


# en boats stranded on a beach

Ten stories about sub-Saharan  
African migration

José Luis Iriberry



The whole of this book, both the content and the design are subject under license  <<Attribution-NonCommercial-Derivatives>> that you can found in <<http://es.creativecommons.org/licencia/>>

CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA Edition  
Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona  
Tel. +34 93 317 23 38 - [info@fespinal.com](mailto:info@fespinal.com)  
[www.cristianismeijusticia.net](http://www.cristianismeijusticia.net)

Legal deposit: B 8897-2014  
ISSN: 2014-6485  
April 2014

Cover design: Jordi Pascual Morant  
Design and layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas

## TEN BOATS STRANDED ON A BEACH

### Ten stories about sub-Saharan African migration

## SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: ACCOMPANY, SERVE, DEFEND .....	3
1. «I WAS TWENTY-ONE YEARS OLD AND I WAS LOST» .....	5
2. «I ONLY WANT TO STOP RUNNING» .....	10
3. «MY BODY IS FULL OF WOUNDS» .....	12
4. «I HAVE CRIED SO MANY TIMES» .....	15
5. « I CAN'T REMAIN HERE FOREVER» .....	18
6. «IN MOROCCO I HAVE LIVED MANY LIVES» .....	22
7. «MY HUSBAND IN GREECE, ME IN MOROCCO, AND MY SON IN SENEGAL» .....	25
8. «I WANT MY CHILDREN TO HAVE A GOOD EDUCATION» .....	27
9. «SADNESS OCCUPIES THE GREATEST SPACE IN MY LIFE» .....	30
10. «SOON I'LL RETURN TO NIGERIA» .....	32
BY WAY OF CONCLUSION .....	36

**José Luis Iriberry, sj.**

---

Fr. Iriberry has degrees in biology from the University of Barcelona and in theology from the faculty of Lovain la Neuf in Brussels. He was founder and first director (2007-10) of the Service Accueil Migrants (SAM). He is presently professor at the Universitat Ramon Llull in Barcelona.

# INTRODUCTION: ACCOMPANY, SERVE, DEFEND

Lost... just at the door, almost there... but no way in...

Mary of Magdalene was lost at the tomb of Jesus. The Gospel says she was crying out. «Why do you cry, Mary?» «Because I'm lost: someone has taken away the meaning of my life and I don't know where I can go now. Why did they do it?»

I'm in Casablanca. People are waiting in long queues. They present their papers in the hope that someone inside the office will take their application. I had already seen this in Barcelona, Spain, before coming to live in Morocco. But on this side of the Mediterranean it is different because you understand more clearly the enormous challenge faced by those who apply for a Schengen<sup>1</sup> Visa. I watch the people waiting outside. Many times during the last three years I have looked at my white hands and wondered why God gave me the possibility to be a white man born in Europe.

Helen gave birth to her fourth child, the only one still alive, just two weeks ago. I'm paying her a visit. She asks me to hold the baby. I love that baby boy, so tiny, so «new»... I pray he is just at the beginning of a long life story. The boy takes my finger and his tiny hand is as white as mine. I'm told that he will be a true black as his ears are already dark black. I wonder if we will meet again: I would like to take his hand once again, his black hand. I would like to know if he ever did get an education or if he had a better chance than his mother, an undocumented migrant lost in Morocco.

3

Precious is weeping in front of me. She came today to see me. She needed to talk to someone. She had to flee with her two babies from the room she was sharing with her «husband». He's from Liberia and was beating her. She's not going back to him. After many years she has had enough. «You see, Father: I'm twenty-seven, I have two children and no husband... I'm stranded in Morocco... my life is a failure... I'm ashamed of myself». I would like to help her but I am unable to do anything. I take her hand and pray that God will take care of her. I look at her and she seems to me like a lost child...yet a mother of two.

Since the summer of 2007 I've been living in Morocco and working for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in partnership with the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, a female congregation working in Morocco for the past hundred years. They were already trying to start a project close to sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco when the Jesuits from JRS-Europe and the Migrations Service in Spain sent me on mission to Casablanca: we were hoping to do the same thing. That blessed coincidence brought us together and the SAM Centre came to birth.

## SAM-Casablanca: Accompany, Serve and Defend

SAM means «Service Accueil Migrants» (Migrant Welcome Centre). We opened the centre for women and children in Casablanca, within the framework of the Catholic Church's social services in Morocco. The stories collected here are those of some of the women who came regularly to the SAM Centre during my time serving JRS-Europe.

The JRS motto is: «Accompany, Serve and Defend». For the past two years we have been accompanying more than two hundred and fifty women and more than hundred children. We offered them a kindergarten, elementary school, different workshops for women, a place to enlarge their hearts and minds, a place to feel

1. Common visa for 29 European countries from the European Union and some others like Austria, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Norway or Switzerland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands.

safe and a place where they could share their experiences and dreams... or failures.

Throughout these years, accompany means to hear and feel close to them even though you know you have not had an experience like theirs. Accompany means to be ready to give our time even though there is a pile of files waiting on our desks. Accompany means being very patient even when you are unwilling or when you feel they are pulling your leg. Accompany means trying to put yourself in their shoes even though it was always very difficult. Accompany means to go to the doctor or the lawyer to help them understand what is going on with their rent or with their husband in prison. Accompany means to help them discern their present moment even though decisions are sometimes very difficult to take. Accompany means to cheer the arrival of many babies to our world and celebrate the birthdays.

To «serve» was a rewarding «task». As you can imagine, you get much more than you give: serving through language courses to our women who have longed for an education since their childhood; serving through sewing formation or art workshops; serving at the kitchen to feed all our children; serving with the distribution of food parcels or clothes; serving through our presence in emergency situations and with our own money when it was needed; serving with our presence in the coordination meetings with other ONGs or at seminars about migration; serving in giving ourselves to the children gathered in our school or our kindergarten; serving in all the celebrations that helped us to become a big family, brothers and sisters in the African way of thinking.

To defend it is not an easy task but we would like to do so with these pages you are reading now. Did you know that our UN Human Rights Declaration says that everyone is free to leave their own country and to return at any time? But the Declaration doesn't say anything about the right to enter another country without permission. So you can leave the land you were born in but then you will find yourself stranded in a void. Actually you have no right to migrate to another country. You have to ask permission and get a visa. And nowadays even to leave your own country without permission can be considered a crime.

4

All of us have rights and we have the right to defend these rights. But with these pages we would like to help everyone understand that we need to think long and deeply about human rights in our global world. Our question all through these pages would be: can we, human beings, offer something to these women and children? They fled from their countries and their families like many of the Spanish, Irish, French, Italians, British and so many others down through the centuries, searching for a New World. Perhaps today's migrants have been born too late since there is no new world to discover. Now walls are built and human migration is not free or, as in too many cases, is actually forbidden. Perhaps the next generation will have a better chance. What do you think? Are we ready for change?

# 1. «I WAS TWENTY-ONE YEARS OLD AND I WAS LOST»

Call me Betty K. I'm Nigerian, from Delta State. I was born in 1976. My father was a soldier in the Nigerian Army. When I was nine years old, my father was wounded in one leg and had to retire. The family moved to Benin, in Edo State: we were three girls and five boys and I'm the third born. I went to primary school but I had to leave secondary school because we were too many and my father had no money to pay for all of us so the decision was made that the girls should stay at home and help in the kitchen. When I was eleven I was already on the street selling roasted corn and orange juice (hand made by me!). Sometimes I tried selling at a street junction. Sometimes I would carry a big dish with roasted corn on my head to get closer to the windows of the buses. My parents had no job, so my sisters and I we had to fend for all. I remember that time as boring: every day the same thing, selling goods... and not getting enough profit. It was a hard job and it didn't give us anything. Just living day to day, you know?

In the house where we were living there was no electricity and no running water. Today my parents are living in the same place. No change. We had to walk two and a half hours to the water fountain. One day, carrying my pitcher on my head, a motorbike knocked me down and I was hurt so badly that I had to spend three days in hospital. You see: a dangerous place for a child! By God's grace I'm still alive!

5

My memories of that time are just memories of suffering. We had no money. I couldn't go out with friends. I had no friends because I had no time for them anyway. I had to work. The only distraction was the Sunday service at the church and the choir. I cried a lot then. There was no way out. I remember the landlord coming at the end of the month to get the rental money and my parents suffering so much.

I grew up like this, always in need. I think that was the reason why I accepted my first boyfriend. I was twenty. He promised to marry me and to give me all the good things that come with the freedom of a new family. I trusted him but he was playing with me. When my family discovered that I had lost my virginity they forced me to find the boy, but he denied everything. I had to endure the shame of being beaten by my own family and expelled from the house. I remember weeks sleeping in the garage. Thankfully, my mother begged on my behalf and I could go back in the house after some time.

I was twenty one and lost. One of my primary school friends had a sister living in Spain. One day this sister asked my friend to come to her in Spain. My friend asked me if I would like to go with her, so I said yes. I had no money, but my mother started to sell things in order to pay the fare. But she couldn't manage to get enough money. My oldest brother came to me and asked me about my idea of going to Spain. I explained to him that I had an offer to go first to Spain and, once there, pay back the cost of my journey with my job. The cost was high: 40.000 € (nowadays it is much more). My brother understood that only prostitution could raise that kind of money. He forbade me to do it. I was desperate to get the money and my mother tried to get help from her family, but nothing came from that side. I had to find a job, so I began to wash dishes, clean restaurants, and any other work I could find. But the little money that I was getting was just enough to cover day to day living.

One day I met a man who said that he would help me: he would pay and once in Europe I would find a job and pay him back. That offer suited me, so I agreed: we had to leave Nigeria by land and once in Mali we would take a direct flight to France. In April 1998, we took a bus which reached Mali after two weeks. But...

that was it. The truth is that the man was taking girls like me for prostitution in Mali! The same night we arrived in Bamako, he asked me to take my luggage and go to a hotel. In the hall I understood that something was wrong: girls in shorts were all around. The man said that I had to pay him the cost of the journey if I wanted to go back home. I had nothing. It was impossible to call my family. I cried for more than a week. I didn't want to eat. I was lost. Some «friends» who were already living there told me to stop crying and accept the situation. I found myself living as a prostitute, in Mali. I was dying there... it went on for more than three years. I had to work in two different cities. That was very hard and the worst is that I began to see the number of men choosing me for sex was decreasing: in only three years I was not the same girl! So I found a boyfriend, someone I thought could be my husband and keep me safe. He knew I was in prostitution because he met me there one night. I decided to go with him... but it was more of the same: I had to prostitute myself for him and when I tried to keep some money for myself, he would beat me. Finally he went away with another woman and I felt that I had to leave him for good.

One day a man came to the hotel and saw how «my man» was beating me. He told me that he had a friend in Italy who could help me. The deal was that one woman would pay my transport and I would pay her with my job. My debt would be again 40.000 €. I had no choice: I couldn't cope with my life in Mali. So I decided to follow him and go to Europe. I got a fake passport and a fake Schengen Visa. I had to fly first to Morocco and after that take the plane to Italy. But once in Morocco, everything seemed to go wrong. I spent more than one month in Rabat, but my Visa expired without being able to take a flight. After that, the man decided on another way out: I should go to Hong Kong and wait there before reaching Italy. I couldn't understand why such a long journey was necessary and I was afraid for my life. I didn't agree with the new plan so he had to think of another one. This time I had to go to France and once in the airport declare myself as being from Sierra Leone and ask for refugee status. I couldn't believe it, but I had to do it. And that was it.

The French police couldn't believe that I was there: «How did you manage to take this flight?» Well... I told a story about someone helping me from outside but as they couldn't find that person in the plane or elsewhere, I was sent to a «migration camp». After three days I was sent to court and they said that I should go back to my country. I told them that I was from Sierra Leone and I couldn't go back. But the court said that France refused to take me. I called my contact in Italy but they said that they had no money to pay for a lawyer to take me out of the court: they told me that I should invent a new story to convince the judge. It was a nightmare. The migration camp was not that bad but I had to go four times to court and this was really bad. Finally the judge had enough of me and he decided to deport me to Morocco, so on the following day two French policemen came to take me to the airport. I was handcuffed and they tied me to my seat on the plane. I was crying and begging for some pity.

To my surprise, once in Casablanca Airport, the border police said that I had not being held in transit in that airport, as they had no records in their computers. So... the border police said that I couldn't stay in Morocco. I said: «OK! No trouble!» and I ran back to the same plane that brought me to Casablanca. And you are not going to believe me... but once in France, the police took me once more to the migration camp... and two days later I found myself back on another plane to Morocco, handcuffed and tied to my seat, crying again. And... the same story! The Moroccan police said that I was not welcome in Casablanca... so, I ran again to the plane and back to France. Two more days in the deportation camp and, for the third time, flying back to Morocco, handcuffed and tied to my seat. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I cried again and again without any hope of being heard. The third time, the Moroccan police allowed me to stay in the airport and they brought me to a detention camp within the compound of the airport.

