



THE SURVIVOR

Survivors of Torture, International:

- Facilitates the healing of torture survivors and their families;
- Educates professionals and the public about torture and its consequences;
- Advocates for torture survivors and the abolition of torture.

"SURVIVORS is always there for me and checks up on me, thank you for caring. I am grateful for everything SURVIVORS has done for me."

-SURVIVORS' client from Africa

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Thank You Kathi and Welcome Etleva

After 25 years of devoted service to Survivors of Torture, International, co-founder and Executive Director Kathi Anderson is retiring September 30, 2022. She is known for building an internationally-recognized organization from an idea based on an unmet need to serve torture survivors in San Diego. While the refugee population was known and the asylum seeker population was lesser known, the torture survivor population was invisible and marginalized. Kathi combined her passions and skills in nonprofit leadership, healthcare, multicultural relations, and human rights as she encouraged others to use their passions and skills to create a safe and welcoming community for torture survivors to heal from their physical and psychological wounds. SURVIVORS has now been woven into the fabric of San Diego and beyond.

Kathi later went on to found the California Consortium of Torture Treatment Centers and to co-found the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs. She was voted by her Canadian and U.S. colleagues as the North American representative to the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) and plans to fulfill her term as the treasurer of IRCT's executive committee. Kathi shared that she feels very blessed to have had



Kathi Anderson

Etleva Bejko

such a rewarding career in which she has had a meaningful impact on the lives of torture survivors, their families and those who have cared for them. The board and staff thank her for her commitment to the torture treatment field and wish her the very best in her well-deserved retirement.

SURVIVORS not only thanks Kathi for her service but also warmly welcomes Etleva Bejko, a native of Albania and now a citizen of the United States, as its second executive director. Her first official day at SURVIVORS was September 12, 2022, and it was immediately apparent to all that she was an excellent fit for the job. Etleva came to SURVIVORS following 17 years as the director of Jewish Family Services of San Diego's Refugee Services Department and an additional six years as a refugee

resettlement case manager and interpreter for Catholic Charities. Etleva is well known and highly regarded in the refugee and immigrant community.

Etleva shared, "It is a true honor to join SURVIVORS, an aspiring organization and a primary partner in San Diego doing critical work providing services to torture survivors and beyond. This year SURVIVORS celebrates 25 years of accomplishments in healing, advocacy, and education and its impact on the lives of thousands of vulnerable individuals, their families, and the San Diego community. This milestone is a remarkable achievement and an inspiration to continue furthering the mission and purpose of the organization and its essential contribution to the global fight against torture. Throughout my career, I have worked closely with local, state, and federal partners to address the barriers asylum seekers, asylees, and refugee populations face to improve their health, safety, and overall well-being. I have always admired the work SURVIVORS does, and I look forward to bringing my experience, skills, and network of contacts to help build upon its sterling reputation." We are looking forward to SURVIVORS' next chapter under the new leadership of Etleva as the executive director.

Fondly Remembering George K.H. Falk



Rev. George Falk

Pastor George Falk, co-founder of SURVIVORS, passed away on August 12, 2022. George was born in Frankfurt, Germany on March 5, 1932, during the Nazi regime in which his father had stood up to. After the war, he and his family moved to his mother's hometown, San Diego, where he attended high school and was harassed for being German. After graduating from UC Berkeley and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, he served several Lutheran congregations as their pastor. Those childhood memories and his professional calling fueled his commitment to co-found SURVIVORS and support its mission. He often emphasized standing up for justice and gathering people in settings where they could celebrate life and build caring communities. He wanted to be remembered as one whom "the Lord has given the tongue of those who are taught, that he may know how to sustain with a word those who are weary."

June, a Very Special Month, at SURVIVORS

In 1997, the year SURVIVORS was founded, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed June 26 as the United Nations International Day in Support of Torture Victims. Ever since, it has been commemorated worldwide including in San Diego. This is an annual opportunity for our government, civil society and people everywhere to unite in support of the hundreds to thousands of people who have been tortured and who are still today being tortured.

