

HUMANS OF  
AMSTERDAM



# INTRODUCTION

For the past four years, total strangers have shared their personal stories with me. I feel it is only fair to take my turn and share my personal story with you.



Photo by Omri Raviv

**In the winter of 2011, when I was a third year Social and Cultural Science student, I found myself about to start a one-year internship in an Amsterdam theatre.** My internship involved PR and Marketing for the theatre, but very soon I realized I wasn't made to sit behind a computer for five days a week. While at the office, most of my time was spent checking my Facebook feed and planning my escape from the theatre, anxious to find work that was more interesting to me. Conflict Resolution is a subject that I have always been passionate about so I wanted to find an internship that involved dialogue. Somehow I managed to talk myself out of the internship at the theatre and in February of that same year, I

boarded a plane to Tel Aviv. I started working for an organization there that was aiming to bring Israelis and Palestinians together through dialogue and the creation of art. During one particular workshop, a Palestinian woman shared her story with the rest of the group; after years of suffering domestic abuse, she had finally filed for divorce. At some point during her story she started crying and everyone cried in sympathy with her. I admired her bravery. That was the first time I experienced the power of storytelling.

**When I finished my internship in September of that year, I knew that I wanted to keep doing something that involved storytelling.** While in

Tel Aviv, I discovered the blog 'Humans of Tel Aviv' and I felt that it was a powerful human representation of the city. So on my return to Amsterdam, I decided to start 'Humans of Amsterdam'. To me it seemed the perfect format with which to continue telling stories. On my twenty-fourth birthday, my parents gave me a digital camera. I had never worked with a semi-professional camera before, but I was highly motivated and excited to get started. In the beginning the pictures weren't very good and the stories were short and rather simplistic. However, looking back on those first photographs still makes me happy because they remind me of how determined I was to learn and grow. As time

passed, the blog continued to attract more followers, and people started to respond to the stories. I began to realize that this blog represented so much more than just me sharing portraits and stories. The followers began to play an incredibly important role in this project, resulting in a daily interaction and conversation prompted by the stories. Thanks to comments from followers, we have been able to make many contributions to help those in need. For example, we managed to raise 10.000 euros which went to help refugees in and around Amsterdam.

**When I graduated from college in January 2014, I had two options; either I found a job related to my studies or I was going to find a way to make a living out of my blog.** It's always been important to me do something that makes me happy. If you can do something you love and are able to provide for yourself, you are a blessed person. Looking for a 9 to 5 job made me anxious, so I knew I had to find a way to make a living out of my blog. I pitched the idea of a weekly photo column to several newspapers. Metro ended up offering me the opportunity to feature my work. Since I wasn't making enough money, I also worked as a part-time cashier in a shop. It was by far the most boring job I ever had, but it was good for me. It made me realize that if I

wanted to follow my ambition, I needed to become a better storyteller, a better photographer, a better writer and turn Humans of Amsterdam into a stronger platform. After a while I got more assignments as a photographer and offers to collaborate from various organizations, until eventually I was able to quit my cashier job and devote all my time to Humans of Amsterdam.

**Humans of Amsterdam has enabled me to do many beautiful things.** I travelled to Nicaragua together with 'UTZ certified' to visit coffee farms and tell the stories of the people who painfully grow and process the beans for our cups of coffee. I have gone back to the Middle East to create a photography and documentary series with my friends of 365docobites. Thanks to Public Library of Amsterdam, I had my first big exhibition and thousands of people were able to see my work in print. Publishing a book has always been one of my dreams. Since I started pitching the idea last year, my book proposal was refused by 30 different publishers so I had put the idea on hold. In the beginning of 2016 when National Geographic proposed the idea of a book I didn't need much time to think about it. I wanted this book to be more than just a collage of photos and quotes from the last four years. I have added longer stories to the book and some

photos which have never been published before.

**It has been quite an adventure.** I could not have done it without the support of my parents (thank you Mum for proofreading my stories including this foreword). My dad who always made sure I wasn't lacking any equipment. Neither could I have done it without my boyfriend Benjamin, who played a big part in helping me decide the final selection for the book. And the biggest support of all, you who follow the blog on a daily basis. Through the years I have read every single comment and message you have sent. Whenever I was running out of energy, your excitement and compassion in this community kept me going. The Humans of Amsterdam project has taught me more than any educational institution.

**To those of you whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, and who confided their stories in me, I'd like to thank you for your time and for putting your trust in me.** Creating this book was an absolute pleasure. I hope you enjoy reading it just as much as I have enjoyed making it.



'WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE  
WHEN YOU GROW UP?'  
'A TRAIN.'



'Every Eid-al-Fitr we buy her new clothes and shoes. This year Yara got to pick them out all by herself.'



'She has never seen a camera like that before.'



'WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?'  
'A PRINCESS DOCTOR.'