In the «detention camp» at the airport we were close to thirty women and men, living together in the same room. We had to bath with cold water and had very



little food. The police told us that we had to buy a ticket to another country or we would be deported to the Algerian border, to the Oujda region.

I spent one month and a half in that camp. I felt very sick ... I have a surprise for you which I haven't explained yet: I became pregnant when I was in Mali... so... all those months of coming and going I was pregnant! I knew it and I told the French police but they didn't believe me: I was sent to a French hospital but they didn't take an ultrasound, and as I was still having my period, they decided that I was wrong. But I knew it... and in the detention camp in Morocco it became clear: I was five months pregnant, so although I was wearing big clothes I couldn't hide it. This pregnancy was my salvation: a Moroccan migration officer had pity on me and found a way to send me to Abidjan. That was the first time God came to visit me. And I was glad to be out of all that mess... but good luck was not yet on my side.

I didn't reach Abidjan: the flight had one stop in Mali, so I took a chance and got off the plane. The Immigration police couldn't understand what was wrong but as I was persistent in my desire to remain in Mali, they took me to a police station in the city. There I spent five days feeling very bad: something was wrong with my pregnancy. A police man, seeing that I was bleeding called the border police at the airport to get instructions... and they decided to release me! So I found myself back in Mali, at the same hotel where my «boyfriend» was «working». He had another woman who was kind to me and helped me: I was very sick and finally I lost my baby. I wasn't really welcome in that place: the man who had offered me the «job» in Italy was furious with me. He felt that he had spent a lot of money on me for nothing, and he started to beat me.... I came back to hell.

I run away to another hotel and I continued with my «job» trying to survive as best I could. One woman working at same place as me, with two children already, asked me one day to go to Church with her. She found some help in Jesus Christ and she told me that perhaps I could find some help in Him also. Perhaps it was again God talking to me. But things weren't easy: my former «boyfriend» was still coming to see me and taking my money. I was still his possession so I had to obey him and I had to stay at home not in the Church. One day I decided to go to the Anglican Church Community and if he wanted to beat me, I would accept by the grace of God.

After some time going to church I found another man, a Nigerian who had been living in UK but was deported to Nigeria and he was now travelling back to the UE. He saw me in the church and someone told him my story so he asked me to leave the hotel and go with him. I thought this could be a chance to leave my former life of prostitution so I packed everything and I moved in with him. That man was different: instead of taking my money he was giving me money to go to the market and do business. That was a real change, you see?

I started doing business travelling to Cotonou and even Lagos. I bought African food and jewellery for woman: as I knew many women «working» in Mali, I could do good business. After one year living together he went out to Cotonou for business. That was fine, but he didn't come back. I called him asking for an explanation but he was always giving me bad excuses. He asked me to talk to someone he knew who was sending girls to Europe but I said that I was not going to do that again. I decided to go myself to Cotonou... and I found that he had found another woman to stay with. I did something stupid then: I wanted to keep my man so I tried to stay there to find a job and earn money (in a restaurant) and... I got pregnant with him! But he wasn't happy with that so he told me that I had to have an abortion: he wouldn't ever recognise the child. I started taking drugs and other things in order to lose the child but nothing worked. I was lost once again: there was only one way out for me... reach Spain before giving birth.

I went back to Mali and talked to the people who could send me to Europe. They didn't want to take me if I was pregnant: I had to get rid of the baby. I started again to take drugs and «traditional medicine» and finally I ended the pregnancy. With that, the opportunity came to take a flight to Casablanca.

In 2003 we were two on the journey: another girl who was supposedly my sister and I. We would change planes here in Morocco and just stay one week in

Casablanca. We met other women waiting in the same place for the same reason. We were nine girls flying to Spain. But this was the end of the journey: the man took only four of us and he said that the rest of us should fend for ourselves. He said that he couldn't trust us because we were already too «wise» about the journey and we wouldn't pay him back once in Spain. We had to change «boss» and this time Congolese men took charge of us. What a life!

One day, going to the market, two Nigerians approached me. I refused their offer but they told me if I needed something I could go and visit them. I felt I could do it, so one day I went there and I found another Nigerian, John... and that changed my life because he was the one who really took me in charge for the past seven years.

These years in Morocco had not been easy: we lived by the grace of God. No job. No money. Just getting through each day with the little we could beg. Sometimes we are five people sleeping in the same room, sharing our fate. Sometimes someone would bring a little food and we would share it. You know, those years were difficult for all blacks gathered in Morocco hoping to reach Spain one day or another. We hid ourselves from the police. We changed rooms many times. Sometimes we had to flee and find shelter in other friends' places.

Once in 2004, I dreamed that the police were arresting my John and another friend. I saw myself crying in the dream and as soon as I woke up I told him to stay with me and not to go on the usual business. I left the room to warn his friend but I was late: he had already been caught by the police. He was sent to Oujda. Another time, when we were walking to our flat, coming from our business in the city, we saw a hidden police car and some «civilian police» close to our house. We understood that they were waiting for us. What to do? We were still paralyzed with fear when a Moroccan man pulled us inside to the hall of his house. He told us that the police had beaten one black in the flat where we were living and they were waiting for us. He helped us to run away from that place. Another time the police came to our building and they told our landlord that he should bring out all the blacks living there as soon as they arrive home. So, our landlord caught me and said that he was going to drive me to the police station because I was a thief. I tried to explain to him that I was a migrant not a thief and that my papers were being processed in the embassy and that was why I had no papers. He wouldn't believe me. I started crying and that was my salvation: one Moroccan woman saw me there and she asked my landlord to release me. My landlord accepted to let me go free but did not allow me take my belongings. So I was free but the poorest women in Morocco... he took even my cellular phone!

We found shelter with a Nigerian friend... she was not really a friend because when we were in a very difficult situation she exploited me. The only caring came from John and luckily he got some money from one of his sisters (living in USA). However, my luck was running away from me again: after a while I got pregnant and this made things worse. I wanted to keep the child but John didn't agree: we had nothing to sustain our life, how could we have a baby? So finally I accepted and I had an abortion in a hospital in Rabat. I was lucky: no troubles with the police or the doctors in that hospital. Doctors have been always helpful to me. One time I was attacked by Moroccans: I was walking in the street with another Nigerian girl. We were followed by two Moroccans boys and they asked us to give them our bags. I resisted but they drew a knife and cut my wrist to make me let go of my bag. I was badly injured. John brought me to the emergency service at the hospital and I told the doctor that I had no money, nothing to pay. He listened to me and took care of me for free.

In 2006 things became quieter. I started to do some business with clothes coming from Guinea. I was going to Church regularly and I had decided to follow closely God's commandments. I needed to find some peace within myself after my troubled life, some reconciliation. At that time I had another pregnancy and the baby came in Christmas 2006. The pregnancy wasn't a good one. I was feeling sick very often and I had neither money for medicines nor for the doctor. I was feeling pain in my stomach all the time. I couldn't eat. John was with me, but he couldn't do anything. We knew that we couldn't go back to the hospital for an

emergency because pregnancies were treated differently: much more money and much more paperwork. So the little girl who was born at Christmas came into the world too quickly: she had to be in a special care unit at the hospital. After five days she died. They asked me to pay for the treatment given to the baby. As I had no money, they threatened to call the police. Thankfully, at that time John had met a Moroccan association for human rights and one Moroccan woman came to the hospital to deal with them. She was helpful but it was Anglican Church who finally paid the bill.

Life went on. God gave me another girl by early 2008. At that time a team from «Medecins Sans Frontiere» were here in Casablanca and they followed my pregnancy. But again I was unlucky: during the delivery the doctor in the hospital did something wrong and my baby girl was paralyzed from her neck down. It was depressing but I wanted to fight for her. «Medecins Sans Frontieres» helped me at the beginning: my girl needed physiotherapy in order to recover any chance of movement. She was a beautiful little girl but she couldn't move. I was devoted to her. I sang for her. I danced for her. I was her movement. Over the months Medecins Sans Frontieres told me that there was no hope for her recovery and that they couldn't keep paying for the physiotherapy. Then I found the SAM Centre project and they agreed to take care of my baby and myself. But... again... one day she got really sick and she died at the age of eleven months. Father Joseph and our pastor celebrated the funeral in the Church close to SAM.

To find SAM was a gift of God for us: you know, in our prayers in the Church we always ask God to help us, to give us our daily bread, and SAM is the answer to prayer. You know that many girls have found a great deal of help here at SAM: we suffer being without jobs, without papers... Here you can learn foreign languages, you find some money to relieve your suffering, and you find food to eat when you have nothing at home. SAM should be here in the future because many girls live the same life as I'm living here, and many more are going to come. You know, when we come to SAM we tell everyone that we are going to school and that makes us feel proud of ourselves. With SAM I have found the stability I needed in my life. And the best thing from SAM: I got pregnant last year and I gave birth to a marvellous boy in January 2010. He is big. He is healthy. He is my boy... and everything thanks to SAM and to my Anglican community!

Thinking about my future... I pray God to keep me as a good Christian, to keep me alive, to have the good family life I never had. Europe is no longer part of my future: perhaps one day I will go there to visit my dear father Joseph or to visit the place. Right now I want to earn enough money to go back home and start doing business: I know I can go as far as Dubai and bring goods to sell here and make a good profit. I have already started a new life here in Casablanca with SAM and I want to keep it. I'm not a young woman: I'm going to use the wisdom of my age to build my future... if it's God's will.

## 2. «I ONLY WANT TO STOP RUNNING»

CJ

Call me Brigitte E. I'm from Edo State, Nigeria. I was born in 1980. I come from a small village close to Benin City. My father is a business man and a teacher in the town. Although you may think we had a lot of money, this is not the case: as with most of the teachers in Nigeria, they get their salary when it comes... and sometimes we have to wait a long time! I have six brothers and two sisters. I'm the eldest of the family.

I went to primary school until I was twelve years old and then I started working: selling goods in the market. But at the age of fourteen I decided to change my life. I wanted to go to the big city and continue my secondary school education. I had an aunt living there, but after two years of schooling I found myself again selling tomatoes in the market: my aunt said that my father had no money to pay for my school. It took me two more years of working in Benin to convince my father that I needed to finish my secondary school. He said that he would do his best. I was eighteen years old. He kept his promise, so I was able to finish my formation... although it took me four years. Since money was not coming regularly, I had to stop from time to time and work in the market.

My time in the city wasn't that bad but I knew that there were better places. I have a cousin in Italy, older than me, and we were in contact by e-mail. She told me about the situation there. A classmate and I decided that we should try. I talked to my boyfriend (you know, he's still in love with me! He calls me from time to time!). He didn't agree with my proposal, but although I loved him I knew that you need a little money to start a family, so I decided to get the money first and marry afterwards. I knew my parents wouldn't like the idea either, so I didn't say anything at home.

10

With my girlfriend's money we left Nigeria in March 2003. From Benin city we went to Cotonou, into Mali, Gao, and Adra in Niger then from Adra to Gardhaia and finally Oujda, in Morocco. We didn't enter the Maghnia region because of the bandits there. We were only two at the beginning, but seventeen of us (nine women and eight men) arrived in Oujda. We travelled by bus and car. Sometimes we had to walk five or six hours in the desert (once to cross the Algerian border in the south and another time to cross the Algerian border with Morocco). All together it took five months: a long, long journey. We lived always in the bush: eating the bread and sardines that our Arab contacts brought us. We couldn't enter the cities and we lived like animals. But thanks to God we were lucky because our guides were good and didn't loose their way. I hear stories from other migrants who were lost in the desert and they had to drink their urine to survive. It is a long and dangerous journey.

When you have money, travelling is easy... but when money ends, then you start having problems. That was our situation at the end of the first month: money ran out and we had to find another way to keep going. We had no option: each of us found a boyfriend who could help us. We were not the only ones to do that. And we couldn't expect any money from outside.

Once in Oujda, we spent just one week in the grounds of the University and finally we reached our destination: Tangiers (in the north of Morocco). We spent six months there and again it was the same story: at the beginning we had some money, but then we had to find another «boyfriend». It is sad. That is the only thing I can say. At that time to be outside the room was pretty dangerous, so we spent six months doing nothing. Only men could go out and try to find food for us. My girlfriend was in a different apartment and she was not as lucky as me: the Moroccans told the police that there were too many migrants in their flat and the police deported all of them: it seems that Nigeria sent some planes at that time

in order to deport everyone. At the end of those months I was so fed up that I decided to come to Casablanca.

Things in Casablanca weren't any better: shut into a room most part of the time, watching TV and doing nothing but wait for an opportunity to cross to Europe. After many months my boyfriend and I got enough money to try for Europe: some friends in Europe were sending the money to us (5.000 €). That was in December 2004. The plan was to cross in the boot of a car. I was to try first and he would follow later on. But I was unlucky. On our way to Ceuta we were stopped by the Moroccan police and I spent one week in Tetuan police station. That was a bad experience: the policemen refused to give us enough food and they beat us when we shouted for more. It was a dirty place.

