



## Calling Syrian refugees like me Skittles would be funny if it weren't so cruel

Shadi Martini

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I am a Syrian refugee who was forced to leave my country. It was discovered that I had created an underground network to provide medical aid and supplies to the sick and wounded. The regime had ruled that what I was doing was against the law, so I fled. I took whatever I could fit in a rolling suitcase and nothing more. I now live in the greatest country in the world, and have just become a US citizen.

In the past year, more than 10,000 Syrian refugees, like me, found refuge in the US. However, there are those who are portraying this great humanitarian deed as a bad thing. They are calling for the United States to shut its doors to Syrians, who are fleeing unspeakable horrors of war and acts of daily terror. Those who would turn their backs on these innocent, desperate victims use scare tactics to gain support.

The latest one was an ad by the Trump campaign comparing Syrian refugees to poisonous candy, Skittles, in this case, but it's not the first time the analogy has been used. Last year, another reference was made to poisonous peanuts. Of course, the aim is to spread fear, with the ultimate goal of shutting our doors to those who need us most.

Turning away those fleeing war would mean disregarding the very values that made America the richest, most powerful nation in the world. We should be more afraid of losing our honor and virtue, than of helping these refugees, 80% of whom are women and children. Remember Alan Kurdi, who washed up on the shores of Turkey trying to make it to safety? He was a toddler; someone's beloved child. Not a Skittle.

While scare tactics can be effective, the greater good always is served by the facts. Of the more than 750,000 refugees that have been admitted to the US since 9/11, just three have been arrested in relation to planning terrorist activities. None have been Syrian.

According to the latest Cato Institute study, the chance of an American being killed by a refugee is 1 in 3.6 billion. The likelihood of being murdered by a non-terrorist was 1 in 14,275. Should we suspect our neighbors since they are in the “more likely” group?

I should be angry and outraged by the hateful things that are said about Syrians, but since coming to the US, I began educating myself about the immigrants and refugees who have found safety in this great land. I realize that our welcome of the weak and vulnerable has not come without name-calling and labels.

One of my learning experiences took me to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, where I discovered the WWII story of the St Louis, the ship carrying German Jews who were permitted to leave Germany and denied entry to, among other countries, the US. It was feared they might be “German spies” or “communists”. They ultimately had to return to Europe where many of them perished in the Holocaust.

The stains on our history don't end there, unfortunately. Most of the immigrant groups who resettled in the US experienced xenophobia as a result of their ethnicity. And that says nothing about our treatment of African Americans and the Native Americans who inhabited this country before we all arrived.

It is critical to remember that in this Great Melting Pot of America – so called because we are a nation of immigrants – the chances are that when your family members arrived, they were targeted in the same way that Syrian refugees are today.

It may help to be reminded that the Syrians who have lived among you for generations are famous actors, innovators, business leaders, army personnel and veterans. There are thousands of physicians living and working here, saving hundreds of lives every day. They are ordinary hard-working men and women who make important contributions to our economy and our culture.

Let us not fear the stranger because of where they came from or what their religion is, but be brave and courageous and honorable to accept the weak to our shores. We are the land of the free and the home of the brave. We stand up to evil. We do not stay silent