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'Homeland' star mastered WhatsApp to reconnect with refugee family he helped rescue

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March 20, 2017

It's been six devastating years since the start of the Syrian war in March 2011. Coincidentally, it's been six years since the first season of *Homeland*, where Mandy Patinkin plays the role of CIA chief Saul Berenson.

As the show progressed into its fifth and six season, the war and the subsequent refugee crisis in Europe were weaved into the plot. But for Patinkin, 64, playing the part of a fictional character wasn't enough.

"I needed to get back to the real world – not the fictional world that I work in," Mandy Patinkin said after returning from a trip along the refugee route across Europe with the [International Rescue Committee](#)

For Patinkin this real world is one where rich, Western countries are battling waves of populist rhetoric, based on ethnic nationalism and fear. A fear growing among people, who have never even met a so-called "refugee."

So, he embarked upon a journey across Europe to try and change that perception by sharing some of the incredible stories of people he had met. He jokes there was a steep learning curve in mastering how to Instagram and Facebook Live and WhatsApp along the way.

"It was my two children that said I should use my celebrity and do whatever I can for these people," Patinkin said.

He tells the story of a Syrian family he helped off a dinghy and onto the shore in Lesbos, Greece. They had lost everything they had during the journey, and after he gave them some travel money, they were able to make their way into Germany.

Patinkin and the father stayed in touch over WhatsApp for about a year, during which the family had managed to start a new life for themselves. After concluding the filming of *Homeland's* fifth season in Berlin, Patinkin was invited to visit the Syrian family's new home right outside the city.

"And I just lost it – I was overwhelmed with emotion," he says as he describes the cozy apartment. The father had been a decorator in Syria and had put all his artistry into his new

home. "I just couldn't stop thinking of all the families we just met, who weren't having this opportunity for a new life."

For Patinkin, himself coming from a family of Lithuanian Polish immigrants, the humanity of these people that have lost so much needs to be upheld instead of buried by fear.

He says that while he tried to stay up to date with the refugee crisis by reading the news and listening to podcasts, actually seeing families coming off the boats, walking and talking with them, changed him profoundly.

He angrily addresses what he calls President Donald Trump's policy of fearmongering and quickly navigates to facts that show that refugees are among the safest people to enter the United States. (According to a [Cato Institute](#) report, only three refugees, of Cuban origin, carried out attacks the 1970s out of over 3,000 deadly incidents).

For Patinkin, the Syrian family he helped nudge onto a new life is just a small example of what can be done to help. And, following his work with the IRC, he is hoping that his message will reach more people that have become somewhat desensitized to the world around them.