

## JUST THANKS

That day would be a very special day. That day would mark a before and after in my life, a new beginning as a citizen in a new land full of opportunities, Europe. That day, countless doors would open in my life, full of dreams that I will come true.

I will never forget that day, on July 25, 2011, being only eight years old, I left my small village in North Africa, looking for security.

After years of savings, my parents managed to get enough money to be able to buy a one-way trip to any country in the European Union.

My parents and my best friends's parents talked continually about the wonders of the developed countries. They say that we could go to school there without having to walk miles. That there, we will have teachers who will teach us many subjects so, when we get older we could be whatever we want. You don't need to work being a child, and when you work you will earn a lot of money if you have studied.

And they said there's one thing called justice, and if someone does something wrong and you complain, the bad guy will have a punishment and he won't do it again. It sounded great because if there was justice or something similar here, many tragedies could have been avoided.

All of us who live in my village know each other and are friends. There's never any problem between us. But often, neighboring villages are picking out our crops and the little money we have. We can do nothing, because they are armed and we don't want more problems, but if there were justice we wouldn't have famines.

They said that in the European Union, in every house there is something called tap, and just by turning a handle, a jet of clean and transparent water would fall into your hands. At first I couldn't believe it, it seemed impossible. The water would have to be brought by someone...

In our village, my friend Anna and I were responsible for bringing water from the well. It was one of the best jobs we could have. It was dangerous, like all jobs, because if you slipped and fell into the well, you would surely die. But we only had to lower the empty buckets to the well and raise them with water and something as simple as that made the whole village happy. When we filled two barrels we finished our shift and we only had to take them to our village, which was two kilometers away.

We only had to do two shifts a day because we were young. We worked voluntarily and all the jobs are distributed along the villagers, so we all helped each other. The problem was that recently children couldn't survive more than five years, and old people aren't working because they couldn't continue with his work.

There are fewer people who can work, and the work remained the same ...

It was an adventure I was not going to undertake only with my parents. My best friends would come with me Anna, Moisés and Adam. Also their parents would come. Anna, Moisés, Adam and I are friends almost since we were born. Our parents were best friends, like us. As soon as we learned to speak we made a promise: we would be friends forever, no matter what happened we would stay together. And until July 25 that promise had never failed.

We had already made plans of how we would live in Europe. We would all live nearby, on the same street. Anna and I would live in the same house and Moisés and Adam would live in a house in front of our house, so we could see each other from the windows.

The truth is that when we talked with Anna about living together I don't know if she referred to us as friends or as something else because Anna and I have always been friends but I was starting to love her, so I would tell it when we left África ...

That day I got up knowing that everything will get better. The sky looked more blue than other days and the Sun filled every corner of light. I got up from my small bed and left my house to find my parents closing a bag with our most valuable belongings. But I was surprised when they left things like their winter shoes ...

They were very happy, it had been years since I saw them so happy. They gave off a contagious happiness and I smiled when I saw them.

We took the little luggage we had and went to Moisés's house, where his family was waiting for us.

His family looked like mine, excited and energetic. We walked a long way to Adam's house and we were playing "pilla pilla" on the way.

We passed through the house of Moises and then of Anna. Moises was crying when we picked him up, and his parents too. I didn't understand why, because Moises was the oldest of us and he shouldn't be afraid. Since that, the trip stopped being as cheerful as before. The sky turned gray and a voice inside of my brain told me that something wrong will happend. We didn't live near the coast so we had to walk for five hours.

When we arrived they told us that there were problems with the boats and that they would have to separate us. My parents pushed me into a boat and gave me the bag, seconds later the boat was far from a shore where my parents were smiling and saying goodbye to me, saying that they loved me and that they would never forget me. They told me that from that moment I would have a future and I could come true my dreams.

Everything happened so fast and I didn't have time to react. When I looked for my friends, I discovered, horrified, that they weren't with me and that our promise had been broken.

Each one was in a different boat. In a minute we had being separated from our parents and I found myself alone in the middle of the sea.

I could never tell Anna how I felt about her, either i couldn't be Moises and Adam's neighbour. I would never see them again in my life ...

The trip was very long and I spent all the time thinking about how much I will miss my friends and my family. I thought about everything my parents had given up to give me a chance in life and I decided that I should take this opportunity to the fullest.

