

IMAGINE your child, the one you love so much. Imagine having to send them away to another country, with no guarantee that they would survive. All you really have is hope, hope that they will have a better life with more possibilities and less suffering. How hard would it be to be in such a situation? Now imagine them travelling all that way to a new country only to be denied access to the life that they fought so hard for. It's heart-breaking. Yet it happens every day and people in Western world often turn a blind eye or worse, actively protest against immigration.

According to the United Nations Commission for Refugees, we are currently facing the biggest refugee crisis the world has seen since World War Two. Fifty million people have been forced to flee their homes as refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced persons within their own countries. This has been due to war, persecution, disease or natural disaster.

Of Syrians who have been forced to cross the border and become refugees, four million are children – all of whom have left their schools and future education behind. Some have been separated from their families within refugee camps, some have seen their parents die. Some children are left behind by parents hoping to find a better life in Europe and then send for them to join them. All of these children have experienced great trauma and are extremely vulnerable as a result. We know the facts, we know the numbers, but we don't know the people. We don't know their stories.

This is the story of one little girl. She was around six years old and she lived with her uncle, aunt and cousins in Nigeria. That was all she knew. That was normal. Until it wasn't. One day she was brought to live with strangers. "We're going away", they told her. The day finally came when she boarded a plane to Ireland, leaving behind her all she had ever known.

When she arrived in Ireland she was brought to a little house on the edge of a town called Enniscorthy. Now she found herself in the arms of yet more strangers. Except these weren't strangers, they were her parents. Also in the house were her brother and sister whom she had never met. This was now her home and this was where her future lay.

The girl's name is Tunmise Akinyemi. My name is Tunmise Akinyemi. This is my story.

It's a very old story which I came to understand more as I got older. My parents had left me when I was very young to come to Ireland in search of a better life. Unfortunately, they could not bring me with them so I stayed with family in Nigeria. My parents fought and worked hard to get me to Ireland but it was especially hard when they had to fight hard to stay here themselves. At the time, African people were being sent back to their home countries. However, when my brother and then my sister were born as Irish citizens they needed their parents, so they were allowed to stay. When I was six, I was brought to this country. I started school and a new life with my family. When I was fifteen I became an Irish citizen.

I got lucky. I know how fortunate I am to have a life with my family in a safe country where I have the right to an education. But there are thousands of families who don't get this opportunity. Life isn't fair to them. We can be fair to them. We can't replace their loved ones or undo the trauma they have suffered but we can support them in their time of need.

By Tunmise Akinyemi

5th year, Coláiste Bliide.