

This Fourth of July, I took a break from the normal nationalistic fervor and celebrated the day of freedom and democracy in a different way. This year, I went down to the endangered planet gallery in Laguna Beach to take part in a historic display of genuine American care and generosity. On July 4th, me and 10 other American youths painted a mural. What's so special about a mural you ask?

I suppose that I should start at the beginning. On June 27th, Joanne Tawfillis approached me with a unique opportunity. Renowned Iraqi artist Qais Al Sindy would be in town the next week and he had agreed to help paint a mural as part of the art miles mural project. However, this would be no ordinary mural. Qais had been working with Iraqi children in Jordanian refugee camps as part of the Iraqi Children's Art Exchange. Through his work, Qais was able to provide the Art Miles Mural project with an invaluable opportunity: Half of the mural would be completed in Laguna Beach, while the other half would be completed by Iraqi children in Jordanian Refugee camps. Needless to say, I jumped at the opportunity. However, the preparation for the event was no mean feat. We had a week to get a press release, get a venue, get supplies, and, most importantly, get people. The week leading up to the event was hectic, to say the least. However, everything fell into place, and by the Fourth, we were ready for a memorable experience. At the start, there were only six of us. However, that number soon grew. Qais sketched a beautiful mural encompassing our spirit of understanding and compassion toward the refugee children. Painting the mural was an enjoyable and unforgettable experience. By the end of the day, we had all created something that we could be proud of.

In retrospect, there were a thousand other things that I could have done that day. I could have gone to the beach, seen a movie, or gone to a barbeque. But somehow, I don't think any of those things would have given the feelings of happiness and accomplishment that I received as a result of my work that day. What the youth of Laguna Beach accomplished that day was in the true spirit of Independence. In these times of war, the youth did what politicians seem incapable of accomplishing or fathoming: we extended a genuine olive branch to the disheartened and destitute youth who have been so adversely affected by a war that is not of their doing. By receiving this mural, I hope that the children in these refugee camps realize that not all Americans are governmental bigwigs, and that the majority of citizens sympathize and empathize over their plight. For those of us truly seek to make the world a more peaceful place, the mural was a beacon of our willingness to bridge the gap between cultures, races, and religions in hopes of creating a long lasting global unity.

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