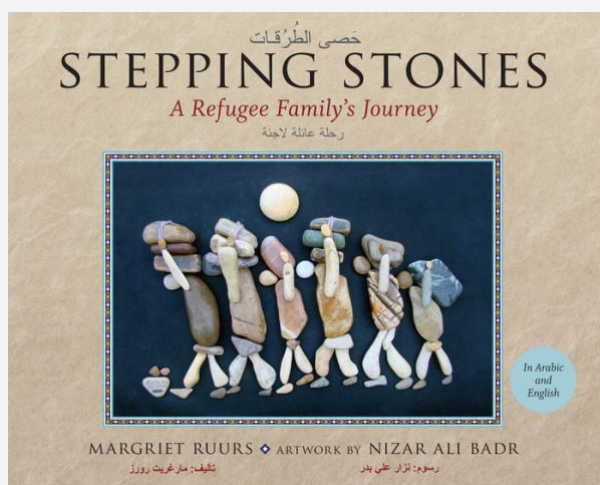


Second Reaction: Peace Again

Rurrs, Margriet. Translated by Falah Raheem. *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey*. Illustrated by Nizar Ali Badr, Orca Books, 2016.

Cheryl L. White



Stepping Stones—A Refugee Family's Journey is a captivating book about a family whose life changed drastically. Written by Margriet Ruurs and illustrated through the stone artwork of Nizar Ali Badr, the book chronicles the life of a Syrian family forced to flee their comfortable, peaceful home after war comes to town. When reading the book for the first time, the illustrations were lost on me because I was so engrossed in the story itself. It was only during my second reading of the book that I paused to intently study the stones that so aptly told the story of the life of a little girl and her family that was changed—not quite overnight—but certainly quickly and dreadfully. The stone illustrations that accompany the words in this moving account bring life to the story. You can almost hear the rooster crowing in the beautifully detailed illustration as the story begins. Readers will no doubt wonder how many hours were spent locating and/or carving stones that were just the right size and color to create scenes from nature—flowers, trees, the sun, and the moon—and even a fish! Emotions are clearly felt through the illustrations showing people fighting; the love shared between family members is apparent in the touching scenes where loved ones embrace. The differently shaped and colored stones depict a peaceful life interrupted by war, followed by an exodus, and finally the beginning of what will hopefully be a life full of promise.

The story is told in the words of the older of two children in a small family consisting also of a mother, father, and grandfather. As the story begins, images of a happy and carefree existence are conjured as the young girl reminisces about better times. She describes days gone

by—the regular routine for a loving family—a father working in the fields, a stay-at-home mom, a grandfather fishing the days away, and she and her brother laughing and playing with friends. The young girl feels free . . . until war comes. She watches families leave her village. First, only a few people leave, followed by more and more, until her small family decides to join the countless others who must leave behind a world where they once felt safe . . . and free. Her family walks away from their home, with few possessions and lots of hope. They walk until it is time to sail across the sea and later arrive on the other side; there they walk more, into a land free from war. Having traveled to a new land with a new language, they look forward to a new life.

Children will be able to easily follow the story and will ponder the strange and different illustrations. They will more than likely have questions—such as these:

- Why did the birds stop singing?
- Why didn't they take their goat? What happened to the goat?
- How old was Rama?
- Did they ever go back home?

Some readers, upon reading the story, will, no doubt, think of the daily news surrounding current immigrant concerns. Perhaps they will wonder: Were Rama and Sami separated from their parents? Was the family forced to return to their home in the midst of war?

After reading this book, I began searching for information about Syrian refugees and learned that, as of 2016, according to “Syrian Refugees—A snapshot of the crisis—in the Middle East and Europe, “an estimated 11 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011.” This statistic is monumentally disturbing, to say the least. It is also disturbing to know that the story depicted in *Stepping Stones—A Refugee Family's Journey* is most assuredly a story that has played out far too many times for far too many families since 2011.

In my search, I also learned that, as the Syrian refugee crisis marches on, in 2018 (“Syrian Refugee Crisis”):

- “Fighting continues, despite international agreements for de-escalation.
- Humanitarian access is limited because of insecurity, and 2.9 million people remain in hard-to-reach areas where aid is not supplied on a regular basis.
- March 15: Syria enters the eighth year of the Syrian civil war.”

It is my fervent hope that the links that appear at the end of this book will serve as a starting point for readers to learn more about what has been referred to as “the worst humanitarian crisis of our time” (“Quick Facts”).

I believe that this story will bring attention to the devastating facts of life for families that have walked the steps of the family that we meet in *Stepping Stones—A Refugee Family's Journey*.

Works Cited

- "Quick Facts: What You Need to Know About the Syria Crisis." *Mercy Corps*. www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis. Accessed July 2018.
- "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help." *World Vision*. <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>.
- "Syrian Refugees—A snapshot of the crisis—in the Middle East and Europe." *Syrian Refugees*. <http://syrianrefugees.eu>.

About the Author

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