

The Boston Globe

Steve Jobs was the son of a ‘Skittle’ — or why Trump is wrong about refugees

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September 22, 2016

Steve Jobs was the son of a Skittle.

By which, in the parlance of Donald Trump’s campaign, I mean that the father of the founder of Apple and Pixar was a Syrian migrant.

Stay with me here. After bombings in New York and New Jersey and a stabbing in a Minnesota mall, the Republican nominee’s eldest son this week tweeted an image of a bowl of colorful candy with this message: “If I had a bowl of Skittles and told you just three would kill you, would you take a handful? That’s our Syrian refugee problem.” The message was hailed by supporters and condemned by critics, who shared images of bloodied and lifeless children, a reminder of hundreds of thousands of innocent Syrians killed and millions displaced by civil war. The photographer of the Skittles image objected to its use without his permission and — wait for it — revealed he was a child refugee when his family fled Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus.

The coup de grâce came from a Skittles spokeswoman whose simple logic spoke eloquent volumes: “Skittles are candy. Refugees are people. We don’t feel it’s an appropriate analogy.” Trump’s campaign retorted that Americans would rather be “safe” than “politically correct.”

It’s understandable that we worry about opening our doors to refugees after last weekend’s attacks. Authorities arrested an Afghan-American for planting bombs and shot to death a Somali-American during the mall rampage and said both may have been inspired by Islamic extremism. Dozens were injured; mercifully, no one died.

Trump has shrewdly tapped into visceral fears of the “other” for political gain, demonizing Mexicans as job stealers, rapists, and killers, and Muslim refugees as terrorist plotters. He called for banning Muslims from entering the country, until “authorities can figure out” the problem, and stopping “immigration from any nation compromised by terrorism” (a definition that includes the United States, United Kingdom, and France). Last month in Arizona, Trump doubled down on building a wall separating Mexico and invited mothers of people killed by undocumented migrants onto his stage.

His scare tactics work because the stories he tells are scary.

And yet. Not to diminish the suffering of any victims or their families, but Trump’s hideous caricature of doomsday danger posed by refugees and migrants bears no semblance to reality.

Study after study show that immigrants from any country, whether legal or illegal, are less likely to commit crimes and be imprisoned than native-born Americans. A 2015 report by the Immigration Policy Center found that while illegal immigration in the United States tripled between 1990 and 2013, violent crime dropped by half.

The reality of refugees, who undergo two years of security checks before even entering the United States, may surprise you even more. A November 2015 report from the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank funded by the conservative Koch brothers, found that of 859,629 refugees who had entered the United States since 2001, only three were convicted of planning a terror attack abroad, and none perpetrated a domestic attack. Compare that with one in every 22,541 Americans who committed murder in 2014.

In a new report last week, Cato found that while foreign-born terrorists were responsible for most of the 3,432 terror deaths in the US from 1975 through 2015 (most of which happened on Sept. 11, 2001), the chance of an American being killed by a refugee in a terror attack is a scant 1 in 3.64 billion per year. The chance of being murdered by an illegal immigrant is an infinitesimal 1 in 10.9 billion per year. That's one enormous bowl of Skittles.

Remember this next time Trump hypes the threat: Albert Einstein, the Dalai Lama, and Jesus were all refugees. Not bad for a trio of Skittles.