After a week they deported us to Oujda. We were released during the night and after some hours walking we reached Oujda by foot. My boyfriend had to pay my train ticket and I went back to Casablanca with him. There was no more money, so we had to say goodbye. I don't blame him: he had the money to go and I had missed my chance, so I told him: «go and save yourself!».

I had to begin again with nothing. Again I had to find a boyfriend and this time it was good. I found a Liberian who gave me more freedom than the Nigerians! You see, since I met him, I could go to church more freely! I'm Anglican and I believe God can help me, so I was happy to go to church every Sunday. With my new freedom, other things happened. I was twenty-six years old and blocked in Morocco, so I decided I had to become a mother. My new boyfriend also wanted to have a child... and Mercy came! That was in 2006. But things went wrong, once again: in the months after the birth of our child he started to go to nightclubs and misbehaving. He started to be rough with me and beating me sometimes. Things couldn't continue. I had to stop. I took my baby and left the flat.

This time I learned my lesson: no more boyfriends and better to beg on the streets or do something else, but on my own. I found a friend who offers us shelter for some months, and in the meantime, thankfully, I found the SAM Centre project! Right now I'm doing business in the medina, with the money that SAM gave me (through the micro project scheme). I sell artificial hair and other beauty products. I come to SAM for French and computer classes. It's good.

What am I doing here? Well, waiting. Last summer 2009 I had the chance to send my baby to Italy, with my cousin: she came here and she took the baby with her, as if it was her own child. So... now I'm alone again! My cousin promised to try to find some money for me. I have already bought a false passport with my own money but I have to wait because I have not enough money for a visa and the ticket for the journey. I need 3.500 euros. I will find it.

What is my future? Well... I pray God that He will find me a good husband so that I can become a respected wife, to be more stable and teach good values to my children. But, you know, if God asks me to stay here in Morocco with all of that, I could accept it. I just want to establish myself in any part of the world. Just to stop running. Although I have only one direction: I can't go backwards to Nigeria... my child is already in Italy!



### 3. «MY BODY IS FULL OF WOUNDS»

Call me Flory S. I was born in Côte d'Ivoire in 1980. My father was married to five women but we were not many in the family, only twelve children and two of them died quite young. We were in a reasonably big city just a day's journey from Abidjan, the capital. My father was a football player, but he ended up becoming a night watchman in a factory.

When I was a child I went to the primary school. I remember I liked to play with my friends, to skip and to play with the hula-hoop. I remember going dancing with my girlfriends when public «shows» came to the villages. At the age of seven, my mother was divorced by my father and I stayed with my father and an aunt for two years. I missed my mother very much so from time to time I went to meet her in the market, where she was selling meat. Finally, one day she sent somebody to «kidnap» me from the school. It was definitely great to be with my mother but on the other hand I stopped going to school. I began going to the market with her to sell plastic bags.

When I was ten years old, I began working with a woman who buys sheep and afterwards chops them to sell them. I had to carry huge boxes of meat, and I had very little strength. After a short time I was exhausted. I had a lot of pain in my back and elsewhere in my body so that woman sent me back to my mother. I remember it well. It was a Friday and my mother brought me to the hospital because I thought I was going to die. I stopped doing this job. Then, I sold food prepared for passengers who arrived at the city's big Bus Station.

12

When I was fourteen I had a bad encounter with a man who raped me as I was coming home from an outing with a friend. It was dark and nobody came to help me. I was ashamed, so I did not say anything for months. And you're not going to believe me, but I fell pregnant. From that torture I had a boy, the only child I have now. My parents did not accept my explanation and they thought it was my fault, so my pregnancy was not easy. The life of young African girls is hard because you are always blamed whatever the misfortune might be.

When my child was two, I decided to leave the country for Nigeria and stayed there for about three years. I started working in a hotel doing the laundry and cleaning rooms but it was not enough to keep me alive. I had to send money home for my child and also live on a day to day basis as well as think about the future. One day, in my desperation, a girlfriend suggested that I go on the street and look for men. And this is what I did: going to dance in clubs and to sleep with them. Trust me: I'm ashamed of it. My body bears the wounds of that time: once I even went to the hospital because a man attacked my face. It's a tough life.

In 1999 I was tired and I wanted to leave Nigeria. I returned to Ivory Coast and I became a dancer in a troupe which went to the villages on feast days. That way, I earned a little money to send to my family. In 2002 the country was at war. I wanted to go to my own village and I was with a group of friends, but the roads were blocked and we were obliged to stay in Abidjan. I heard that my village was destroyed by the guerrillas and that my family left for Ghana where they were in different refugee camps. I heard also that some of my brothers were dead. I couldn't stay in Abidjan, so from there I fled the country with many others. We went through Ghana, then to Mali, Algeria and finally Morocco. The trip was pretty good compared to others whom we know died on the road. We did not have any problems with the police. We were seven women and three men from Congo and the Ivory Coast. Our aim was to reach Morocco, a civilized country, and find a job.

We stayed a little time in Oujda and then took the train to Casablanca. The trip had been long and I was very tired and weak. I had a very strong attack of malaria and had to stay in hospital for two months! They took good care of me. I was really

sick, but I had known a Cameroonian in Oujda who came to see me and he helped me a lot. Once I left the hospital, I stayed with him but we were not too long together. During this time a strange thing happened: I met one of the girls I had known in Nigeria from our prostitution time over there. She was in Morocco trying to cross over to Europe. We stayed together a while but she was sent very soon to Spain. I know that she is fine in Spain, but she stopped all contact with me and actually I received no help from her.

So I had to look out for myself. For three years I shared a room with a Nigerian girl and her husband. It was with her that we asked UNHCR<sup>2</sup> for a refugee card. We were accepted as refugees and it was good... very good for her: in 2005 after all the fuss and big problems at the border with Spain, she went to Switzerland with her husband and child, with assistance from UNHCR. She had been deported by the Moroccans to Mauritania and UNHCR went to get herself, her child and her husband. They (UNHCR) arranged everything and they were able to find freedom in Europe. I'm still in Morocco with my useless refugee status. Pity!

2. Office of the United Nations  
High Commissioner for  
Refugees

During these last three years I have worked as a maid for white families who came to Casablanca for a few months and also for Moroccans who accept blacks like me to clean their houses. At that time I was with a Liberian man who spoke to me about getting married. But it did not work: it was not true. After he left me I fell again into prostitution. Here in Morocco there are many whites who come for a few days and they pay far more than blacks. Unlucky again for me, «my» Liberian man is in Europe also. He got through after the 2005 Moroccan raids and by the grace of UNHCR.

After everyone left I had to look out for myself. At the beginning of 2006, I had to move and find a new room. The only area with cheap rooms was a place where nobody wants to live... only Moroccan thieves and their families. But I had no other option. At that time I decided to start a business: a Bar for blacks. A Moroccan gave me credit, I bought some beer and a fridge, and I started to make money. It was good, but the neighbourhood was not safe: the thieves managed to get into my room and they took my bag with all my savings. Another day on the street, the thieves wanted to snatch my bag. I cried loudly and tried to hold onto my money but they cut my veins with a big knife and I had to let go. Trust me! That day I ran to the hospital like a madwoman! After that I knew I had to move to another neighbourhood. I continued my business of selling liquor, but again I was unlucky: the owner of the second apartment was surprised to see so many people enter and leave the apartment, so eventually I had to leave too. You know that under Islamic law, alcohol is forbidden. Now I am in a third apartment. As I have no job I keep selling alcohol. That's what I do: I sell beer and also African food from Senegal and Nigeria... it's my little restaurant for black people!

Let's return to December 2006 when I started a new relationship with a Guinean man. He was good and he came to live with me. This time we were in love. I was twenty-six and I thought this time he was the right one. We stayed together for one year but in late 2007 he went into prison here in Casablanca. We had to earn money to live... and he was involved in selling false papers. One day he was denounced by an unfriendly black man and he went to prison.

Once more, I was completely alone. I found a Gabonese man, and he also spoke about getting me out of trouble, about getting married, about returning home... always the same promises. I decided to stay with my friend in prison. He will be released one day, and he had promised to marry me. I had to wait. But I'm an unlucky girl and was again stranded. This time it was serious.

It was January 16th 2008. I went to Rabat to renew my refugee card. On the way back to Casablanca I met four men, two Nigerians and two Ghanaians. I didn't know who they were but they were gentle and asked me to go to Casablanca with them by car. They were waiting for two men from Oujda. It was five in the afternoon. We were taking a coffee when we saw the two «friends» from Oujda arriving with the Moroccan police. The police detained all of us and we were thrown in prison. I spent six months in jail for nothing. They were charged with doing «illegal business». I was fortunate to have my papers from the UNHCR

CJ

because when they got the news about me in prison they came to get me out. During my time in prison I have to say that I was respected.

They released me in July 2008 and I went back to Casablanca. My boyfriend from Guinea was already there. He had been released from prison before me. He had started another business which was a little safer: the sale of African food. His family sent him the goods and he was selling it to migrant women who then resold it. I thought we were already committed in our relationship, but gradually I realized that he was not fair with me: he would seek other women for sex. I tried to keep him with me, but by September 2009 his behaviour had changed. I cried a lot. One day he left with his entire luggage. Some time later I heard he had returned to Guinea. I felt betrayed. I think I was fond of him. My life... you see... at my age... alone in Morocco. As simple as that.

When I found the SAM Centre project I felt I could relax a bit! Here I find support with food, business... but especially and most important, I'm learning to write! I am happy and I hope to God that my bad luck will end. I even found counselling and some good advice for my life. I'm in a new relationship and in SAM I find guidance. I have had great hopes for this year 2010 and I want to start again from zero. And I am sure you will help me, this time to have a real life!

My future? I still believe it will be good. I pray and dream of getting married, having children, having a job... I want to take responsibility for my life. I did not choose to go to Europe. I'm going to live my life somewhere else. I have a child who is sixteen years old and I still have to help my family. God knows my future. I want to believe that I'm in His hands.



## 4. «I HAVE CRIED SO MANY TIMES»

CJ

Call me Cynthia. I was born in 1982 in Edo State, Nigeria. I was born in a small family and we have no close relatives. We were living in a big city, Benin. I have six sisters and two brothers... so, over the years my parents built a bigger family... but the house did not grow at the same pace. We kept living in the same rented room! The kitchen and the toilet were in the back yard. Not a place to live, really!

I went to the school until I was six and then I started farming with my father. One of my brothers used to come with us as well. I remember that I liked to play in the street with my friends, to sing and to dance. I used to go to the children choir's at the church until I was thirteen years old. At that time I was in a cultural group who used to sing and dance traditional Nigerian songs, and we earned some money for that. It was fun. At that time I didn't have much time to go to school and I didn't like to read books. I used to farm and after that just go around the streets or the markets selling the goods that we grew. When I was nineteen, I decided I had to do something different. I thought I would learn hairdressing and I start a saloon. But after two months of training I couldn't cope with the formation and I decided to go back to the market.

Then one day someone came to our house to visit us. A man living in the same street told us that his wife was looking for girls who would like to go to Spain to work. The only condition was a payment of €40.000! My mother didn't want to let me go because she knew that many people had died on the journey and perhaps she was afraid I would never return. We all knew that prostitution was not a «nice» job but the situation wasn't good. At that time I had a boyfriend I loved. He didn't like the idea. But finally I accepted thinking that God would help me and if my sacrifice was necessary, better to do it sooner than later. Finally my mother accepted if I could find a direct flight.

15

One day in the spring of 2003 I went to visit a woman, not far from our house. She was hiring girls for her daughter who had a place in Spain. It was a strange experience. She told me that I had to undergo a magic ritual. So she called the «witch» and I had to eat odd things and drink wine with something I didn't recognize mixed with it. I had to bath in smelly water and wear white clothes. Then I had to take an oath that once in Spain I would pay my debt. I wasn't scared... it was odd because I'm a Christian, although at that time I wasn't a church goer. It is here in Morocco that I started to go to my church. Now I pray a lot!

I spent two weeks with that woman with four other girls. One day a man came to fetch us and he explained the plan for our journey: we would follow the river... in two weeks we would be in Morocco and then, just a short flight to Spain. This was the beginning of the summer of 2003 and it sounded easy, but actually we spent more than a month in Gao, Mali. The reason why we couldn't continue our journey was a recent accident: a jeep with many migrants had been reported lost in the desert and all the people had disappeared. We had to wait for a better opportunity. One day we left, through Agadez (Niger) to Ghardaia (Algeria). Nine days crossing the desert. We were a caravan of seven jeeps. It was a bit scary. Too much desert! You know: we even have to pass through a sand storm! We had to cover ourselves while we waited for the wind to die down. Eventually, we reached Ghardaia, then onto Oran and we reached the Moroccan border without passing through Maghnia because it was dangerous. At that moment we were quite a large group, almost sixty migrants.