Clinical Case Manager Heather Serafin and the clinical team organized a day of healing in which torture survivors and their families had the opportunity to build genuine camaraderie. With Mission Bay in the backdrop, torture survivors participated in a drumming circle, snacked on plentiful food and painted inspirational messages and pictures to take home. The day was rounded out with volleyball and soccer games for children and adults alike.



SURVIVORS' staff (left) welcomes guests at our annual ice cream social.



Client (right) playing an instrument at SURVIVORS' annual June event in Mission Bay

Also, in June, thanks to Ben & Jerry's of Seaport Village, SURVIVORS' supporters and staff had their annual ice cream social in our healing center's courtyard. At this year's event, California State Assembly Member Chris Ward's staff presented a proclamation recognizing SURVIVORS for its dedication to caring for survivors from around the world who experienced physical and psychological torture.

Governor Gavin Newsome wrote, "For generations, San Diego County has welcomed many refugees, asylees and asylum seekers, who have made enormous sacrifices and endured unspeakable trauma prior to rebuilding their lives and making a new home in our great state. For the past quarter of a century, Survivors of Torture, International has taken on that legacy – providing free healing services to survivors of politically-motivated torture, and their families, from more than 90 countries. California is fortunate to have had the visionary leadership of Kathi Anderson and the team behind Survivors of Torture, International to welcome many vulnerable people to California and help them build new lives of safety, security and happiness."

June 10 is World Refugee Day as designated by the United Nations. The San Diego Refugee Forum annually marks this day in a variety of ways, including selecting a refugee, asylum seeker or asylee who has been in the United States for five or fewer years and who has already made a significant contribution to our community. Our client, Christine, was one of two who was selected to be honored as a 2022 Refugee Resilience Award recipient. We are so proud of Christine and of all of our clients who continue to overcome obstacles and make amazing strides in their healing. Indeed, June has become a very special month!

Providing In-House Medical Services

As SURVIVORS celebrates its 25th anniversary, a long-time goal is coming to fruition. Through UCSD, SURVIVORS is hiring its first medical director, Safi Ahmed, MPH, MD, whose first day will be October 10, 2022. Dr. Safi is triple board certified in family medicine, psychiatry and neurology, and integrative medicine. Six years ago, his residency included SURVIVORS' psychiatry program. We are thrilled that he is returning to San Diego and will be focused on caring for torture survivors.



Dr. Safi Ahmed, MPH, MD

SURVIVORS has offered psychiatric care, medication management, medical affidavits for asylum seekers, and medical case management for two decades. SURVIVORS will now be able to round out its medical services with a medical director who will be on-site to build trust with and serve our clients.

Dr. Safi will also collaborate on medical cases, share best practices in torture treatment, and help train future healthcare professionals. In being paired with a nurse practitioner student, he will be able to provide quality care that is specific to torture survivors who are often missed or misunderstood in mainstream medicine. Dreams of integrated and culturally responsive medical care are becoming a reality at SURVIVORS, thanks to a vision for all torture survivors to have access to healing and hope.

Healing Society Members who have made five-year pledges of \$1,000 or more per year. **Thank you!**

Anonymous	Denise Francis	Jacob Dean Construction	Michael & Mary McKay	Sandra Peters
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Individual & Family Financial Supporters who gave October 1, 2021 - July 31, 2022. **Thank you!**

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Organizations That Financially Support SURVIVORS who gave July 1, 2021 - July 31, 2022. **Thank you!**

Benevolent California Community College Outreach Program	Johnson & Johnson	Price Philanthropies Foundation	Thrivent Financial Office of Jonathan Doering & Matthew Molstre
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The Tortured: Sorrow and Respect

George F. Longstreth, MD

Section of Gastroenterology, Veterans Administration San Diego Healthcare System, San Diego

"They kept me for 10 weeks and left me for dead." Mr. M's eyes shouted anguish and teared above his coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) mask. His experiences were as dreadful as those of many of the torture survivors I have evaluated, and, similar to the others, his narrative evoked both sadness and great respect for his emotional and physical strength.

