



# ‘My friend, Zozan: the refugee I gave a home to’

When Katie Drummond, 46, heard about a young woman who had been forced to flee her country, she welcomed her into her family. Katie and Zozan Yasar, 31, celebrate the friendship that has developed between them

challenging, but she was absolutely lovely.

As the months passed, John and I welcomed more refugees and we felt increasingly relaxed around them.

In October 2019, I was seven months pregnant with my second child, when I was told about a Kurdish woman in her late 20s called Zozan, who had fled Istanbul, Turkey, for her own safety. John and I agreed she could stay with us for four weeks before our baby was born.

On Zozan’s first night with us we bonded over our work. Before retraining as a barrister in 2012, I’d worked as a journalist, while Zozan had been a broadcast journalist in Turkey. Despite our 15-year age gap, we got on well.

She quickly blended in with our family life. Zozan was working as a freelance writer from home. When I got back from work, Zozan would be in the kitchen, and we’d drink tea and chat.

One evening, she opened up to me about the troubles her family were facing in Turkey. It made me realise that one of the hardest things about being a refugee is the emotional isolation you face, without old friends and family to turn to in difficult times.

Zozan ended up living with us for two months. During her stay with us, she spent a lot of time with Hugh and he adored her.

A few weeks after Zozan left, I had my daughter, Maud. We kept in touch and now Zozan is back in London following the pandemic, we can see each other.

I encourage all my friends to host refugees, if they can. You’re really helping someone and, in turn, you also get so much joy.

**M**y friend Zozan is a force of nature. Driven and determined, funny and positive. She’s also a refugee and, until I shared my home with her, we were complete strangers. Now I regard her as a friend.

I’d become increasingly aware of the plight of refugees when I saw photos of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, whose body had washed up on a Turkish beach, after his family had fled Syria in September 2015. My heart went out to the family. I wanted to find a practical way to help.

By January 2019 I was working as a lawyer and living in a four-bed house in south-east London, with my partner, John, who is also a lawyer, and our son, Hugh, then 18 months old. I remember waking up in the night and thinking

about people without a home, while we had a spare bedroom. The following day, I read in the paper about a woman who shared her home with refugees through a charity called Refugees at Home.

I got in touch with her to find out more. With a young child, I had lots of questions. She laid my concerns to rest. John also had his own reservations, but the more we researched, the more he came around.

Following interviews and home assessments by the charity, we had our first guest: a woman from Eritrea, East Africa, who stayed for four weeks. She spoke no English, so that could be

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## 'Katie's family made me feel part of their community'

**Zozan, 31, explains how important it was to feel welcomed after being forced to leave behind everything she loved.**

**G**rowing up in eastern Turkey, my Kurdish community faced a lot of conflict, and our village was destroyed by war in the 1990s. We had to relocate but a forced integration into Turkish society meant we no longer had our own language or culture.

I have a large family with 10 siblings. We could face imprisonment for even speaking, reading or writing Kurdish and I couldn't access a formal education. As

a child, I taught myself to read and write but I became increasingly aware that I had no human rights, especially as a woman. I fought to study, but when I was 22, shortly before my university exams, I was arrested for campaigning for women's rights.

Once I began working as a

journalist, I was constantly under threat of imprisonment. I'd covered news of people being tortured in prison, so I was terrified. I had no option but to choose between prison or fleeing the country.

In the UK, I was granted refugee status within five months, but I was living between different cities. My life was unstable, but when Katie took me in, I could open up to her. I finally had

a space of my own.

Katie was working full-time and heavily pregnant during my stay. I wanted to help her, so one evening, I bathed her son Hugh and put him to bed. I remember sitting him on my lap and reading stories. I'd come from a large family, so I cherished those moments.

For ages, I felt lost without my family, but Katie's family made me

feel a part of their community. Her parents introduced me to their neighbours, who also became my friends, and when I was sick, Katie's father took me to hospital.

I'm settled in London now. I rent my own apartment and I work as a journalist, but if I ever have a problem, I know I can call Katie. She's a good friend. I hope that one day I can return her kindness.



**Zozan appreciates all the support Katie gave her**



### OFFERING SHELTER

Refugees at Home connects refugees and asylum seekers who need somewhere to stay with volunteers who have a spare room. It's intended to be an altruistic action, so rent isn't due in exchange for the hosting. Hosts cover incidental costs of hosting, such as electricity and water, but a £30 weekly bursary is available, if needed.

Hosts can set boundaries (such as rules on smoking), and decide how involved they want to be. Some hosts provide a room and have minimal contact with their guests, while others help with things such as filling out forms and covering travel expenses.

• For more information, visit [refugeesathome.org/get-involved](https://refugeesathome.org/get-involved) □