In Oujda (Morocco) there was someone waiting for us with a bus and we continued our journey to Rabat. But it was not easy! When the driver suspected there was a police control on the road, he would ask us to get down and walk through the bushes, sometimes two hours walking in parallel to the road, and then back onto the bus. We did this at least six times! Finally we reached Rabat and the following

day our final destination, Casablanca. More than three months journey! And my mother wanted me to take the direct flight to Spain!

September 2003, I was in Casablanca living with other women, just waiting. We were in a flat, men and women in separate rooms. The months passed by very slowly and without any change in our situation until finally the people who sent us from Nigeria decided not to pay anything more for food, so if I wanted to eat I had to start «working». But then, after some weeks, I realised I was pregnant. What could I do? If my «boss» knew that I was pregnant, I would be beaten since they don't like girls to get pregnant. We were closed up in our room, no way to go to a hospital. I took tablets and drugs trying for an abortion but the baby remained. It didn't want to leave me! Eventually, I accepted my fate and the boss agreed to send me to Europe for the delivery. From Casablanca I went to El Aaiun, into the desert again. That was my first attempt to cross over into Europe, and I didn't get too far. We were waiting close to the sea shore when the Moroccans came and deported us to Oujda. From Oujda I found my way to Rabat and finally in August 2004 I delivered my baby in the Soussi Hospital without any trouble.

Two months later, someone asked me to try again. We went back to Agadir. But again it was not my time. It was dark night and we were almost sixty-five migrants hidden in a big truck. The police stopped the truck on the road to El Aaiun. My baby started crying and I couldn't stop him. The police asked what kind of goods the truck was carrying and when they shone their torches into the truck, they saw plenty of black faces staring out at them. Well... back again to Oujda. You know: six times I tried the same route in the past five years... and I always found myself back in Oujda. This is not a «nice» experience: usually the police took the few things we had, although I have to say that I was always lucky because I nothing bad happened to me.

In 2006 I had to leave my child. The «boss» said that there was an opportunity to reach Europe, but only for me, not for my baby. The same people who guided us to Morocco were returning to Nigeria, so I agreed to send my baby with them. My mother called me some time later to say that my baby was with her. He is already in Primary School. I have a picture of him always with me.

After that I went to Tangiers, but time went by and nothing happened. Back to Casablanca and the same life. Again, I was pregnant. The man didn't want to take care of the child... once again an abortion... But this time (it was March 2007) the people who were «helping me» with the abortion brought me close to death. They gave me too much drugs and injections over a 24 hours period and it seemed that the baby was too attached to me and didn't wanted to leave me... I was really sick but, by the grace of God, I found myself in a hospital in Casablanca. The Moroccans doctors took care of me there for more than a week, with blood transfusions and other medical care. I was close to death... but finally I had my second baby. Is it not crazy?

After spending all this time in Morocco without reaching Spain, my deal with the first group of traffickers was over. They didn't keep their promise, so I didn't have to pay anything. I had to find my own way. Thankfully, I found someone who could send me the money to cross to Almeria (Spain) with my child. The «deal» was cheaper than the first one: only €12.000 to be paid on arrival in Spain. It was May 2009 when I went to Oujda and then Nador so as to be ready to take the boat. We waited three weeks and finally we got the call to come closer to the sea shore. It was cold and it was evening. We were seventy-one people from Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Ghana who took that «zodiac inflatable boat»... all African! Only six of us were women.

We set out from the shore but after twenty minutes, the engine fall into the sea. The men tried to rescue it and finally they got it out. They tried to fix it, but the engine kept falling... this happened at least five times!

We continued our journey but the situation wasn't good. The boat began to take in water. We started crying and praying to God that we would not die. Finally, a Moroccan police boat came and shone its lights on us. They asked us to stop the engine which we did. Then a second boat came and they asked us to get into

their boat. They threw out a rope to us but we told them a ladder would be better, which they accepted. The Moroccans first took my baby and then I jumped in as fast as I could. After a short journey to Nador, I was once more in Oujda and from there I went back to Casablanca by train. The people who sent me to Nador paid for the transport back to my room. But I had lost my second «contract», because I told the people in Spain that I was not ready to try again by boat. I was too dangerous. No way!

So, once back to Casablanca I could do nothing but beg on the streets with my baby on my back. A job in prostitution job was no longer an option for me. In July 2009, I made the decision to go back to my own country, but first I had to make some money.

A friend told me that I had to send my child to the school and she said that the SAM Centre project was helping people like me. When I arrived there, I recognized the priest I had met once in 2007, when my girl was only some weeks old. At that time he was asking migrants in Casablanca what he could do for us to help us, and he said that he was going to do something but I didn't know that he really had started a project. It was God's help that sent me back to him.

Here in SAM I'm learning to use computers, to sew and my child can stay with me in the kindergarten. I have to say that I feel happy now. All these years I cried so many times, but now I know that I'm not going to Europe. If one day I go to Europe it will be with my own money, with my own man, with my children. If God helps me, I'm going back home to work hard and to build my own family. I want to have three more children.

I'm the only one who was chosen to go to Europe. My family is still in Nigeria, although my father died in 2006. One of my brothers is working in a Bank. Some of my sisters are married. I'm here... without job, with two children but without a husband. What kind of life is this?

## 5. «I CAN'T REMAIN HERE FOREVER»

Call me Franca G. I was born in Nigeria, Edo State, in 1978. I am the eldest of three boys and six girls. My father was a farmer in a small village. However he didn't own the land he farmed so he didn't earn very much. I went to the primary school until I was ten years old... but I can't read and I can't write. My time in school was just a «stop-over» in the middle of my regular job in the house (cleaning, search for water, selling...). Over the years my father started to drink and was violent towards my mother. Problems increased and food was difficult to find. Paying the rent was a problem as was the schooling of my brothers and sisters... As the eldest, I had to work and help my mother. Eventually, none of my brothers and sisters could go to school. Our life was changed.

In 1989. One of my aunts came to the village and asked my mother permission to take me to the big city of Benin. At the beginning the deal was that I would help her in the house and she would send me to school to continue my education. I agreed since I was delighted to leave my father's house and I thought I would go to school. Once in Benin my aunt sent me to sell bottles of water. That was my school for two years where I learned how to do business: how to sell the food my aunt was cooking at her small shop. I also learned how to be quiet if I wanted to stay alive: my aunt had a very bad character and she beat me quite often. I was fourteen years old when I decided to run away from her and go to Lagos. I found a young girl who offered to go with me to try to find a job. But there was no job for me... and at the age of fifteen I got another offer, prostitution.

18

I spent two years working for a «Madame». But that was not a solution since I earned very little money and had a very harsh life most of the time. After that I decided to run away again and go back home to my little village. Of course, I didn't tell my mother about my work. She only knew that I was working in Lagos. It took me just a few days to convince my mother that I could cook and sell goods as I had done with my aunt. At the beginning it was difficult but I had learned my lessons well at my aunt's place. During the week I was selling with my mother and the weekend was for farming. As you can imagine... my time for school was over!

Those years, after work, I used to spend my free time with my friends, playing and talking together. One of my girlfriends went to Europe when someone came to the village to pick her up. We started asking why we should stay in the village, without any chance to do better. I was twenty-one. I told my mother that I wanted to travel and find another place to live. I told her that if I could earn money, my brothers could go to school. She accepted and we got in touch with a woman who promised to bring me into Europe to work as a hairdresser. That was my chance. God knows that the deal with that woman was not related to prostitution. She didn't know that I had already been in that profession before. I was truly convinced that I was going to be trained as a hairdresser. My schooling would start in Europe!

My «boss» told me that we would be taking a direct flight from Lagos to Europe, but at the end of the day I found myself on the road, travelling to Mali. Cotonou, Niamey and Gao. Then eight months in the ghetto of Gao, doing nothing. That was at the end of 2003. We hung around for eight long months, without any chance to go out. We were ten girls and two boys, living in a big room. Our contact man brought us with food which we had to cook. Sometimes we played cards, sometimes we laughed and sometimes we cried, but for the most part we just slept... on the floor, since there was no mattress. It was a prison, although not ruled by the police. We just prayed that God would bring us out of Gao.

One day, my luck changed. A woman called Esther came to our house asking for a hairdresser. As I knew a little already, she took me under her wing. Every time she needed a hairdresser, she called me. But one day, something happened. After

these months of suffering, I found a man who was kind to me... and he would take me out from time to time... and... I got pregnant. That was bad! So I tried to get away. I told Esther and she said she would help me. She got in contact with someone in Europe and one night, after asking permission to go out of the room to buy some bread, I ran away. I found myself once again on the road to Europe. But things were not that easy: my former bosses wanted me back in Gao, and although I was already in Agadez (Niger), they started to follow me. I was lucky enough to meet a friendly contact man who told them that I wasn't the person they were looking for... so I could continue my journey freely.

In two weeks I arrived in Maghnia, on the border between Algeria and Morocco, and there I had to wait for three long months. Outside Maghnia there was a large camp for migrants: it was an enormous place at that time (November 2004) and not a safe place. I regretted leaving Gao. This was even worse! We were in hell! Many people died in that camp. Men were the only ones allowed to go in search of food and water. Women had to stay inside, locked up. We slept and ate, that was all. Fights were common and many disappeared to some places called «tranquilos». When you had to go to the toilet you had to ask permission and someone would go with you to ensure you did not escape. There you had no friends and even the people who brought you there could let you down easily.

It was a difficult time for me, as a woman. I learned how to look unwell so that men would stay away from me. My pregnancy wasn't enough to protect me. Some girls were beaten and wounded with knives when they tried to avoid having sex with the men in the camp. I hid myself and... well I didn't go to take a shower too often, you know what I mean? I was used to this kind of situation, but Maghnia was different. There were always men watching the camp and if they caught you, oh man! You were dead! There was no way out. It was a prison for migrants.

One day, my boss in Europe sent money to free me from this hell, and we walked in the night to Oujda, Morocco. We were thirty in the group. We spent just a week in Oujda, sleeping in the grounds of the University and then one night a bus came to pick us up. They drove us to Rabat. In late autumn of 2004 I delivered my baby, a girl, in a hospital there. I had no papers, but I had no trouble with the authorities.

At the beginning of 2005 I was ready to overcome the last obstacle blocking my entry to Europe. But there was something wrong. After this long journey towards Europe, I already knew that the people who were paying for me wanted to put me into prostitution and that was not my thinking. I had made up my mind: once in Europe I would run away and choose my own life. I had already tried prostitution and it was not an option for me. The people from Europe arranged the last step. I had to go to Tangiers, live in the bush with my baby, and from there take the boat to Spain.

Life in the forest was not easy. We were living in the open air, hiding from the police, in the cold or in the heat. Someone had to go to Tangiers to beg on the streets and to buy food. We cooked, tried to find water... we lived like animals. But some things were good: we were free to meet each other, we could walk in the forest, we could bath when we liked... you know, there was some freedom there! But you had to be always aware of the presence of the Moroccans, because they would come and send you to Oujda. In that forest I lost my baby girl. She passed away one night while sleeping. I don't know why. She wasn't sick. She just went with God and left me alone. That was not fair, but God has His ways, you know. She is buried in the forest. A permanent reminder of our struggle there.

I was waiting for my boat, but every time the contact man came to read his list of chosen women... I was not on it. One year living in the forest and not even once was my name on the list. After the death of my baby girl, and on the day that she should have been one year old, I decided to leave the forest of Tangiers and go south to Casablanca. I had already waited too much time for nothing. I had to find another way to Europe.

Winter 2006, one day I took the bus to Casablanca with another girl, who had a little money. It was a journey to a new life. Once in Casablanca I started begging on the streets. Money was difficult to get and I couldn't hope for any help coming



from Europe or Nigeria. I was alone. I rented a room in a flat with my girlfriend. We paid €100 for the room. That year the situation was still a bit difficult, because of the police. So we had to take care when we were on the streets and behave properly when at home. If the Moroccans got tired of us, they would call the police to come and detain everyone.

Nowadays it is much easier. I can tell you that during those years, 2006 and 2007, I was deported to Oujda four times: the police in Casablanca knew me pretty well! If you wanted to find me, you just had to call the police and they would tell you where I was. Each time we had to walk from the Algerian border back to Morocco. I never had problems and even the police sometimes gave me money to buy a little food. I always prayed to God to protect me and He was faithful to me!

I remember once in Oujda when many migrants took the train back to Rabat after being released at the border. I had a sense that I should not take that train. One boy was with me and he tried to convince me to take the train: «if you stay here alone someone can harm you!» But I knew that I had to stay. Finally he stayed with me... and the police stopped the train and detained everyone yet again! I felt as if I was covered by the blood of Jesus and nothing could harm me. I still believe it.

A wonderful thing happened: one day, as I was begging in the streets of Casablanca, a Nigerian came to me and we started dating. After a while we decided to stay together and he is now my husband.