I provide pro bono medical evaluations for Survivors of Torture, International, a nonprofit organization in San Diego, California, that provides medical, psychological, and other services for asylum seekers. Amnesty International reports that torture is perpetrated in three-quarters of countries.¹ Most of the people I have evaluated were tortured because of their minority racial or ethnic, sexual or political identity, or their promotion of human rights. Many torture survivors seek safety in the United States, despite the great difficulties they encounter in obtaining legal residence here. After surviving life-threatening experiences abroad, many victims travel to Latin America or originate there and then endure additional hazards while migrating to the U.S.-Mexico border. They request political asylum from border officials and are then typically locked in detention centers for months to years while pursuing the complex, lengthy process of obtaining asylum status.

As Mr. M had done, all clients whom I evaluate have created a legal declaration with a U.S.-licensed attorney that supports their well-founded fear of persecution if forced to return home. Without assistance of an attorney, victims usually do not obtain asylum. I interview clients to confirm and expand the details in their declarations, inquire about continuing posttraumatic symptoms, examine them for physical findings that correlate with their accounts, and prepare summaries that accompany psychological evaluations by mental health professionals for the immigration court.

During my interview, the detail I elicit resembles that of other features of a thorough medical history, but inquiry about torture rarely occurs in usual medical practice, even from foreign-born immigrants who may have originated in countries where torture is committed. For example, about 1 in 9 foreign-born individuals seeking care at a Boston primary care clinic reported a history of torture, which most had not previously reported to their U.S. physicians.² Some clients disclose maltreatment to me that they did not report to their attorney, especially sexual abuse. Many have witnessed the murder of family members or friends. Nearly all have insomnia, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and other symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. I proceed

slowly and gently, knowing that many victims experience renewed mental trauma when they describe their torture, as Mr. M displayed. I dislike triggering such distress, but the importance of associating the details of how physical injuries were inflicted with the resulting examination findings motivates me to continue, as empathetically as I can.

Two armed guards, whose large physiques contrasted with Mr. M's slender build, brought him from the detention center with chains restricting his wrists and legs. After more than 20 years of volunteering, I still have a sense of shame when I meet a chained client who appears subjugated after having already endured extraordinarily severe hardship. After the interview, I request removal of the restraints for the physical evaluation, to which the guards respond by releasing only one chain at a time, allowing clients to sequentially remove their shirts and pants. The guards often require a partially opened examination room door to maintain sight of the client, which I close as much as I think they will accept to minimize further humiliating the victim. I think, *don't you realize that you don't need to watch him. He is chained and wants my help and is not going to jump out of a second-floor window.*

Mr. M, previously a journalist, had reported on government-backed suppression of peaceful human rights demonstrations and on beatings and rapes of citizens by police with impunity. He described uniformed men firing guns at people in demonstrations and arresting some who were never seen again. Police had threatened him with death if he did not stop publicizing these accounts, but he persisted. I questioned whether I would have had the courage to do that.



Dr. Longstreth performing a medical evaluation at SURVIVORS' healing center in San Diego.

Three years before my evaluation, police arrested him at work, beat him with batons and gun butts, and detained him in a dark, filthy cell with little food and water for 10 weeks. The perpetrators frequently beat much of his body with a wooden rod, including the soles of his feet (a form of torture called *falanga*³), administered electrical shocks to his genitalia and feet, immersed him shoeless in a water-filled hole containing broken glass, stabbed his abdomen with a bayonet, and finally abandoned him near the confinement facility. Fortunately, his family took him to a hospital where he underwent surgery, treatment of a left wrist fracture, and a long recuperation.