'Yesterday there was only one chocolate left, which she really wanted to have. Because her little brother had been grumpy all day she said, "Just give it to him, he needs it more than I do".'

'Growing up I didn't have a lot of money so I was never able to travel outside of London. One year ago I took a big step and I got on a plane to visit my girlfriend in Australia. I wasn't afraid of the flight but to leave my family behind and not knowing what to expect was terrifying. Once I got there I absolutely loved it. Coming to Amsterdam was a big challenge for me. As a twenty five year old I want to be able to travel all by myself. I won't let my fear of the unknown become stronger than my curiosity for travelling and discovering new places.'



'Whenever I see on my Facebook timeline that another friend is travelling the world I feel as if I should do the same. Last year I took one of those "picture perfect" trips to Indonesia. I went for two months and I have never been so homesick in my entire life. I called my mother every day but I was too ashamed to tell her how lonely I felt. Maybe those adventures are not intended for everyone.'

'How would you describe your style?'

'Black is beautiful!'



'YOU THINK WE ARE COLOURFUL? YOU SHOULD SEE OUR DAUGHTER!'



'My girlfriend suggested I should try wearing a colour. I picked out a purple Hugo Boss suit and it just felt right. Now the only item in my wardrobe that isn't purple is a black raincoat. I wore it a few days ago but I wasn't really feeling it.'  
'Why is that?'  
'I guess because black is just so black...'



'HOW ELSE AM I GOING TO TAKE THIS BAD BOY HOME?'



'I am an artist and I make paintings for a living. When I get inspired it has a bad influence on my apartment because what happens is that I get so excited about creating something that I forget to clean.'

'A while ago one of my friends took me to a farm up north which produces completely organic meat. I kind of enjoyed the idea of eating a product, knowing its origin. I stopped buying meat from the grocery store. I thought, if I like it so much then I'm probably not the only one so I came up with an idea. I thought about how to create a connection between the farm and those who were interested in buying organic meat. It's basically like a subscription to clean meat. Every month I go to the farm and then I deliver the order to your door.'



'I have been working in cafés and restaurants almost my entire life. Because of the heavy physical work my back is completely worn out. I keep myself busy in as much as my body will allow me to. I am not the type of person to stay home all day and I am definitely not the kind of person to be sad about my situation.'



'I COULD BE GRUMPY ALL DAY BUT THAT WON'T GET ME ANY FURTHER.'

**'Nowadays young children get vaccinated against polio but in 1948 that didn't exist.** Ten years later there was a proper vaccination available but it was already too late for me. That's why I am partially paralyzed.'

*'How do you cope with that?'*

'You know, it's all about your personal attitude. I could be grumpy all day but that won't get me any further. I accept life the way it is and I am very open about my handicap. Adults find it especially hard to ask me questions about it. Whenever I am in a new environment like a new job for example, I

always tell the people around me that they can ask me anything. Most people are curious about how I manage to drive a car but instead of explaining it I'll give them a demonstration. Kids on the other hand have no problems asking me questions about my handicap. They find the colour of my wheelchair fascinating. Whenever they ask questions about it I see their parents looking shamefaced but I have no problem answering them. As a joke I'll tell them that my wheelchair can go faster than a Ferrari.'



'IN EVERYTHING  
I DO, I TRY TO  
SPREAD  
POSITIVITY.'



His name is Krish and according to his mum he came into this world to spread peace and happiness.



'I travel the world making jewellery. Each country inspires me in a different way.'



**'My grandparents were teachers in New Guinea.** My grandfather educated local teachers enabling them to teach all kinds of subjects. They devoted many years of their lives to making changes for the better. My mum even grew up over there so for me it was a logical choice to become a qualified Doctor Without Borders. At the moment I have to study for one more year and then I'll be ready

to go abroad.'  
 'What do you think will be the hardest thing about being a doctor abroad?'  
 'To be in a completely different environment far away from home will be tough. Also being in charge of a large local medical staff is going to be a big challenge. Besides all of that being a Doctor Without Borders can be dangerous. I know that a few doctors in Syria recently got kidnapped.'



**'How do you know each other?'**

'We're all medical students studying at the same university in Amsterdam. We are currently medical interns in different hospitals.'  
 'If you could change something about the medical system what would it be?'  
 'The current system is very hierarchical. As a medical intern you work full time for three years without getting

paid a dime. The only appreciation you get for the hard work comes mostly from the patients. Most of the doctors are under big pressure and that's why they don't get to spend a lot of time with their patients. The good thing is though, that we as interns get to spend a lot of time with them.'  
 'Isn't it hard to have a close relationship with patients, when there is sometimes a

chance you won't be able to help them?'  
 'That is one of the biggest misconceptions people have about being a doctor. Many think that as a doctor your job is to extend the length of a patient's life but in fact as a doctor you're supposed to contribute to the quality of life, while the patients are still living.'