Spring 2007: I was still begging on the streets and my husband had a small business earning a little money but we had a chance to try again to cross to Europe. The boat was waiting for us in El Aaiun. Las Palmas, Spain, was in front of us. The journey from Casablanca to the desert was very fast. In two weeks we were ready to take the boat... but our luck ended there. We had only twenty minutes of glory. We were still close to the beach when we saw a torch in front of us... and we knew that the police were coming to pick us up. It is certain that we had been betrayed. The mafia took the money and ran, sending an alert to the gendarmerie. But perhaps that was God again. We were too many on that boat... we probably would have died at sea.

We were deported to Oujda and once more we returned to Casablanca. After that experience, I decided that it was time to become a mother. I was growing old and I didn't know if we would stay for a long time in Morocco. At the beginning of 2008 my second baby, a boy, came into the world to give us a little hope. At that time I was completely alone and I needed some help. Some months before, my husband had been begging for us in the street but the police caught him. He was immediately deported to Nigeria by plane. It seems that at that time there was an agreement with the Nigerian government to send all Nigerians back home. That was painful time for us. He found his way back to Morocco and after two years, by God's grace, he arrived to Casablanca in November of 2009. In the meantime, I delivered my baby boy and with him I found Father Joseph. That was in February 2008. He was in Casablanca working for JRS Europe and helping the migrants. He met me in the street as I was begging with my baby... and that's how I came to know about SAM.

Although SAM was a great help, I continued to beg on the streets: I couldn't avoid begging because SAM was not ready to pay my rent. That was a pity because the police caught me as I couldn't run fast enough with my child on my back. After one week in the cells of the police station in Casablanca I was sent again to the border with Algeria. I was happy that SAM sent some pampers and other goods to the police station for me and my baby. I have to say that the police officer in charge was a good man. One day he invited us –we were a group of twelve men and women– to eat a true Moroccan couscous which his wife had cooked for everyone. I spent Christmas of 2008 in Oujda with my son. By the grace of God we were back to Casablanca in three weeks and I could explain the whole story to my friends at the SAM Centre project.

After that experience, and because Father Joseph offered me his help in SAM, my life changed a lot. I stopped begging on the streets... well I still go on Friday, the day of the Muslim prayer because you can get good money begging close to

CJ

the mosque... but by and large I manage to have enough money to buy food and pay my rent. In SAM I have found courageous people, kind people. It is a refuge for us.

What do I hope for in the future? Well... only God knows. I would like to have three more children... but in Europe... never again in Morocco! There is no school for black children in Morocco! No future for them. And I hope one day I will go back to Nigeria if it is God's will. I'm not afraid of trying again to pass by boat to Spain because I know that God protects me but I think I'm going to try by car (hidden) or by plane (fake papers). I cannot stay forever here. I must move on.

## 6. «IN MOROCCO I HAVE LIVED MANY LIVES»

CJ

I lived many lives in Morocco both good and bad, times when I was lost and times of hope. There were even times when I wanted to die.

Call me Honey A. I was born in 1979 in a small city like Tangiers in Edo State, Nigeria. I lost my father when I was five. I wanted to go to school but there was no money for me. I was the youngest so my five brothers and two sisters had an opportunity to go school. I spent my time with my mother who was a farmer, so I know how to work. You buy me some land and I can farm for you!

I remember playing with my friends and dreaming of going to school to get a good education. When I was fifteen I decided to take care of myself and to go to a hairdressing school. I thought that perhaps I could have my own business and work for my future. But once I finished my formation, no one was there to support me. Then I decided to go to find a job, any kind of job, in a big city, Benin, where one of my brothers was living.

In the big city there were no good jobs for me. I started working in a Bar, but after a while I had to leave it because it wasn't the kind of job where I could feel at ease. Then I was pregnant after a relationship that didn't last long. I was nineteen and lost. I went back to my mother and I asked her permission to leave for Abidjan, Ivory Coast. But she said no: «your elder sister is living in Italy and we have lost contact with her. If you go now I will lose you as well». But I had no option, so I told her that I was going to Europe and finally she accepted to keep my young girl with her.

22

One of my brothers (who at that time was working in Europe) came to visit us and he gave me money to make the journey to Europe. I found a boy who was willing to with me and both of us took the road north. He said that, if it were necessary, he would pay for both of us and one day I could pay him back. That was my «travel insurance»!

November 26th, 2001: from Lagos we went to Cotonou (by bus) and then by taxi to Agadez. Then taxi, bus, bus, taxi... to Ghardaia and so on. Finally, after three weeks travelling, we arrived in Temara near Rabat, Morocco. We had to pass quickly through Maghnia (Algeria) because of the danger of being caught by the Nigerians in the migrants' camps, and we had to walk across the border towards Oujda. We had no trouble with the police. The journey very easy, although long and shocking because of the desert. By the spring of 2002 I was already in Tangiers waiting for a signal from my «contact man» to go to Europe.

I spent nine months in a hotel: I had to pay €3 a day and find my own food. I found a «boyfriend» who helped me... but the police found me and they sent me back to Oujda. I lost everything I had in Tangiers and I spent four months in Oujda, living in a small room.

I left Oujda in the spring of 2003 and moved to Fez. I took a taxi. At that time it was pretty easy to travel inside Morocco if you had money. Finally I came to Casablanca in 2004 with a friend from my own Nigerian town whom I met in Fez. He was helping me all along the way.

Once in Casablanca I was in a flat with twelve men and eight women, and without any money. You had to fight for your life and at the same time accept your fate. If you wanted to remain alive you had to accept to «give something in exchange for food and housing». I don't want to call that prostitution since you must stay alive. And life is not that easy, you know? Those were difficult years because from 2003 to 2005 you couldn't walk freely in the streets, so you had to be closed in your room the whole day and go out during the night.

All those years in Casablanca I was living inside the flat: watching TV and watching the days go by, doing nothing. In those days, we could go to buy things or beg in



the streets only if we had a baby, because the Moroccans won't harm you if you are with a little child. So I often asked my friends to lend me their child when I wanted to go out. It was a difficult time. Once I got my own baby I could go on my own. You see, that's real life!

Some of the people in the flat were getting some money from Europe (from friends or people who had passed through already) and we were waiting to have enough money to get through ourselves. At that time we couldn't go to church because it was too dangerous because, if we were caught, the police would deport us to Oujda. But in 2006 everything changed and by the grace of God we can now go every Sunday to gather as a Christian Community at the Anglican Church.

I didn't look for my baby. She came as a surprise but once I knew I was pregnant I decided that I was not going to take have an abortion. I knew that it would be more difficult to get to Europe, but abortion is dangerous and ethically not good. And the father of my child promised to become my husband.... one day when we find the money to get married!

Begging in the streets is not easy. You look dirty, your baby is always on your back, perhaps some children will come to make fun of you or even some adults... you don't feel good. It causes great pain. The Moroccans usually asked me if I was Muslim... and I knew that if the answer was yes I would get much more... so I learnt sufficient basic Arabic to make some money.

On December 2007 I got a chance to try again for Europe. The father of my child found someone in Europe, another woman, who was ready to pay the €1,600 for my boat trip to Spain. I went to Oujda and Nador to wait for the crossing. I spent one month in an abandoned house close to the seashore waiting for the moment. But it was the Moroccan police who came to pick us up and they deported us to the border. We were seventy in all and three were children. It was late at night and I was with my baby. They told us to go to Algeria. We walked a bit but after a while we sat down and the Moroccans went away. So we waited, and after one hour we made our way back to Morocco.

We arrived in Oujda and we again waited for two weeks to get some news from the people who were to take us to Spain. Finally we made contact and we went again to the seashore. It was at night. We were thirty-five people in two zodiac inflatable boats. We spend eighteen hours at sea and it was becoming dangerous because the sea was rough. People started screaming and shouting. I was crying. My child was crying and we all thought we were going to die. Then we called the Spanish Emergency services but no one answered our call. We called a friend in France but he couldn't do anything for us, so finally we called the Moroccan police and they came to pick us out of the sea. Once on land we were brought to the police office and back again to the Algerian border. The same story: wait a while in «no man's land» and once more walking back to Morocco.

Once in Oujda I had to beg again because I had nothing. But Oujda is very dangerous because you are too close to the border and the police try to move all the migrants off the streets. I have had no luck in my life: after some weeks of begging I found myself again at the border with Algeria. I was begging with my baby but the police didn't care about her age. At that time we were a small group of fifteen people. And after a while... back again to Morocco... I know the road, believe me! In September 2008 I decided to come back to Casablanca.

Once in Casablanca one of my friends told me about SAM, so I came to look for help. At SAM I could find some formation (e.g. sewing), food from time to time, a school for my child and sometimes clothes as well. I know that God asked me to come to Casablanca and find you. HHe prepared this place for me and my baby. That's why I'm grateful to God. When I come to SAM I feel happy because I like the people here but more than that, it is because I feel that my life is not a complete failure. I can do something good!

This last year in Casablanca was a bit hectic. One of the men living in the same flat as myself and my husband was involved in some kind of illegal drugs affair. One day we got the news that the police were coming to search the apartment. We had just enough time to flee but without taking anything. We would have been

charged with the same crime as the drug dealers even though we had nothing to do with it. We lost everything since we couldn't go back to our room as the police were watching the flat. We had to start again. Every time something happens, we start anew our race to Europe. I'm tired. And when I call my family in the country I get the same request: can you send us some money? I'm tired. I'm really tired of this life.

When I think about my future, I know that only God can bring me happiness, so all my trust is in Him. He is going to find the way to send me to Europe. I still want to get there. There is no way back home. Getting to Europe cannot be done by boat. I tried and I have learned my lesson. No way! Next time I'm going to try a safer way, by road or by plane... but I need some € 5000 and I don't know where I could get that money. I hope someone is going to take first my baby and I will follow afterwards. We can't go together, I know. I hope my husband will also come to Europe. When I think of going back to Nigeria... you know that I would have to feed two children, pay their school, our rent, help my family, my husband... No way! I must first go to Europe and then go back with some money. I hope to see you soon there!

## 7. «MY HUSBAND IN GREECE, ME IN MOROCCO, AND MY SON IN SENEGAL»

Call me Amy G. I am from Senegal. I was born in 1984. My father is Muslim and my mother Christian. I'm a Muslim like my father and a practicing one. We lived in the outskirts of Dakar. My family is kind of big! My father had already ten children with his first wife when he took my mother as a second wife... and she gave him seven more children! Can you imagine, just one family of twenty in an apartment with four rooms!

At that time my mother had a good job. She was a doctor in a hospital in Dakar. My father worked there as well, not as a doctor but in the health care service. Her luck ran out when the hospital decided to fire some people working there. I was only seven and my mother found herself married to an old retired man. She had to start selling goods, doing business and going out. She travelled to other neighbouring countries to sell red oil (palm oil) and dried fish. I was most of the time alone so finally my grandmother took me with her. She was the one who took care of me as I grew up. I was the only girl of the seven children, so that's why I had the chance to leave my father's apartment.

My mother didn't abandon me. I was the only girl so she made every sacrifice possible to keep me at school. I went to a Catholic School with the Fathers in Dakar. I went through secondary school and even started High School but at the age of nineteen I fall in love with a handsome boy of twenty-five and we decided to get married. In Senegal marriage is a priority, so if you find the man you love and you can marry him, you must do it at once! The only difficult thing is that I had to abandon my studies because, after the wedding, I had to go to my husband's house to live with him... and to work for his entire family! That is our fate. If you live in your husband's parents' house you have to work for them.

At that time I discovered what it means to work at home. I got up early each morning to sweep the house and the sand from the front door. I had to make breakfast for everyone and clean the kitchen. Then go to market and cook lunch... should I continue? We were sixteen in the house. But I was lucky because one of my husband's brothers was married as well so I had another woman to share the work.

After one year of marriage I was pregnant and my first and only child came into this world. I was really looking forward to being pregnant and we were happily waiting for our baby... but after my delivery things got even worse at home. I now had a baby to nourish, it was difficult to sleep at night, I had to take care of him... and the other sixteen people! I can tell you in the future I want a small family, just three children no more! That was a very hard time for me.

As you know, the situation in Senegal was not good. There are few jobs, no security for your future... so one day my husband decided to leave the country and try his chance in Europe. We talked seriously and I agreed with him that the only way out was Europe. We had no chance to save any money in order to find a small apartment for our little family. His salary wasn't even enough to cover basic daily living costs. He had to go. My son was only six months old when he left Senegal.

It was in 2006... the year of the huge wave of arrivals into the Canary Islands! The boats were leaving Senegal by hundreds every month! But my husband didn't like that idea. It was not that expensive but it was dangerous, and suicide wasn't an option. We searched everywhere and got the €1000 he needed. He took a flight to Turkey. Once there he made his first attempt to cross to Greece. He was in a hurry because of us, staying in Dakar. He was almost there but the Greek police arrested him. He still remembers the horror he had to endure. He was

insulted many times, beaten without any explanation and robbed of the little he had. Some of the men in the detention camp did escape but he was unable to do so. Finally, after some months, the Greeks took pity on him and sent him free in Athens with some kind of safe-conduct that he called a «red-card». By mid 2007 he called me from Athens saying that he was fine but without any chance of a «legal» job. That meant that he was just selling things on the streets and when the police arrested him, he had to find a way to pay them or he would lose all the goods he had. As you can imagine, he was not saving any money and there seemed to be no way out. He had tried to reach Spain by road but without papers it was too difficult and pretty expensive. Nonetheless, recently he told me that he has asked for regularization in Greece and he hopes he will get legal papers one day or another. One thing is crystal clear, without European papers he cannot come back to Senegal so we have to be patient. We talk by telephone from time to time and keep in touch... but I miss him an awful lot! That's life!

«And what about me?» Ok. Once my husband left the country I stayed with my child in my husband's family house. That was not a good time. I was just a servant for the whole family. As my husband was not with me, I had no money for myself and my baby so I had no freedom. I was working at home but without any hope for my future. I had to find a way out. One day I decided to migrate like the others and to find a new life abroad.

Unlike my husband, I had no money to leave the country. I decided that Europe was way beyond my modest means and I searched for something a little nearer. I heard about Morocco and the «call centres» that were developing very fast there. They needed people who spoke good French and it was possible to earn a lot of money very quickly. I talked to my husband and he agreed that this could be a chance for us. My husband talked to his mother and she gave me the permission to go, keeping our child at home. In summer 2009 I left Dakar and I took the road to Morocco. I bought a «ticket» in a huge truck for only €150. We were six women travelling together in the back of the truck with the goods, destination Casablanca. We crossed Senegal, the desert of Mauritania, the Sahara desert... and finally we reached Casablanca, where a friend had promised me to take me in on my arrival.

I started my formation in one «call centre» but after two weeks I already knew the truth of that kind of job: you work eight hours a day for a miserable salary. The stress is enormous. That's why so many got sick after some months working there. So I left and I tried to find another job... any kind of job! The only condition was to avoid putting my life at risk. But it was not easy. After some months a friend told me that the SAM Centre was looking for a teacher. I went to try my luck although I knew I had not much experience. The director was quite desperate because the last teacher had left and they had no one to replace her... but the children were in class!

As I was ready to take any challenge he accepted me and I spent some time in a nuns school in Casablanca learning a bit about how to teach in a kindergarten. Afterwards some other formation came along. I feel good in this school and I hope I will stay for a long time!

My future is linked to my husband. If he decides to go back home, then I would go back to Dakar. But in the meanwhile I have to stay in Morocco. There is no way I am going back home to the past life! With the little money I get from SAM I have a small business and I try to save some money... and we wait in the hope that the situation will change for the better.

My only concern is for my son. I don't feel good about him. I don't have the means to bring him to Morocco but on the other hand he is too young to stay alone with my husband's family. I don't like this. It is very painful for me. You see: we are three in my little family and each of us is in a different country. Do you think that's a life? As for my future? Just pray and hope that one day everything is going to change for the better.

## 8. «I WANT MY CHILDREN TO HAVE A GOOD EDUCATION»

Call me Koukou S. I was born in 1972 in Sanlo State, Liberia. My father was a worker in a rubber factory owned by the Germans. I come from a very small family. My father was an only child and my mother had only three brothers. My parents had five children but two of them were killed in 1990 during the war. When I was a little child, at the age of eight, my parents sent me to live with some friends. They knew that they could have enough money to keep me and to give me an education. But fate did not allow me to go school. My new family treated me like a slave and I spent the whole day working for them. At the age of ten I already knew that slaves don't have rights and that if you don't want to be beaten you must be quiet. At the age of thirteen I ran away. I couldn't go back home because I knew there was no money, so I found an aunt in a big city and I asked her to keep me. She agreed but after a time I realised that there was no real change: school would never be possible for me. I ran away once again and I found myself on the streets of Monrovia.

In 1986 I was an adolescent on the streets. I was living with my street friends. I wanted to do something for myself. I found a place where they taught young girls traditional dancing. Tourists love to see us dancing in our traditional dress. I enjoyed that but after two years living on the streets I decided to go back to my aunt and ask her to send me to my parents. She didn't accept because she said that she had no money. Seeing me crying, one man begged for me and finally I got the money I asked for.

27

After seven years away from home many things had changed so I started helping my family and stayed two years with them. However, in 1989 I was back in Monrovia. That was a difficult time for Liberia. The civil war had started in 1990. At that time I was attending a free night school. I was eighteen years old and starting primary school! But I was so happy! You see one day I was watching TV and I was amazed by the people talking in good English and with a good education. I wanted so desperately to have that education. During the day I was doing business, selling second hand clothes or selling African food. I got some money so I could find a room for myself and... I found a boyfriend... a very good one! He could speak good English and he had parents in the USA! I thought that my life had started to change for the better.

As you can imagine, I very soon got pregnant and my boyfriend told me to move to a safer place, his parent's house. It was a big one! I was still eight months pregnant when the war came to our house and we had to flee. My boyfriend remained behind. As he was not coming, his little sister and I we went back to the house. We found him dead. The rebels had shot him. His sister and I buried him with our own hands. I was ready to give birth and burying my boyfriend at the same time. That's my life! My girl came into a world in flames... and she didn't want to stay. She was just one year old when she got sick and although the Red Cross tried to save her, they couldn't.

I lived through the Liberian war in Monrovia doing business when I could, living or, more to the point, surviving day to day. We stayed at my boyfriend's house, running away from time to time. It was a huge nightmare. After so many years of war people were going crazy and it was really dangerous. I found another boyfriend who helped me a lot but he was too old for me so finally I left him... but I gave him a baby girl. She's in Ghana right now. I couldn't keep my baby, so I left her with the sister of her father and she took her to Ghana. She's a big girl now and she calls me from time to time.

In 1996 the house was bombed. We lost everything. I had to find other friends to live with. But that was not safe. One day I went out to do some business and when



I came back I found the boys dead in the house. The girls were still alive but had been raped. I was lucky not to have been there. We decided to go out and never come back. That was a difficult time because there were blockades everywhere and the gunmen telling you that they would kill you if you go further on. I learned how to cook doughnuts. Seven days a week with my bread box on my head, I sold them on the streets to earn enough money to survive, against the noise of the bombs and the shooting in the streets. That was my war time and I have today high blood pressure and a heart which beats heavily from that time.

September 1998. I had enough of our wars. I left Liberia with one of my girlfriends and we fled to Nigeria. We went to a refugee camp where I got my first refugee card. Life was not easy. The UN people are a bit odd. I haven't a good experience with them. They don't help you. They don't give you money. The facilities were limited and there was very little rants here. With the crisis in Ceuta and Melilla (the Spanish cities of North Africa), all the «blacks» living in the big cities of Morocco suffered! Police came to our neighbourhood, as they knew that there were migrants there, and they took everyone in big buses straight to the desert.

I was on one of those buses with my baby Irene and my husband. We lost everything and perhaps we were about to lose our lives in the desert. It was a long caravan of buses, almost eight buses full of migrants. On the journey we tried to call UNHCR and ask them to come to help us but they said that they could do nothing for us. We were deported to the Moroccan-Algerian border at Oujda and abandoned there around three in the afternoon. We had to walk back to Morocco during the night. We spent three days in Oujda waiting for some help but nobody came, so we left the city and came back to Casablanca. Once here we discovered that the Moroccans had entered our room and taken all our property.

When UNHCR reached Oujda to talk to the refugees we weren't there. I had a baby and I couldn't spend too many nights under the open sky waiting for them. My husband heard that UNHCR was sending people to Europe after that crisis, so he went to Rabat to talk to them. To our surprise, UNHCR told him that we had should have stayed in Oujda to have a preliminary interview and we were not there. So... no possibility to enter in Europe like others had. My husband sent many letters complaining but finally UNHCR told him to stop doing it.

UNHCR Morocco has not been helpful to us. Once I was selling goods in Casablanca Medina. I was sitting on the street with a friend and hoping that someone would buy something. One Moroccan threw water from her window on us. I called the police and I told them that I was a UNHCR refugee. The UNHCR official who came along to «help me» and «protect me» said that UNHCR had given me a refugee card but not to put Moroccans in jail. So... thank you very much!

Coming back to Casablanca, we had to find another room and start from scratch as we had nothing. Some friends helped us and we did the same when other migrants needed our help: this is how we live. At that time in Casablanca I took in a young girl we had met in Oujda. She was sick because of the cold she got there. She couldn't get over her illness. She died on my bed. So... again I was in trouble! An illegal migrant with a dead illegal migrant on her bed! And I knew that UNHCR wouldn't come to help me. So I had to take a chance: I called my landlady and she understood my trouble. She called the police and they were friendly with me. They asked me plenty of questions but that was all. They took the body to the mortuary and we left the room and moved to Rabat to take some distance and after a certain time, we came back to Casablanca.

Life came back to normal again. 2006, 2007 and 2008 were not that bad. As my husband is a mechanic he finds something to do from time to time and gets some money. I was doing my business and finally in July 2008 my last baby came to give us some happiness. This time I had to go to the hospital for a caesarean. Since I delivered Irene in Oujda, something had changed in me. I had put on a lot of weight and it was dangerous to give birth without caesarean. So, I followed the instructions of the doctor and everything was fine.

In August 2008 a Nigerian friend told me that there were some people from Europe helping the children and migrant women in Casablanca... so I came to visit the

SAM Centre with my husband and my children. From that time on SAM has being a great help to me. I was wasting my time at home doing nothing, without any real aim in life. One day I wake up in the morning and I knew that I had to go to SAM, to bring my children to school, to attend the workshop myself. I learned sewing, knitting and some French! At SAM you can talk to the sisters and share your life. You find plenty of good people to help you. And everyone says that since we arrived here we all are happier and we are putting on weight. And I can tell you that we are having babies! Well... not me! You have given us some hope in order to keep living in this country and God will bless you for ever.

As for my future...? I have to give a good education to my children. I have to find a little money to settle down and build a future for my family. I have a husband and we have being together for a very long time... The problem is that there is no peace in Nigeria or in Liberia. We are refugees but UNHCR has forgotten us. We are stranded here in Morocco... and our future... well, come to visit me in ten years and perhaps I will answer this question. But thank you for being close to us... and if you find someone in Europe, who could take my children to school in Europe, please let me know because I would prefer to live far from my children than to oblige them to repeat my story in Africa

## 9. «SADNESS OCCUPIES THE GREATEST SPACE IN MY LIFE»

Call me Joy B. I was born on October 12th, 1979 in Edo State, Nigeria. I come from a farming family. I have six brothers and one sister, all of them still in the country. My parents died some years ago. I'm the only one who tried to make the migrant journey and I'm not asking them to try it because now I know that there is no way out of this adventure.

I remember going to the primary school and playing with my friends, clapping hands and dancing... but most of the time I was farming with my mother or helping her at the house.

When I was thirteen years old my mother got very sick. She was losing blood and my father has no money to send her to the hospital, so they decided to send me to my aunt's family in Kaduna State. Later I decided to go back home since I wasn't happy with my aunt. My mother didn't like that but I didn't want to go back to my aunt. That was a time of quarrels in the family. Finally I had to go back to my aunt's house. One day I discovered that my mother had died. My aunt didn't tell me because she wanted to keep me with her. I ran away and went back to my father's house. He accepted me back but then I had to work to feed all the family. My sister had gone from the house years before. She got pregnant and my father sent her away because she wasn't married.

30

It was very hard then. I was seventeen years old and I knew I was missing out on going to school. I had to go to the market everyday to sell the farm produce and I couldn't decide for myself even though I was the only woman of a family of eight... my family!). You know, we women like to buy clothes and things. Nothing! That was a very sad time. It was sad to see my little brothers living with nothing and to know that they will have the same future as me.

I already had my sister in the city... one day I decided to leave as well. I would go to Europe and make lot money as a prostitute. My family will get what they deserve and probably my life would be different as well. I knew prostitution was a big, big business because you can see the houses and cars and everything that these people have in our country, and I already had a younger cousin in Spain working in that field. One day I told my father that I should go to Europe to help the family and as he knew that one «sister» was doing some kind of «travel agency» to help girls to reach Europe, to work in houses (cleaning, cooking, etc.), my father agreed and paid €300 for my journey. In 2000 I went there and I stayed for a year in that house, with my aunt. I remember once a woman came to the house and she took three girls with her. We were six but I don't know why I wasn't chosen. So after a time I was back in the village with the promise that one day someone would come for me.

And it was true. Some months later, someone came and took me first to Lagos, where I spent one month. From there we were eight women travelling by bus to Bamako, Mali. We had directions to follow and that was all. In Bamako I spend eight months and I met another Nigerian girl who was already waiting there, Cathy. She would become my sister forever. I met her again in Casablanca and she was also helped me during my delivery some years later.

One day we left Bamako. At twenty-two, I was one of the youngest of the group and there were some who were twenty-eight and thirty years old. We were travelling in disguise. I was disguised as a young adolescent, so I didn't need a passport of my own, just my picture on another passport, that of my «false mother». From Bamako we took the plane to Casablanca and in Casablanca I found myself in a flat with eight other girls. We had a room where we slept together with a bath, a shower to share... Our «guardian» with his wife were living in the



room next to ours. Our «boss» sent regularly from Bamako some money for us but generally we had to fend for ourselves. We couldn't go outside on our own but always supervised by our guardian. Actually this was more to protect us from Nigerian men than from the Moroccan police. If the Nigerians knew that we were Nigerians they would kidnap us and sell us to another «boss». That was 2004 and our life was very boring and painful. Nothing to do but just sleep and eat. Someone from Europe sent money to pay transport for some of the girls but I wasn't one of the lucky ones.

Suddenly, after a year of hanging around, our «boss» from Bamako stopped sending money and our «guardian» put us out the flat. I found myself on the street, but I was lucky. I fell in love with a Liberian, a true love with a very caring man, and he took me with him. But this relationship was not to last. He had to leave for Ghana and he died there some months later. You know me, I'm most of the time making fun but, looking inside, my life is not that funny.

It was 2005 and I could still see Europe in front of me. I had to try for myself. I tried to call home for some money, but nobody could help me there. I tried my cousin in Spain but after some calls she told me she had had a very bad time and she couldn't help me. I was alone in Morocco. My only chance was to «find a husband». So I found a Liberian who said he was in love with me and little by little we grow in our relationship. He was very helpful at the beginning because he had pity on me. Then very soon my little girl arrived! My first baby!

Time passed without any change. From 2006 on, I was free of my «bosses» but stranded in Casablanca. I had no-one who wanted to pay my ticket to Europe and I had no money either. I'm still with my husband although we are not legally married... we can't without any money! And I'm here in 2010 and still no money to get away. By the end of 2006 I found «a job» in a Bar, serving drinks to blacks. At that time I was earning €60 a month but the Moroccan police found the place and... closed everything.

31

When my child was two years old she was attending a Moroccan kindergarten, but my husband asked me to bring my child to the SAM Centre. Why? Easy to explain! My girl was learning Arabic, which I don't understand... so how to communicate with her? She was also learning Muslim prayers and their religion, just like the other children. I have been Christian all my life, like my family, so there was no point in keeping her there.

Once I started to come to the SAM Centre, with the help of the micro-project scheme I could start doing my own business. My child is much better at the SAM Centre and I feel fine here. Right now I feel happy because I'm independent. I don't have to ask anyone for help, because I have business, buying and selling things and I'm good at that.

And as for my future? Well... I know that by the grace of God my future is going to be good. I know that Europe is not for me. Now I have to go home, with my husband. Right now I try to earn as much money as I can and save the biggest part of it. One day I will go back and I will start a business over there. Let's pray to God!

## 10. «SOON I'LL RETURN TO NIGERIA»

Call me Jessica Ch. I was born in 1979, in Nigeria. My father was from Edo State but when he was just two years old he lost his parents and someone took him to Congui State, where he found my mother and I grew up. We were farmers. My mother had twelve children, but only nine are still alive. We are two girls and seven boys. We were not able to go to school. We all worked on the farm with my father or with my mother at home. We don't have an extended family, so we had to help ourselves. That was our life.

When I was twelve years old, a woman asked my parents to allow me to go with her to the city and she would take care of my education. I didn't go regularly to school but I worked in her restaurant. I was cooking there for eight years. It was a big restaurant and I learned how to cook, which was good. As she had promised, the woman sent me to primary school (I was thirteen!) but I couldn't go regularly because of my job. I was going just two days a week. That was something that affected me a great deal during those eight years. I wanted to learn but I was just working all day. But one day things changed. I was very good at sports, as I'm very tall and fit. I qualified for an important national competition and my trainer said that he would give me a scholarship in order to work harder in sport.

But there was a problem. The woman couldn't give her permission, so I had to go back home and ask my parents. That was the first time I had spoken with my mother for eight years, can you imagine? When I explained to her how my life had been, she started to cry but at the same time she asked me why I went back home, because they didn't have money to allow me finish my education. After so many years I couldn't go back to the farm and I really wanted to finish primary school, so I decided to start my own small Bar to serve food in my family village. With that money I could finish primary school at the age of twenty two. I'm proud of that!

At the age of twenty three I decided to continue my studies and go to secondary school but they asked for too much money and I couldn't afford it. I knew that my family wasn't able to help and that I had to find my own way. I was young and very fit. I had to do something before it was too late. One day a man came to my «bar» and asked me why I was there, as I was such a beautiful girl. I told him my dream to have a good education and build a future for myself. He told me that he had a sister in Europe and that she was doing pretty well over there and perhaps she would need someone to help her.

So, his sister called me and sometime later we met in the village. I explained to her that I wanted to go to school and finish my studies. I knew I was a very good runner so I could train in Europe and do big things. She said that she would help me find a good job and I could continue my education. So she told me to get my passport and a visa in order to go with her and I did. She said that someone would come to pick me up and bring me to the airport. I was twenty-four and full of hope. I had a boyfriend at that time and he agreed that the best for us would be to go to Europe and see how good I was as a runner.

July 2001. A man came one day and told me to go with him. He took my passport and everything seemed ok. I asked him about the woman who first met me and he said that she was fine. But then he said that if I wanted to travel with him, I had to have sex with him. I couldn't believe that and I refused. I left the place in a hurry and when I went back the next day, the man had fled with my passport and another girl. I was furious and I called the woman telling her the story. She said that she was sending another man to pick me up, which she did, but this time the journey was by land: a big change, do you see?

Mali was the first stop in Gao city. Three months hanging around. There were many girls from many different countries. We were in a small house, just waiting.

They told me that they were going to Europe like me. I was surprised to meet so many girls travelling to Europe in order to go to school. I still remember them laughing at me when I asked what kind of studies they would like to follow in Europe. Then I understood that prostitution would be my near future. Depressing, really depressing.

I called «my» contact woman in Europe and I asked her what it was all about. Then she told me that she was going to give me an education but that I had to work for her. She said that if I didn't want to continue with the trip I could go back home and this is what I decided to do. But then all my problems started. She didn't send any more money and they had taken all my papers, so I wasn't free to go home. I was just stranded in Gao. I had not even the address of my family and I knew that I couldn't ask them for help, because they had no means.

I started to go to the food market to beg for something to eat. As I could cook, I was cooking for others and eating a bit of my own cooking. I didn't know what to do. I prayed a lot. I asked God to send me help. I started three days of prayer and fasting asking God to help me. At the end of the third day I couldn't cope any more. I started to cry, sitting on the sand outside the main door of the market place. Then... well, a Nigerian man passed by and stopped close to me. He asked me why I was crying. I told him my story and my distress when I realised that I would have to become a prostitute if I wanted to get out of here. That man took pity on me and he said that he would help me. That man, named Hakim, is today my husband. Nice story, isn't it?

Hakim came to the house and paid money to release me. I was free but the other girls advised me that perhaps I was falling into a second trap. I asked Hakim about his intentions. He was travelling to Europe on his own. He wanted a new life in Europe and he was inviting me to share that dream with him. I couldn't believe it. I told him that I wasn't a prostitute, not even for him and if God didn't like the fact that I was with him, I wouldn't go. So, I started again a three days fasting and praying to God about this man and my future with him. And... believe it or not, at the end of my prayer I was certain that God wanted me to be with him. And that is the case up until now!

From Gao we went to Ghardaïa and over there we had to stop again for a while. We were in a house for migrants waiting to continue our journey. We had bad luck. One of the migrants living in the same place stole something in the market. The Algerian police followed him to the apartment and they took everyone. I escaped but Hakim didn't know that I was safe and ran into the house to try and rescue me. The police took him to the border, and he spent two months in Gao! But Hakim didn't abandon me. He called someone and told them to lead me to Morocco, and he would pay once he got back to Ghardaïa.

It was November 2001 when I arrived in Morocco. We didn't pass through Maghnia because we got the news that the situation over there was really bad and there were dangerous people living there. We entered through Figig, a much safer road. In a few days I was in Rabat, in the neighbourhood of Takadoum. I was sharing a flat with... forty-five sub-Saharan! By the grace of God we were women in one place and men in another. I had to wait two months for Hakim. As I didn't want to have sex with the man in charge of the «guest house», he didn't give me any food, soap or other things I needed. I had to beg from the other girls. I was ashamed. They asked me why I wanted to be the «Virgin Mary» all my life. But I couldn't do it. I still have some marks on my body, evidence of my fight to keep to my decision.

When Hakim finally reached Rabat at the beginning of 2002, the people of the flat asked him to pay everything. If he refused, they would sell me to another group of Nigerians. I remember praying to God and asking Him why this was happening again to me. But Hakim was generous and he paid for my freedom a second time. Where did he get his money? I discovered that he came from a quite wealthy family in Nigeria. His father was a well known politician but in trouble. He had been threatened and decided to send his only boy to Europe. The father was paying for both of us. We could find a better place to stay in Rabat and we paid for our «transport» to Europe. Again we had no luck: the «trafficker» stole all our money and we were back again at the starting point.

As my relationship with Hakim was strong, we decided to have a baby, who came into this world in April 2003 at Rabat. That was another story. At that time Morocco was a difficult country for migrants. I went alone to the hospital for my delivery. They asked me if I had papers and I had none. They asked about my husband and I told them he wasn't in the country because of fear of being detained. After three days alone in the hospital I took my baby and we just ran away. I stopped a taxi, and God was with me again. The taxi man asked me about my papers and why I was leaving the hospital dressed like that. I explained to him that I was alone, and without any help in the hospital... and then, one Guinean man who was already in the taxi told the taxi man to drive me home, that he was going to pay the fare. God is always on time when you need Him!

But things went wrong again. We had no money, so I had to feed my baby with a mixture of flour and water. My husband went to find the man who had stolen our money to fight to get it back. Hakim went twice, but the third time he went the thief was with other men from the mafia. They kidnapped him and almost beat him to death. Thankfully he was able to get to our room and our landlord, a Moroccan, took him to the hospital, where he rested for two weeks. After that, the police deported him to Oujda, because he had no papers. It was very hard. Finally he took the train and came back to Rabat. When he went back, another man told us that we should go to Tangiers, in the North. It seemed that from there it would be much easier to reach Europe. Once in Tangiers Hakim would ask his family for the money to continue our journey.

July 2003. Thank God the family of Hakim was rescued us once more. So, we paid € 2.500 for the three of us and the «trafficker» brought us to the forest outside Tangiers and told us that we should wait there for some days... but a month passed and we were still there, waiting. At that time I met some of my «girlfriends» from Gao some years ago. They were still on their journey to Europe. One night we were asked to go to the beach and wait for the boat. Soon we were in the boat sailing towards Spain. But the boat wasn't in good shape and after an hour, we sank. In the dark we all lost contact with each other and I lost my baby. A wave had taken him away from me. Some of us were lucky enough to find some Moroccan fishermen who took us to the beach. Others had to reach the coast by themselves. Others never got back to land. And then, God again was working miracles. I was desperately crying on the beach when news came that one fisherman, far away from the place where the boat had sunk, had found a baby floating in the sea. We ran to the village and I found my baby. He was still breathing but with great difficulty. The Moroccan women had helped him to stay alive but he needed urgently to go to the hospital. So we called our Spanish friends living in Tangiers, and they took the baby there. In the Italian Hospital he recovered and was saved from the waters. A miracle!

By the grace of God, the three of us were back in Tangiers, and we made up our minds to go back home to Nigeria. Hakim asked our «trafficker» for the money. Since they didn't bring us to Europe, the deal was off but the man said that the money had gone. We had no money, so Hakim asked his family again. This time the news wasn't good. His father had died... finally his opponents had found a way to poison him. The family was going through a very difficult time, so they could help us. We had no money to pay for a room, so we went back to the forest to live there, to hide among the trees and suffer the cold and difficulties with «wild life». Animals live in the forest, not humans. I was lucky to have my husband with me. For a single woman to live in the forest it is much worse. I had to take care of my baby who was being bitten by insects. We stayed there for a year. I was taking my baby with me to beg on the streets of Tangiers and then going back to the forest. The police was trying to chase us out of the forest. They came twice a week and we had to run every time. I'm still a good runner, you know! If the police found us, they would deport us to Oujda, steal our goods and burn everything in the forest. That was a difficult time, but there was something good which I didn't expect. God sent me another baby.

At that time, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) was helping us in the forest, so they took charge of my pregnancy. I delivered at the hospital in Tangiers in October 2004 and after a few days MSF brought me back to the forest. Now we were four

in the family and we had no regular income. We were really poor. We survived with the little help coming from the solidarity of some foreigners who came from time to time to the forest and tried to give us some food, blankets and other goods. But that was dangerous for them as well, because of the huge police surveillance.

In January 2005 God came again to our aid: a Portuguese family was told by a Moroccan woman about our situation and they decided to pay six months' rent for a room in Tangiers for us. So we went there and I will be always grateful to God for taking us out of the forest. After these six months I had to go begging on the streets once again. But, the same Moroccan women who introduced us to the Portuguese family found a job for my husband. Although he had no papers he could work as a driver and the Moroccans accepted him nicely. Like that we started to have some €100 a month... for the first time in many years, something started to change in my life.

The decision was to go back home but we needed to find some money to do that. The Moroccan woman gave me a little money to start selling food in the streets. In September 2005 we heard about troubles in the forest. The police had decided to «clean» the forest and they were taking everyone out. They burned the «tranquilos», cut the trees and really cleared the place. Many of our comrades were deported and some reached Tangiers like us. After that, our life was kind of quiet although the police was always looking for us. I was begging in the streets or selling food, so they caught me three times. As I was always with my baby they respected me every time and released me quite early. The first time they released me after one day in the police station. The other two times I had to pay to be released. That's life!

From 2005 to 2009 we stayed in Tangiers. In 2007 we decided that we should be legally married, so we had to find the way to get in touch with my family to sign the papers. One friend of Hakim did that for us. When he came back he brought the news of my mother's death that very year. I was sad because I hoped to meet her back in Nigeria with my new family, but now it was too late. On the other hand, the visit of Hakim's friend was a very happy day for my family. They thought that after such a long time without news from me (six years) I was already dead. In all these years I never tried to reach them. I knew that they were poor so if I called them, they would ask me to send money and I had nothing to share with them.

My children were growing up and I couldn't give them an education. I was worried and wanted to do something for my children but what could I do, lost in Tangiers? Then I heard about the SAM Centre in Casablanca. Some Nigerian women had been there and they said that there was a school for migrants. Again God was answering my prayers. So we decided that I should go to Casablanca with the children and try to find the SAM Centre. Hakim would stay in Tangiers to keep his job. When I arrived in Casablanca I found a room for €120 a month and we came to the SAM Centre to ask for help. The first time I didn't get any help. The director, a Jesuit priest, told me that I should go to Tangiers because I was living there and the children were not the right age for the kindergarten: my oldest had already over six years old and they were taking only from three to six. He didn't give me a chance, but I knew that I had to try again. Some months later I returned to the SAM Centre with my two children. This time I explained that I wanted to go home the sooner the better but in the meanwhile I wanted my children to have a little education. The coordinator, a Franciscan sister, accepted my request and I was oriented towards OIM. Thank God my children are having an education and we receive food parcels and some clothes when the SAM Centre gets some. And if I'm in great need I know that SAM is backing me. I'm grateful to God.

Up until today, my husband is trying to save the money he can and I'm doing the same with my «African food» street business. And we pray God that very soon we can go back to Nigeria to start a new life. We have already €2.000 so perhaps one day you will pay me a visit in Nigeria!! The SAM Centre is helping us to get in touch with OIM and I think 2010 will be the year of my return to home. God knows! After all those years I learned that God is my future. He has rescued me so many times and I know that once back in Nigeria He is going to help me to build my life with my husband and my children.



## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Ten lost lives. Like Mary Magdalen they feel abandoned. Although I must confess that perhaps it is my feeling rather than theirs. They keep their faith in God. They have more hope in the Resurrection than me, as it is the case with the women in the Gospel. Too many times I felt powerless. What can we do? Just accompany «Jesus» in his agony:

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, «Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages». «Leave her alone», Jesus replied. «It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial» (John 12, 3-8).

Accompany. That's SAM's job. We can do no more than that. We share the fate of these lost women and their children in the big city of Casablanca. Last September 2009 three of our beneficiaries, Mary, Blessing and her two month old boy, died during the night on the Mediterranean Sea, along with some other thirty migrants, trying to reach Spain. We shared their last year in Casablanca, their laughs, their fears, their dreams. We helped them to endure their difficult time here in a big, strange city. We poured the perfume we had and we shared the happiness of their dreams.

36

In that way we really can say that we share their situation. Although we know that we all are in transit: after some months or a few years, they will all leave Morocco. They don't have any possibility to stay here.

Over these past three years we have been giving a shelter to their shattered lives. After a difficult time when they were children, all of them took the same decision: «I have nothing to do here. I must leave. I had to try a new life in Europe for myself and for my family». Then some people appear who offer you «heaven» in Europe after a short journey. The contact man comes to pick you up and the nightmare begins. Sometimes the journey is quite easy, and takes just some weeks, from Nigeria, Cameroun, Congo, Ivory Coast, Senegal... Sometimes it takes some months of difficult experiences: «Many times you find yourself against the wall: you must accept to become a prostitute if you want to continue the journey. To escape that fate, you have to "marry" another migrant who will protect you against others». Some of them choose their departure only in faith of finding something in Europe, but many women knew from the beginning that they were heading to the prostitution clubs in Europe: that was the only way they knew how to pay for their journey, the only way they could help their families... or unfortunately this is the only job that they can offer to the people in Europe: «When you went just to the primary school because your parents couldn't give you any further education and you had no professional work because since you were nine years old you just went selling goods in the streets, you cannot enter in the list of "available EU jobs for migrants". It's impossible to get a visa. So, you are bound to stay in your country for the rest of your life! No way!». And although prostitution is a paid job in Europe and you can find that job in all the European countries, it is not included in the list of jobs which will guarantee you a Schengen Visa and so many of the beneficiaries of the SAM Centre risk their lives in order to fulfil the «desires» of some Europeans. The Schengen system has not stopped prostitution in Europe; it has just put at risk the lives of the women that Europe «needs». And Europe is paying the same price for their services.

Too many times the women who drowned in the Mediterranean were pushed by their «bosses» in Europe to take that boat. The bosses were tired waiting for them to get to Europe. They had paid and the women were not yet in Europe. For many

it was their last attempt. So, though the boat is often overloaded and the sea is not safe, they have no other option: «now or never». Too many times «never» is the answer. We shared their last months. We poured our perfume over them. God keeps them in His mercy. SAM is still working in Casablanca, with many other women and children. We accompany them.

Here you have read ten missing lives? But they are not the only ones. In the past there have been... how many... millions? And they will be many more still in the future... Migration is part of our human condition. But... what are we doing? In our global world we close our minds, we close our hearts to that human condition. I believe that every generation has its chance to change just a little the path we walk together. In our case, Black and White, we all share the same fate. We need to look at ourselves, at our personal lives in our Western well-developed and advanced world and perhaps then we will hear the voice of Jesus saying «I don't condemn you. Just go and don't do it again!». We have another chance; there is always another chance with Him.

We are an expression of the will of God to Exist. Human life is a religious experience in this universe in which God communicates. Why hinder the expression of God? Why put limits on human existence? Why do we turn the dream to emigrate into a curse?

I truly believe that we have another chance to look into a chart of «Migration Rights». There is always another chance. Let's think anew and let's find a way to live together in peace and in justice in this our only World.

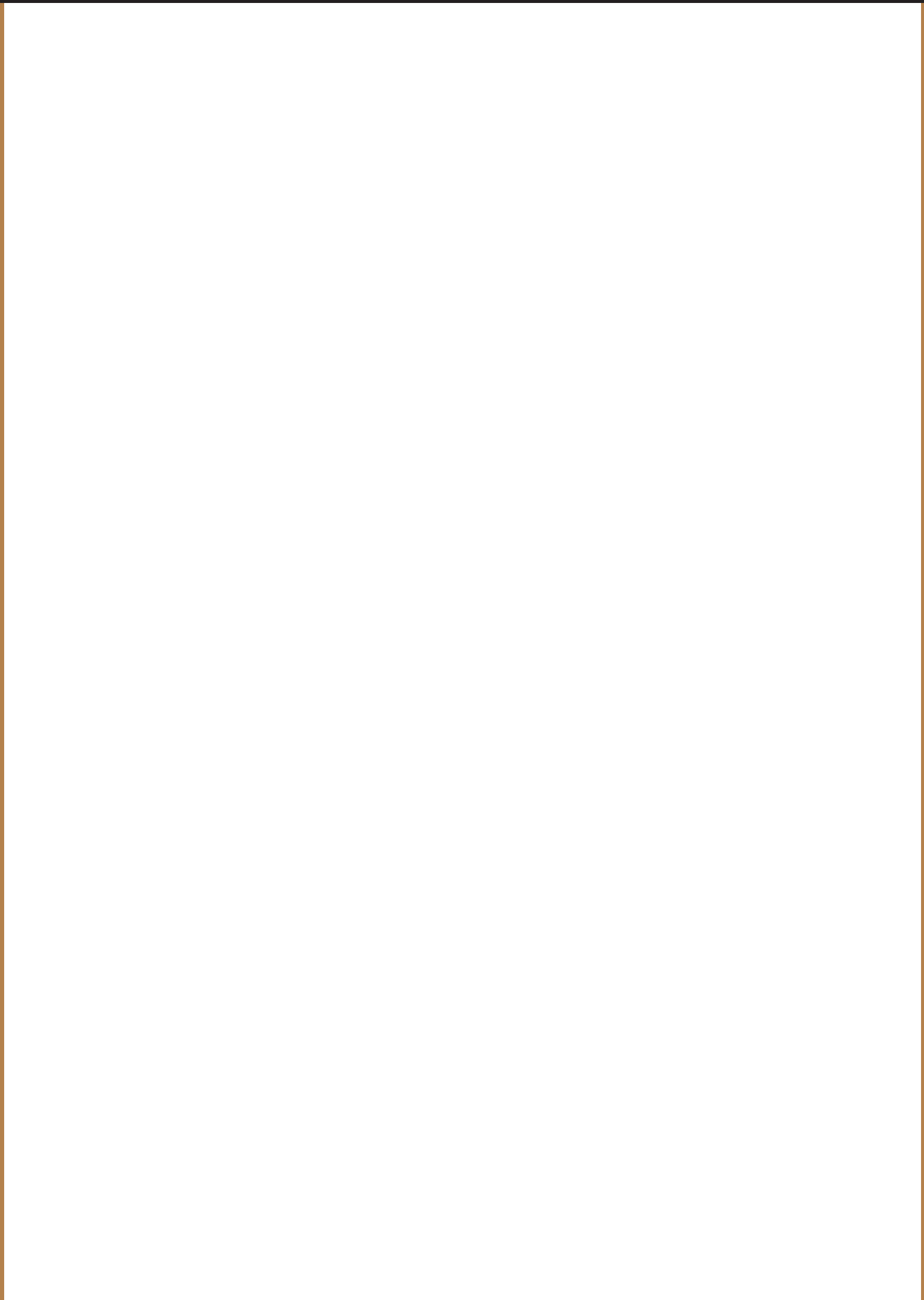
And I would like to end with a reflection written in 1991 by my spiritual teacher during my years of Jesuit education:

In the midst of poverty, our hearts grow in spiritual simplicity and tenderness and learn not to root reflection on our faith on comparisons, parallels or demands but rather on difference, gratuity and, ultimately, on the ever-active presence of the Paschal Mystery in the lives of these people. Above all else, they teach us to always live in hope. Their life is quite different from what we see or imagine it to be: their life is one of hope while our perception of it is often dramatic. It would seem to me that the art of living among them is to weave strands of hope and pain together in such a way that hopes prevails over the pain.

Hope is the touchstone of their life. Stranded on a beach, but always with the hope of living their own lives.

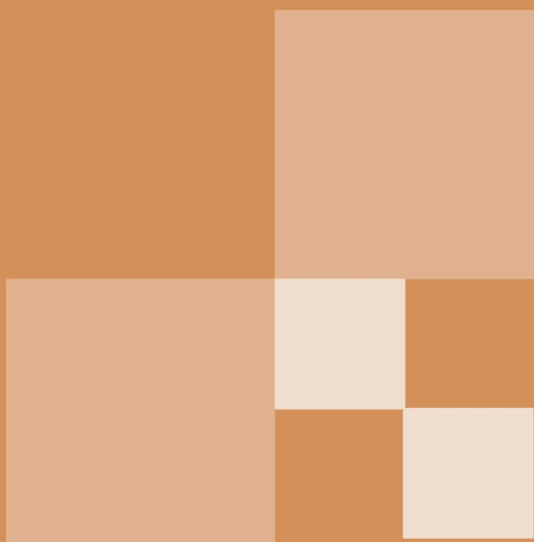






**virtual collection**

1. Ten boats stranded on a beach. José Luis Iriberry



The virtual collection includes materials published exclusively on the web. Here you will find booklets which we have not printed because of their length or their different format and style, but we believe that they possess the same rigor, significance, and quality as the published booklets of CJ. We would like them to be distributed by the internet, and that's why we are counting on you.

You will find the booklets of this collection at: [www.cristianismeijusticia.net/virtual](http://www.cristianismeijusticia.net/virtual).