many speak a dialect we don't understand but we get along. The Arabic here is the weirdest I have ever heard. Everyone is a little different. I can't read Arabic but the local nurses are at ease no matter the dialect.

We have a couple of Jewish families, many Yazidis and many Catholics.

Micheal has a guitar at the big building. He patiently got it working at our other main clinic last Fall and played the kids some songs. The guitar found its way to the big building as our schooling system expanded.

Recently there has been bombings and artillery. A lady I speak Hebrew with was telling me about where the bombs were landing. We worry about that. Nobody cares about children and their families. They shoot and bomb everything. Sometimes they just shoot at the sky for nothing or blast away at the side of buildings for no apparent reason.

There were about 30 kids of all ages in the room on the day Micheal came back. They had been there for two days.

An explosion sounded either closer or louder and it hurt. Everyone had been locked in for a couple of days because some Daesh had taken over a house nearby and could see our door easily. We had waited to see if they would go away.

We use our special "Cell phones for survivors" (https://rinj.org/interactive/?page\_id=845) Blackberries in a special peer-to-peer setup that Simon and RIM invented in Toronto. Those Canadian phones are incredible.

At the end of January there had been trouble near Kantari, Syria about half way to Raqqah. Jessie and Bonnie were with security guys and needed to switch some boxes of supplies with UN refugee medics. They got lost at first or got a bogus steer. In any case a bunch of Daesh were looking for them in a tank. They had to lay low for days in the middle of nowhere. Their truck had a lot of our stuff. That's why Micheal and friends had to arrive fast. We thought the emergency was worse than this.

There wasn't a lot of food but Micheal brought some boxes of soup and beans till we get our other stuff. It was welcome.

The kids ate like Jessie does. Jessie the bear. She growls and chases the kids around. She is a big kids herself.

Once fed the children became a little moody. They were tired.

There were five of the orphans in this group that day. They are the quietest. Micheal was talking to the group with the help of a mom when another bomb came near. The mood was dropping again.

Among the orphans there is an older girl with two younger brothers. The boys began to cry. The sister got them settled down.

All the kids sat down on their mats in the "classroom" part of the big room. Micheal was going to play some music and had to fiddle with the strings to put the old guitar in tune.

It became quiet. Micheal has been only once to this place but he knows many of the kids from the other places we have. They call him "Khal" which sounds like the last part of his name (Micheal) but it actually means an uncle who would be on the mother's side of the family.

They were all sitting down and things went quiet. The kids had full stomachs. Without the worries of eating, their other worries came to the surface. They began to ask "Khal" questions. He couldn't understand so one of the local nurses from the university who works with us and one of the moms tried to translate but the kids were really impatient and uptight, probably from the bombing.

The older orphan girl has never shown any emotion. The two boys cling to her. They are always glancing over their shoulder when at play to make sure she is nearby. My guess is that she would be 11 or 12. We don't know much about her or her story. We know that at first she lied about going home to her mother. There is no mother. Her playmate's parents have taken her in with her brothers. We have helped them out with clothes and food. That girl acts like a mom authority and takes care of her young brothers in a strict, over-the-top-Brady-Mom way. It's almost funny to watch, if it wasn't so sad.

Micheal played one of the songs the kids like. They were dead quiet. Too quiet. He sensed something wrong and stopped.

Micheal was sitting on the mat tuning the guitar in front of the older female orphan and the boys.

I noticed one of the boys was staring at his sister's face from the side as if in shock. I moved closer.

Tears had begun to run down her face. Then I watched her slowly melt down. Her shoulders began to twitch and then shake violently. The two boys pulled back startled.

I saw Micheal reach out across the guitar to put an arm around her shoulder and I watched her face contort and the tears poured and her lips pursed together and then she burst across the guitar arms outstretched and was clinging to Kahl in a bundle of crying, shuddering child.

She cried "oh Kahl I didn't have a hug since my papa died".

That would have been last June.

I don't know any other way to say this than to just say the other thirty kids joined her.

It was the biggest spontaneous crying scramble hug and tear session I have ever seen. The mothers, oh everybody burst into tears hugging and holding and walking around in chaos as some helped out grabbing and hugging their own kids. For a moment it was utter pandemonium.

Everybody. Absolutely everybody broke down in sobs. I saw in the corner of my eye the two security guys darting into the room with horrific looks on their faces.

Dear God, we were a mess. Too many days worrying what had happened to the others and our truck; the bombs; the bad news; always bad news; the stress. The fear. Oh God, the fear and the trauma these poor darling people have suffered.

We were all crying. Look. The security guys had tears too.

I was clinging to two women and we were looking into each other's faces crying and asking loudly "look what is happening to us".

It was a sudden, fleeting glimpse of the utter despair. The utter hopelessness of humankind and it's disgusting, abominable behaviour. Nothing of the bombs; the bloody beheadings; the hangings; the shootings; the bodies falling off roofs; the raped kids; the orphaned kids; the broken families; the broken hearts; nothing of this could we do anything about.

'Khal' was drenched and fully wrapped by kids, all the orphans. He is a natural-born Khal. One by one we got the kids extracted and distracted and calmed a little. 'Khal' was like the pied piper. The kids would only let go of him if they were sure they were going to get love and care from someone else.

I realized the pain in that little girl must have been building for eight months and the extraordinary thing is that all the kids knew that and we didn't.

When she had started her melt-down, the others looked scared as if they were little volcanoes themselves looking at the big volcano know it would explode and take them with it. When the big sister began to cry, the emotions of the others exploded. The kids all knew telepathically what we could never get out of her.

We gave her warm water, a blanker and a quiet corner and she 'spilled' her story to Micheal and the local nurse for three hours. They recorded her case. I listened later in sad horror.

Now she is on some meds and she is going to be working a little bit each day with a clergy woman and with Jess. She is reliving hell. She will be fine.

Probably the only reason she escaped from the Daesh and the prison to the south was because she needed to find her brothers, or the Daesh would still be raping her and beating her.

Here is my biggest problem. I have always noticed that all the girls have that look on their faces and in their eyes. For a moment it was all so overwhelming for me. I am so small and inconsequential and my life's problems are meaningless compared to what these kids have gone through.

I guess Micheal and the nurses have done hundreds of these cases and they are very professional but I didn't emotionally cope with her case well. That's why I am in Toronto for a while. But also I must keep a promise.

I now also realize too that when our people seem cranky or uncooperative,

they likely have a hundred times more of what is going through my mind tonight (hmmm this morning) and now your mind.

I wanted to share this with you because each of you for the big or little thing that you do that put us into our little sisters life, I am sure that if there is a God in Heaven, and He has a special place for you.

Bless you. And from her, I promised I would say, "thank you".

Our little sister said she wants to come and live in America (Canada) someday, so I said I would take her and her brothers to Canada's Wonderland, in the future.

Well my dears, we are *learning to love and be loved by other women, because when we work together we are a force to be reckoned with*.

K T