

## **Ali Bajdar**

**Edited: Katrine Hansen**

I live in France now. You might wonder why. Why I left my country and my family. What happened and for what reasons did I have to leave?

I will start by telling you about my life in Iraq. In Iraq I lived in a small village. I had one brother and one sister. I wanted to go to school and complete school but I only did three years. My family had to take me out of school because they did not have the money to pay for further education. My family is not rich. It's a normal family, but we don't have a lot of money.

I was born with an ear disease that meant I couldn't hear anything as a baby. I had an ear operation when I was two years old. It cost my family a lot of money. If normal hearing is 100%, my hearing is now 65%.

My house in the village had a small garden with lots of rocks. One day, when I was seven years old, I went out in the garden. I fell on one of the rocks and broke a bone in my arm. I was brought to the hospital where the doctors had to operate on my arm. It cost my family \$600. They only had \$100. My father and brother were working to pay off the loan.

We lived under conditions that made it hard to live healthily. It was cold and not clean and my health was poor. My stomach was causing me pain. The doctor told me that I needed an operation and that it could be deadly if I did not have it. In 2011, I went through the operation. The doctors removed part of my stomach. My family had to take a loan once more.

I am not able to do physically challenging work because I am sick and have stomach problems. In Iraq, physically challenging work is the only kind of job you can get when you are not educated. I would have liked a university degree, but that was never an option. My mum saw a better future for me in Europe. She told me that they have a good health care system and I would be able to get an education. I left my country 18 months ago and I haven't been in contact with my mum since. I don't know where she is.

My father and brother worked in a big city far from the village. They were the providers of the family and had to go there to earn money for our food. At times during the war they couldn't come back to the village. We saw them maybe once a month. We heard about the war in the radio, heard about how Daesh kills people, how old people and young women are being captured and killed.

You can even see it on Facebook. When you hear and see these things, when you know what they are capable of, you also know what you need to do when Daesh arrives - you need to run. One morning at 7 am we heard shooting in the village and people were yelling, 'Daesh is coming'. I ran back home to look for my mother. My mother was not in the house, I could not find her. The only thing we could do was to run, so we did and I had to leave without her. We couldn't bring anything with us, there was no time.

Because of the war it was not easy to travel. We stayed in a camp near the border. I asked so many people if they knew where my mother was but we never found her. My uncle helped me to get to Turkey and he travelled with me. He wanted to help me because he knew I was sick. I didn't have any money so he paid for my travel. We went by car and at times we had to walk. He didn't stay with me when we reached Turkey. He told me to go to a house in a village where there would be an old lady waiting for me. She would help me and provide me with food. She cooked me food. She was nice and almost like a mother to me. She knew about my ear disease and my health and she helped me with everything. I miss her.

Before my uncle left, he said to me that I could not leave the house. If the police saw me they would put me in prison because I don't have a passport or any ID card. I could go out for 10 minutes, that was it, and I always had to stay around the house. A few times, my uncle came to visit me. I stayed for 14 months in Turkey but health care is very expensive there so eventually I had to leave.

I don't think I will ever go back to Turkey. Imagine if I told people in Turkey that I am Kurdish. They would ask me what I am doing there, if I am studying or working. I don't have a passport, and could probably go to prison because of that. Because of the civil war between the Turkish and the Kurdish it is not a good place for me to be.

I left six months ago. We were a group of people traveling together of whom I didn't know anyone except for my uncle who paid for the journey and travelled with me. Sometimes we walked, sometimes we went by car and sometimes by train. In Germany my uncle and I got lost from each other. One night the police came. People tried to avoid the police and went in different directions. I couldn't find my uncle again after that. The smuggler told me, that we had to keep on travelling, and that my uncle would reach us again eventually. Now I don't know how to find him again. Maybe he has changed his name. While I travelled my stomach was causing me so much pain that there were times when I had to stay behind and wait until I was able to travel again. I still have pain.

There are still days where I cannot eat or walk, so I stay in my tent, sometimes for days. I get paracetamol when I go to see the doctor in the camp. That is all they can do for me here.

My dream is to live just like other people. I don't want there to be war. My dream is to go to school like everyone else. I want a family. A small family, no more than three children. Maybe one or two. I would love to become an accountant. That is because my family never had money so I want to help the poor. My biggest dream, if I had a lot of money, would be to open my own hospital where people could have kidney transplantations. I would like to live in the UK because of the health care system, and because my mum said that they can take care of me there. I want to learn English and I was practicing every day in Calais, in the Jungle. I had a good teacher. She said to me that I should not try to jump on a train. It's too dangerous for me. So I don't do that. My friend was trying to jump one night and the guy he was with fell on the tracks.

Here in Dunkirk there is no school so I don't practice my English anymore. Sometimes there is no food. If I am hungry I have to wait for the next day. Sometimes the food doesn't agree with me. We all have two pairs of shoes here: one pair for the camp, and one for going outside. It's because of the mud.

I stay in a tent with people who have become my friends. In the night we go to our tent and talk about the future and about our plans and dreams. We talk about the past, about life back in Iraq and about the war.

You want to ask: what did you see, what did you do, what do you think about now and what do you think about for the future? When I go to England, I want to help other people. One thing you can do is to smile and be kind. To me, receiving a smile is more important than receiving things. Clothes and shoes, such things are good, of course, but in the end all you need is people who smile and are kind towards you. When you feel that other people consider you an animal you cannot live together. When you hear people telling you not to worry, that things are hard but will get better, it is different. It gives you energy. When I go to the village it seems like the French pretend that they don't understand what I am saying and that they don't want to talk to me. I am not saying that all French are like that but I have friends from England, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Denmark who come here and spend their time helping and I rarely meet any French people.

When I think about the past and my mother I feel like crying. I miss her a lot. I want to come to England, I want to study and have a life there, but if I find out where my mother is I will go back to

be with her. That is the most important thing for me. I miss her so much. She is old and cannot work so she needs my help. I hope she is safe somewhere. Maybe she is in a camp. If I knew where she were, I would go back. I am also sick and cannot work but we would figure something out, we used to take care of each other. It wouldn't matter. I don't want her to live alone. My father and my brother are also back there, but they have each other. My sister is married, she has her family. My mother has no one.

My village as I knew it is gone. I don't have my family there. It is all gone. My friend has relatives that drowned in the Aegean Sea. We have lost a lot and everyday there is a war going on in Iraq. There is nothing to go back to.

There is more I could tell you but not now. I can't write about it here. When I go to England, I will tell you the rest. We can sit in a café and then I will tell you all the rest there is to tell.