

Far from my country

I was fifteen when my country, Ecuador, was experiencing a territorial conflict that had forced many people to leave their homes, to emigrate or hide. So, did my mother. She had a very well-established beauty salon, large and with plenty of customers every day but with that sequence of events business soon began to fall, and my mother started to struggle to raise her three children alone.

We moved to my grandparents', in the countryside and a carefree life period began, despite the turmoil in the country. We would ride bicycles on the mountain roads, discover life in the woods and follow animal trails as a game. One of the exciting adventures for example, was when we would go into the chicken house to get freshly hatched eggs, or when we would spy on my grandmother while cooking chicken, baking bread in a wood-fire oven, and other times when we'd go watch my grandfather prepare and train fighting cocks.

We also had, of course, our school obligations and we followed all the classes very carefully. It was a life lived with a certain tranquility and to us, the nation's turmoil only came to our ears just by its echo on the news. I didn't have a father, unfortunately, but there was my uncle who protected me, helped me and he became my role model.

Unfortunately, my mother was forced to leave us and emigrate to Italy eventually - and a lot of things changed after that. With her example, she had taught me to be strong, and when she left us all that power vanished into thin air. I took her departure very badly and for fifteen days I couldn't get out of my bedroom, neither could I eat nor go to the bathroom. I had locked myself up until when, one day, I realized that my brothers were in need of their older sister, a sister who had to be strong.

I had been a good student, I'd always had good grades, but the pain of living without my mum had taken me deeply down.

I started drinking one beer up to a whole bottle of whiskey a day without getting drunk. At the age of 17, I got a very severe gastritis for which the doctor was very clear about: "either you stop drinking or you will get a stomach cancer."
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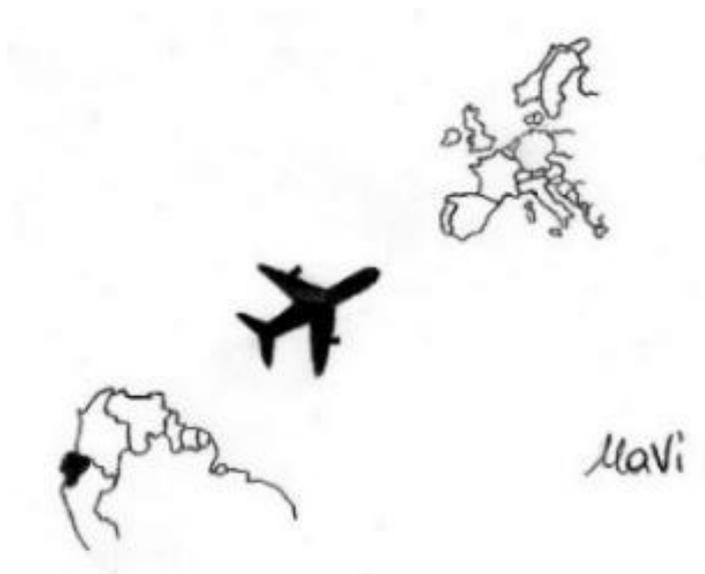
Facing this reality, I gave up drinking on that very day. I was also struck by the sight of an 18-year-old girl coming out of the OR after not having followed the same doctor's advice - I saw myself there, and if I didn't follow his advice that would have been my next place, and this frightened me so much and gave me the strength to stop.

Without my mother my days were dull and meaningless - I didn't want to do anything and I had no energy nor imagination. She was my breath, my eyes, my voice, she was the reason for my living, the reason and incentive for my studying. Thanks to her I was the only one graduating with honors. Now, I was longing to reach out for her and too many years had gone without one of her hugs.

I was also missing my brother and sister. They stayed with me for a while but, being younger, they had to join my mother long before me. I was counting the days to take that plane and see them one day, so many tears, so many years of deep and silent pain would

have been paid off on the day I could look directly into her eyes again.

I disliked the idea of leaving my relatives and friends but the joy of hugging my mom and my siblings again would make up for everything. The days before my departure I couldn't sleep at all and I felt a lot of contrasting emotions. On the one hand I was very happy, while on the other I felt so much pain for leaving who I loved to get to whom I loved even more.



On the day of departure, at the airport, everyone was crying. The sky was dark and the eyes of those who loved me were full of sorrow - a suffering at the hedge of happiness for me. I hugged each one of them very passionately while they were begging me not to forget them - as if it was possible at all!

I was looking at my grandparent's grey hair, my uncles forced smiles, my friends' silly jokes which unfortunately did not make me laugh. Amongst all my loved ones, I was also leaving my boyfriend - I promised him that I would have come back after a year and I asked him to wait for me.

I hated airports, for me it had been a symbol of sorrow, but once I took my seat on the plane, regardless of my tears, I was happy and started travelling with my imagination soon. I started dreaming about the new life with my family - we had to make up for six years of separation. I thought my degree in tourism and my ability to speak English, Italian and Spanish would help me get a job easily.

As I heard the plane's turbines, my heart started stirring and I could see the runaway lights. People got smaller and farther away, and I could see their hands waving at us - the migrants. When the plane began to pick up speed my heart started beating even faster. My tummy was in pain as I felt the detachment from land ...that moment, in that precise moment I felt a tear inside myself, an immense void marked by a tear in my eyes. I clearly felt a piece of myself stuck there. It was as if I were a tree and part of the roots, although the plane was going up, wouldn't let disconnect me from that land where I was born and grew.

Many hours on the plane past, and as I was watching the clouds I kept dreaming about my new life. During the flight, at some point, the sky was half in the day and the other half in the night: I wondered if it was a message from the universe or simply an atmospheric phenomenon.

On that plane already, I began to feel the differences in food, and I did not like it - where were the flavours? When the captain announced the landing, I began to feel the same emotions of the take-off: stomach ache, sweating, fast heart beat so that it seemed to get out of my chest. Seeing the clouds as we were descending toward my new home, which would allow me to hug my loved ones again, calmed me down and when we touched the ground a sudden feeling of profound peace and joy pervaded my body and my soul.

While all the passengers were clapping their hands (it's a typical custom in Italy to applaud right after landing -TN) I was paralyzed with joy and by the thought that all the things I had dreamt of would soon become reality. I couldn't wait to see my loved ones and hug them again. Time stood still as everyone around me seemed to have become the slowest people on earth.

Every step in that long isle got me closer and closer to happiness. The doors opened, and I could see my three loved ones with their arms wide open.

That day was definitely the happiest day of my life. We all hugged very passionately and swore we would never part away from each other, ever again. We promised we would make all our dreams come true and remain forever close.