

The Story of Aslan and Rose: A Boy and His Puppy in the Syrian Diaspora



A teen walked more than 300 miles with his Husky puppy, Rose, to escape the Syrian civil war. His heartbreaking story reminds us of our powerful connection to dogs.

The reports about refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria is the crescendo to a tragedy that has been building for years. For many in Europe and America, the extent of the Syrian crisis was crystallized by a single photo: The image of [Aylan, a 3-year-old boy whose body washed up on a Turkish beach](#) after he and others drowned while trying to escape their home by sea.

Watching the developments around the Syrian crisis is nothing but heartbreak with a few slivers of hope here and there. One story that combines the two for dog lovers is that of 17-year-old Aslan, who traveled over 300 miles from Damascus to Greece on foot with his dog, Rose.



Rose drinking a little water in Greece. (Screenshot)

The story of Aslan and Rose has spread because of [a video posted on Facebook by the UN High Commission on Refugees](#). In the video, the cameraperson asks the most obvious questions, and Aslan responds simply.

Journalist: “Some people will ask — you have only a small bag?”

Aslan: “Yes.”

Journalist: “And you bring your dog?”

Aslan: “Yes.”

Journalist: “Why?”

Aslan: “I love my dog!”

The constant exodus of Syrian refugees is a horror, as is the racism with which some in Europe and North America have greeted the refugees. But horror on such a scale is hard to really grasp. There’s an old saying, often erroneously attributed to Stalin, that captures the problem perfectly: “A single death is a tragedy. A million is a statistic.”



Aslan with his luggage and dog carrier. (Screenshot)

The story of Aslan and Rose is one that helps move the story of the Syrian diaspora from the realm of statistics into something that's more personal and relatable. It is both mundane and heartbreaking; dog lovers can see something of themselves in Aslan, and understand the companionship between him and Rose. That intimacy between human beings and dogs is why we see them as more than just another animal.

At first glance, I found it remarkable that Aslan traveled so far with Rose and went to such lengths to bring her. After all, I know people who have given up their pets under much lesser circumstances. But on a second glance, it doesn't seem so remarkable.

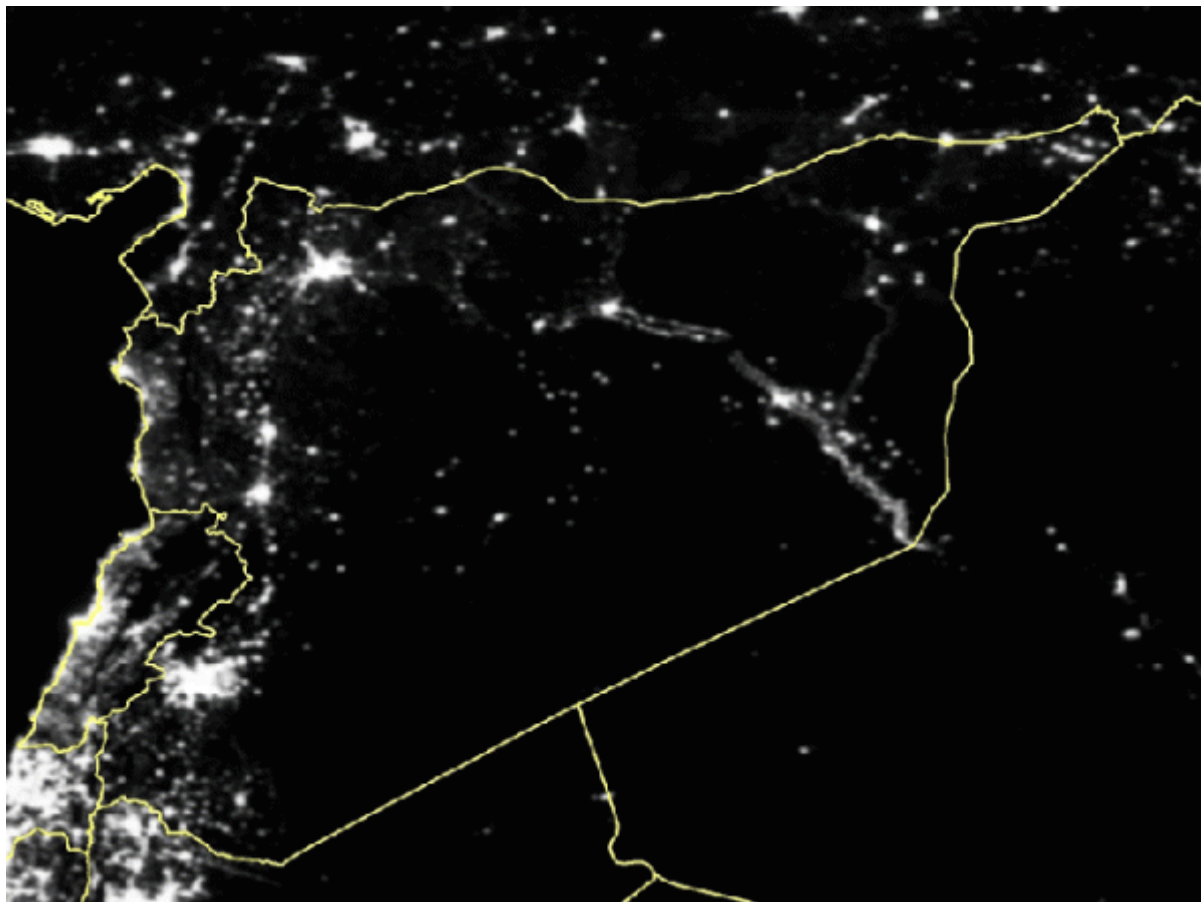


Aslan explains why he brought his dog over 300 miles.

The scale of the trauma that the Syrian refugees have undergone is almost impossible for most of us to conceive of, but one image has been going around the Internet that illustrates it with stark simplicity that even the image of Aylan can't quite achieve. An animated GIF based on satellite pictures of Syria shows the difference between the nighttime lights in 2011 and 2015. It shows Syria's light literally being extinguished. The image from 2011 shows terrestrial constellations scattered throughout the map; in 2015, it's almost completely dark.

That darkness represents not only the people who have died, but the people who will die in Syria because the violence has eradicated so much infrastructure, which people depend on for day-to-day survival. [The news site Quartz says of the maps:](#)

83 percent of the lights in the country are out, according to analysis by scientists from Wuhan University in China in cooperation with the international #withSyria coalition of NGOs. In some of the worst-affected areas, the black-out is nearly total: In Aleppo, 97 percent of the lights have gone out.



We don't know how many people Aslan lost to that spreading darkness, but we do know that he arrived alone. Except for Rose, he brought no friends, no family.

The importance of someplace or *someone* to call home can't be understated, and the tragedy of the Syrian refugees is that they've lost both places and people that represented home for them. Think about that trauma, and it is perfectly understandable, even if you've never owned a dog or even don't particularly like them, why Aslan would hold on so persistently to the very last thing that was part of his home.

I hope that Aslan and Rose find a new home, and that they can do it together. In reading their story, I think that Rose has done for Aslan the very thing that dogs have done best for humans since they first became companions: guarded against the encroaching darkness. Until there are lights in Syria again, dogs and humans alike need to guard each other.

Read more commentary by Chris Hall: