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Kindness: The Man Who Taught Me the Meaning of Friendship By KAT GAL

He was visionary genius or perhaps a crazy lunatic. You decide. He was completely chaotic, yet in his own ways, incredibly organized. Possibly the smartest and most certainly the kindest man I have known.

Being a nomad, I meet many people on the road. Some I only connect with for a moment through a smile, while others I travel or volunteer with for months. Some are locals, some are fellow travelers, some are both, and some are in-between. Some I keep in touch with, some I never see again, and some I even forget about.

But there are always a rare few who change my life.

"Hello, my friend", he said the first time we met.

"Good-bye, my friend," was the last thing he told me as I departed Turkey.

In between hello and good-bye, there was a countless amount of kindness only "for you, my friend." Only for us: his friends.

Everyone is his friend. As soon as I stepped foot into his kitchen, I felt at home. I knew I was his friend, in fact his family, right away. He has a heart bigger than his body with never-ending love pouring out from all of his cells. He told me to feel at home, and I did. He shared his food, his work, his free time.

Life is a big joke, he believed, so we may as well enjoy it together.

Picking olives may sound like an easy job for a volunteer. Of course it is not hard, but it is repetitive, it can be boring and your neck stiffens up in the process. But picking olives is not about simply picking olives. It connected us to nature. It taught us about patience, appreciation, and gratitude.

Olives were part of his greater plan of permaculture, of creating a sustainable system, of nurturing life, of cultivating food, and of sharing life with his friends. With each olive, he picked a piece of happiness and love that he shared immediately with his friends. All the olives on his farm were a representation of life – the life we all shared there.

On his beautiful olive orchard, we connected to nature and connected with each other, volunteers and locals like. We shared food and laughs. There were no rules, yet in a fluid, natural manner everything would get done – both in work and fun. Perfection was never expected. I felt accepted along with my flaws and forgiven for my mistakes.

Today, far away from Turkey, as I sit here pouring tahini over my fruit bowl for breakfast, I remember Ali.

"Hello, my friend", he said with the warmest, most accepting welcome, and a quirky smile. With that welcome, he showed me what family was.

"Thank you, my friend," I want to tell him, "you've truly changed my life."

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