Nurses told his family that the police had come to the hospital looking for him after his discharge. He knew that to prevent being killed he had to leave his country. He fled, aided by smugglers whom he paid with money from his family. He flew to Ecuador, a common initial destination for asylum seekers due to its favorable visa policies. After starting northward, he was captured and held with his legs shackled and repeatedly beaten for 1 year until his family paid for his release. He hired more smugglers, was incarcerated by immigration authorities in a South American country for 7 months, traversed the notoriously dangerous Darién Gap in Panama, and finally reached the United States. Some survivors of severe torture in their home countries undoubtedly die on route to the United States, but little information exists on such tragedies.

Physical examination of Mr. M revealed multiple skin scars that would be expected from the trauma he described, focal hyperpigmentation typical of healed bruises, and chronic foot findings characteristic of *falanga*.^{3,4} He had a long, vertical, midline laparotomy scar with suture marks, small scars typical of peritoneal drainage sites, and a linear transverse scar near the umbilicus the length that would be produced by a bayonet wound. His left wrist was tender. Using the hierarchy of causation in the United Nations Istanbul Protocol,⁵ I assigned major degrees of consistency to the physical findings with his attributions for them, bolstering his case for asylum.

Aided by his attorney, the declaration, a psychological evaluation, and my medical assessment, the immigration court granted Mr. M asylum status, and he moved to another state to live with a relative. When I phoned him a few months later, he still had flashbacks and other symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and worried about the welfare of his family remaining in his home country. But he described walking daily to reduce anxiety and "clear my mind." He was awaiting a work permit, explaining that he wanted employment to support himself and adding, "If you help people, God will help you."

I was deeply moved that he expressed such enduring humanity despite the horror of what people had done to him. Immediately after evaluating Mr. M and other torture victims I feel drained yet privileged to meet and assist these exceptional human beings, one of the most rewarding aspects of my medical career. Teaching medical students⁶ and residents⁷ how to evaluate torture survivors could increase the number of physicians who do this valuable work. The victims deserve our efforts to make their lives safer.

Acknowledgements

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Survivors Referrals Increasing

Over the summer SURVIVORS has seen a large increase in referrals to our healing center. Conflicts and oppressive regimes around the world, from the war in Ukraine to the Taliban in Afghanistan, have forced many to flee their homes to find safety in the U.S. While not all arrivals are torture survivors, SURVIVORS stands ready to provide for the estimated 44% of refugees who are survivors of torture.

SURVIVORS' Increasing Referrals

May 2022	22 clients
June 2022	37 clients
July 2022	54 clients
August 2022	21 clients

University of San Diego and SURVIVORS Uplift Afghan Women

SURVIVORS gladly agreed to participate in Onward for Afghan Women's project at the University of San Diego where a two-week retreat was offered to prominent women who had been leaders and activists in Afghanistan and had now found themselves making their way in a new country. They had been living in different cities in the United States for eight to nine months and had already begun the integration process. At the retreat, SURVIVORS' Senior Mental Health Specialist Nance Lovell provided resilience sessions that focused on coping skills, such as exercises in deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, visualizations, grounding and self-care. Each woman was also offered individual therapy with Nance. She said, "It was truly an honor to meet and serve these women. They will certainly become strong leaders here in the U.S."

Thank you to our generous 2022 event underwriters



Jeanette Barrack



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SURVIVORS is an IRS 501(C)(3) nonprofit. Eighty-six cents out of every dollar raised goes directly to SURVIVORS' programs. Our federal tax ID number is 33-0743869.

LOOK INSIDE!

To read Dr. Longstreth's latest contribution to The American Journal of Medicine

Have you included SURVIVORS in your estate planning? Would you like to know how to make a planned gift to SURVIVORS? Check out our new Healing Legacy Circle at: notorture.org/healing-legacy-circle

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims

SURVIVORS is an IRCT-accredited torture treatment center