

Dear ladies and Gentlemen, believers to all faith and non-believers
Today is a very special day for me , actually it is a remarkable day to be with you and share my journey, the journey of a women, a migrant, a cancer patient with you as 374 lion sermon.

My life was guided by the love and care of my parents, grandparents especially my maternal grandmother who taught me unconditional love, patience, not to give my time to those who talk bad about me , thank those who constructively criticize me, be humble, be strong, be proud be kind , always share with others and help those in need, never be weak shy ,rude or arrogant

My childhood was great , we were poor, but I was loved unconditionally and felt everyday how the power of love can make better anything you face like poverty, bullying or war.

I was the first one on my family to finish university, engineering. And it came as a result of working very hard, changing our destiny.

I got married with the love of my life, God blessed me with a child but due to a nearly civil war we had to leave our home and ended up here in UK, feeling lost, lonely, not able to speak the language, nor know how to travel or know how to navigate the support available.

I was a young mum and pregnant with my second child.

We arrived in London on a cold January night. We were grateful to be accommodated in a one-bedroom flat, but the heating was not working, and we were all with our coats on wating for the morning to come and someone knocked at the door, a beautiful young woman with a little girl came with a big bowl of warm soup and she also fixed the heating and brought us a blanket.

From that day I believed everything happens for a good reason.

Hannah my beautiful neighbour stayed present in our life for more than 6 months, she took us to different shops and markets, taught us how to travel, changed our vouchers into money and when my son was born, she and her family brought me everything for a newborn baby.

When we were moved to Newham, she took me to a local charity where I met wonderful people like sister Mary, Catherine Woodall, Emma Morton, Esme Madill, Anne Easter, Marnie Freeman, Moya Hamilton who helped. inspired and guided me to do what I do today.

I also met my soul sisters Flutra Shega and Evis Bodili who became my source of energy and they supported and helped many more refugee & immigrant women who become part of our journey helping themselves and each other

Sister Mary helped me quite a lot. and through talking to her about how she found faith and became a nun devoted to God helped me to start being curious about my spiritual journey . I lived close to our Lady of Compassion church and studied the Bible and was baptised on easter 2001 together with my children. At that time, I felt complete. I found my mission my friends, my supporters, and my faith .

In terms of my self-development and curiosity I was particular drawn by two movements the school For social entrepreneurs and community Organising . Both the CEO Alistair Wilson and Neil Jameson become my source of knowledge, they trusted me , they offered friendship and support to me and my team to enable the integration with dignity of the Albanian speaking community here in UK

Over the years we achieved amazing things. We changed the lives of thousands of people to integrate with dignity and became an award-winning organisation . Shpresa received the Queen's Award for

Volunteering in 2004. We hold the London Youth Quality Mark, Gold Award for excellence in our Youth Work provision. We also hold the Special Distinction Award from the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education for exceptional all-round high quality supplementary school provision. We were awarded the Forum for Health and Well Being's Communities of Health Award for the third year running in 2016. Shpresa programme fully achieved the Trusted Charity level 2 Quality Mark(known as PQASSO level 2 4rth addition) from NCVO in August 2018 .

In October 2016 and October 2022, we were delighted to receive the Marsh Award for our contribution to the fight against modern slavery for our work with trafficked women and children.

I also was invited to No. 10 and Buckingham Palace along with receiving many recognitions such as an Honorary Award as Migrant and Refugee Woman of the year in 2012, the David Crystal Award from the Chartered Institute of Linguists in 2014 in recognition of her work with Shpresa Programme fostering the study of community languages, the Ambassador For Peace from Universal Peace federation December 2016 and recently May 2017 the UK Foreign Social Entrepreneur Award from Money Gram. I recently was awarded the prestigious Freedom of the Borough from the Barking and Dagenham Council in June 2023 and the Anne Estela Lifetime Achievement Award in March 2023.

Remembering that we lost everything we had was the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make big choices in life and never give up

Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure – these things just fall away in the face of crisis or death, leaving you with only what is truly important.

Remembering that there is no way back is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. When in this position you are already naked of everything .

There is no reason not to follow your heart and GOD. This helped us to believe and fight which brought changes with campaigns such as end child detention, turning strangers into citizens, living wage, safer city, and lunar housing enquiry.

When I thought everything was going well, about a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer.

The doctor told me that it was a miracle that I have made to hospital I had a big mass in my heart. I did not take it seriously as I never had heard that cancer can grow in heart, I thought it is a mistake

I asked doctor how serious it is

I never would forget his straight face - as serious as I don't want you to move from this bed

2 days after I was taken to Bart hospital where I had an open-heart surgery, via an auto transplant the mass was taken successfully only to be told that is a very aggressive cancer, and is terminal

The doctors told me that the team of UCLH will take care of me. I stayed at Barts nearly a month, many people came every day to visit, I was showered with love and care in person and digitally, I got to know the work of nurses and Dr and help everyday any other patient in the ward , even sometimes nurses

I never felt hopeless, lonely, or scared.

I accepted where I was , I understood my diagnoses, but I never felt alone , I truly believed that God kept me alive and he plans for me, and I trusted Dr to keep fighting

My first appointment at UCLH was I Don't know how to explain the Dr was almost certainly that the type of cancer was so rare and was incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than 8-12months if I did the Chemo. I saw tears in her eyes while talking to me. But for some reason I kept believing that God has is own plans,

all my life was filled with moments when I was afraid, on in doubt and I was grateful. If he decided to take me, I would be closer to him I went home and started to get my affairs in order. You learn about Will, Trust, Insurances and try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 20-30 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. However, I never felt my time had come

There were times when I broke down, there were moments I which I fall apart. These are moments in time where my smile became an expression of strength my way forward. I knew this could be the journey of many , so I started sharing that online too

The Dr expression “is a miracle you made it here” kept me believing God had other plans for me.

When we are born, we all know we are temporary in this world, we don't think we are born with death penalty, we forget. For me this was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more years to come . Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was only a concept:

I never in 52 year have met someone who wants to die, I have met people who are in dark place and thinking suicide, but we have done everything possible to help them not to plan that.

I have met people who want to go to heaven, but they don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. Is our price to pay No one has ever escaped it.

And to be honest we should be taught in school and with family at how to deal with death , how to see it as a good thing as the best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent.

Very often institutions are taught to change management. Death clears out the old to make way for the new.

Right now, every one of you , is young people, is everyone who is healthy but someday not too long from now, they will grow and become the old and be cleared away.

Sorry to be so bold and simple, but I want to normalize DEATH.

Our time in this planet is limited,

So don't waste it

Don't hate but love

Don't destroy but build

Don't judge but offer solution

Don't just talk but get your hand dirty

Be helpful and be grateful

Never feel powerless , if no one is fighting for you , you fight for yourself

Have the courage to follow our heart and intuition as they somehow know what you truly want.

If I, a refugee who came without knowing the language managed to rebuild my life, build an organisation to inspire hope to over 3000 people, build partnerships to solve identified needs and develop leaders with lived experiences can, anyone can.