Days passed and I only saw the sea. But on the fifth day, they found us and rescued us on the shores of Spain.

When I set foot in Spanish territory for the first time I felt that from that moment everything would be possible. I armed myself with hope and decided to continue forward.

When they got off the boat, they took me to a building where I received medical attention and food.

At the begining, I did not understand anything, because I did not speak Spanish. But in the end I understood that I could not stay in Cádiz because there was no place for me. They put me in a very big vehicle called bus, which was like twice my house but it was over wheels.

In the bus, I fell asleep thinking about everything that awaited me ... when I woke up they told me that I was in Murcia. There they welcomed me in an orphanage until a family decided to adopt me.

A month after arriving, I had a new home, a dream house with taps and water, beds with mattresses, thick walls and also fire in the kitchen. All my life had changed. Yes, I missed my family and my friends, I would have done anything to be with them, but now I had to take advantage of everything I had and be grateful for the luck I have.

After I moved in with my new family, who was very kind to me, I started school. At first I thought that when I started school, the kids would laugh at me. Because they had been studying since they were born and knew how to read and write. They were also very different from me and spoke another language.

But for my surprise, when I arrived, some guys talked to me and we ended up playing ball.

No one treated me badly, as much they looked at me with curiosity because they had never seen a child like me. We all played with everyone, after all we are all the same.

The first month it was difficult for me to talk with the others, because they didn't understand me, but I tried to learn Spanish and after a couple of weeks I started to speak fluently. I felt integrated and step by step the sadness of having abandoned my parents was changed by happiness.

Nine years later, I had many friends and I was as part of my class as any other student could be. Step by step I improved my marks until I became one of the best students in my class.

I was already used to a normal life as a citizen of the European Union. The taps no longer surprised me, the justice was something usual, I felt safe. I was already used with the vehicles and technologies.

My life took an incredible turn on July 25. I left some important things, but now we had a guaranteed future full of opportunities.

One morning I woke up as an usual day. When I arrived at my highschool, a teacher proposed us to participate in a project called "Erasmus +". Participating in "Erasmus +", We would travel to France, Poland and Germany. We could make new friends, know other cultures, improve our English level ... And the one thing we have to do was doing an exercise. It is not necessary to pay hotels or anything similar.

It was a gift. An incredible opportunity, impossible to refuse and I did it.

I got into the project and on some weeks my first meeting will take place in France.

I couldn't imagine that something as simple as doing an exercise would be the price for a trip full of experiences and a meet that I would never forget.

When I arrived in Verdun, after getting off the plane, I saw Anna. I couldn't believe it, I thought it was a dream or that my mind can't remember Anna's face ... but no, it was real, it was her and she was in front of me. I dropped my suitcase and ran to her to give her the most beautiful hug of my life.

When she saw me, she didn't recognize me, but when I hugged her she recognized me and began to cry in my arms.

We started talking, I told her how I arrived in Murcia and how I started my life in Spain. The story of how sweet my family had been with me, how I had been taught in school. I told her how I learned Spanish and how I became one of the best students in my class. Do not leave me any details, I told her what happened to me since I stepped on the shore of Cadiz until I got off that plane from Verdun.

While we were talking at the airport we heard that the German and Polish's student had reached.

First we went to the meeting point. Later, when we saw that Moises and Adam were between the other students we ran to hug them.

We talked about how our lives have been since we left our village.

Moises explained us that our parents could not accompany us because the trip was too expensive, but they preferred to give us a new life before we sank with our village.

Moises finished in Poland, he arrived in Italy with his boat and from there he was sent to Poland.

Adam lives in Germany with a very rich family. They adopted him in France while they were on holidays. Since that he has not lacked anything and has been living between luxury and affection.

Anna came down from her boat in France and there she was welcomed by an orphanage like me, but she took longer to find a family.

We all achieve a life full of privileges and rights within the European Union

Thanks to "Erasmus +", all of us managed to get back together and save the promise we had. Thanks to a simple exercise we managed to revive the

strongest friendship of my life. Thanks to this project gift we managed to keep in touch. Thanks to "Erasmus +" I found the woman of my life with who I got married .

I can simply thank my parents for giving me so many opportunities.

Thank you for giving me a place in a land full of freedom, equality, security, rights, democracy and hope.