

SACRIFICE

Life creates many amazing stories that stick with you forever. I guess that when my skin is wrinkly and my hair is grey to the tips, I'll have my own story to tell. However sometimes these stories don't have to be personal for you to have a connection with them. In fact, the stories of others can seem even closer to you than your own. Like a spider's web, they cling to your heart.

Such a story was my uncle's. A story of courage, bravery, and aspiration to achieve his goals. His story opened my eyes both to how much people like him have suffered and to what an amazing and dedicated person he is.

My uncle, at the tender age of 19, was desperate for a life in which he would be happy and successful. He had many goals and was adamant that he would achieve them regardless of any obstacles. However, in a rural village with a widowed mother and eight siblings, his goals seemed to be carried away by a strong wind before he could even have the chance to get anywhere near them. So, what was the choice? It was to migrate to Greece, a country regarded as a sweet haven in the 1990s. Whether this decision was one that showed his bravery, or his idiocy and his risk taking personality, I am not quite sure of. What I'm certain of, however, is that I would never have the courage to do this. Where I like to play it safe, my uncle was a rebel and would not allow any obstacles to stop him from getting what he wanted.

What my uncle wanted was a good life. By good, I mean a place where he could have a family, and fulfil their needs and desires. A place where his work, money and happiness would be secured. Albania was not the place he was looking for. He knew that his life would be equivalent to those of the people that surrounded him, people that spent their time cultivating plants, and never getting anywhere in life. He despised that life. So, with this goal in mind, and eager to get away from the life that seemed destined for anyone who lived in his village, he went to Greece. Or more accurately, he walked to Greece.

He hadn't taken a car on purpose. A car would be identifiable and visible from a distance. How was he supposed to creep past police on the lookout for illegal immigrants when he was in a massive piece of metal?

It takes three days to walk to Greece and, with no houses around and only an isolated barren landscape surrounding him, sleeping on the ground was the only option.

Camping is definitely not something I would ever enjoy. Being someone that screams at the sight of a bee, sleeping on a hard floor where a vast variety of different insects and animals are lurking would probably not be a very good idea. Why people actually make the choice to camp will remain forever a mystery to me, but sometimes, camping is not a choice: it's a necessity to survive.

My uncle was nearing the end of his trek through the unknown wilderness, and had walked all day through the flat isolated land. He knew he had to rest soon. He was tired, exhausted and racked and drained of all the energy in him. The blistering heat of the sun that had burnt him during the day had lessened in intensity now that the day was coming to an end, but it was still hot, and his hair was plastered to his face with sweat. His muscles ached with the exhaustion of walking all day. He knew that, without some rest, he would just collapse onto the burning rocks and fine sand that blew into his face. Also, night was descending and he could see the stars.

So, creating a mound of sand that would serve as a pillow and lying onto the jagged rocks that pressed painfully against his back, he gazed up at the stars overhead that sparkled and shone in the ever darkening sky. The stars were deceiving: they gave the illusion of peace, hope, and beauty, but the landscape was barren and the stars could not give him any comfort. The stars did not diminish the terrifying thoughts that were churning in his head on how to escape the police tomorrow. He was aware that, if caught, he would be thrown into an unhygienic prison and might not ever be able to see sunlight again. He would be surrounded with prisoners that were eager for a fight, and the police would not serve as protection. In fact they were probably the biggest threat. He knew that getting through tomorrow would be crucial, but succeeding seemed like impossibility now.

At the beginning he had felt invincible, like nothing could take him down but now, lying on the ground with doubts emerging in his mind, his confidence lessened. He fell asleep with thoughts of failure on his mind, a tear falling down his cheek at the memories of what he'd left behind, wishing that the night would last forever so he wouldn't have to face what tomorrow held for him.

He woke up a couple of hours later at the sun burning his eyes. Squinting, he got up, dusted himself from the sand that clung to him, put his bag on his shoulder, and started his journey. The border was so close it was scary. He could feel the pressure getting to him. His heart started beating against his rib cage and he could feel a lump in his throat. He was beginning to doubt himself. He didn't know if what he was doing was the right thing and whether the pros were worth risking the consequences. He was aching to go back. Every ounce of his body wanted to go back, apart from his heart. Because he knew that danger would not be present in the peaceful village where he came from, but he wouldn't have achieved his goal. That's what scared him more than the border. Being a failure, living with the thoughts that he could have created a better life for his family.

Migration is a sacrifice. You leave everything behind, and often you leave the comfort of your home country for a place that seems daunting. This is done for us, the future generation. This was the case with my parents, they left their homes behind in Albania to migrate to a country in which they couldn't even speak the language. For me and my siblings. So, although migration may seem like it is nothing to do with you, likely your relatives or friends, have been through this process.

My eyes have been opened, and I am ever the more proud of my uncle and parents.