

SOUMYA ARRIVES IN THE UNITED STATES AT 13

My name is Soumya and I am 13 years old. Today I will tell you my story. When I was 4 years old I lived in the village of Armed in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. I have a small family, my Mom, Dad, and my brother Mohamed.

My brother had a problem with his feet, I had to help him. I had to go with him if he wanted to go outside, so I could make sure he didn't fall or the boys didn't make fun of him. My brother Mohamed liked to play outside so I had to be outside all day.

One day when my Mom was cleaning the house and I was playing with my brother outside, Mohammed was running and he fell. I helped him to get up. A woman there said "Hi" in English. We did not understand. She said that she wanted to see my family. My Dad and my Mom came to see what she wanted.

She was looking at Mohamed. She introduced herself to us. She is a doctor in orthopedic surgery and her name is Pier Boutin. She said she will find a Doctor in Morocco that can fix Mohamed's feet

My Mom and Dad were not sure because they think in Morocco they would cut his feet off.

The woman left. The next day I was with my Mom going to help my grandmother in the garden when my uncle said that the woman is back. We went back to my uncle's house to meet her. We don't have a nice house to serve her a tea. We talked to her. She said that she can take Mohamed to America to fix his feet. He can come back to Morocco after his feet are fixed.

First, my Dad didn't want to let him to go to America but my Mom made him. She said if you want Mohamed's feet to be fixed, we need to let him go to America. My Dad said, "I would be okay to lose my son in the hopes that he would be able to walk". The woman left. My Dad said that she will not come back. Six months later the passports and the visa came for my Dad and my brother. My parents were happy and sad at the same time because my family says that Mohamed will never come back. Mom said to my Dad that Mohamed will come back.

My Dad and Mohamed went to buy things they needed for travel. They took the airplane in April 29, 2011. I was 6 years old. I cried so hard because I don't know if my brother will come back or not. It was so hard. My Mom and I work by ourselves in the house. My Mom was sad and she cried so hard because she don't know if Mohamed will come back.

It was hard to be in the house without Mohamed. I was so sad. My Dad came back from America. He came so happy. My Mom said "How is Mohamed doing?" My Mom started crying. My Dad said "Don't cry because Mohamed is having the best time in his life." He showed my Mom the pictures.

Mohamed called us every day. When he talked to us, he started to cry. He said Mom "I don't know what is happening to my feet", Mohamed was having a lot of surgery. He was in America

for one year. Mohamed didn't want to talk to us. Pier called us. Mohamed didn't know how to say 'hi' or 'bye' because he forgot his Berber.

When Mohamed came back to Morocco, he did not speak Berber anymore. We can't talk with him. People were surprised when Mohamed came back because they think that Mohamed will not come back. My Mom and Dad were so happy because they saw Mohamed after a year.

Mohamed came back to Morocco with his feet fixed. My Mom started crying when she saw Mohamed's feet are fixed. The whole family was so happy. We did a party for Mohamed. It was a good time to be with everybody in the family and play with the children.

In that year one of my cousins got married and Mohamed went back to America.

Mohamed said to Pier that my cousin is married at age 13. Pier was not happy to hear that. She said that girls need to go to school. She has a daughter who is the same age. She said that she can't think of her daughter getting married.

Mohamed told her that in Armed girls can't go to school. They can go to 6th grade, but boys can go to school until they finish. The boys in Armed never finish school because they don't like school. If their family has money they can finish school but some of the boys go for fun. The boys like to spend money in different things and they don't go to classes. Their families think that their boys are going to class. Some boys are like that but some of them like to go school.

Pier said that she wanted me to come over to America to visit for a month. She didn't want my family to think that Mohamed is better than me.

My Mom said that she thought she wanted me to see how women live in America.

I was so happy. My brother and I had a notebook and we marked the date. We crossed out the days. When I went to school I told my class that I am going to America. They didn't believe me. The girls are saying stop lying.

When I went to school and I told the teacher that I will not be here at least 2 days because I am going to Casablanca so I can make my passport, the girls and boys said "are you really going to America?".

When it was May 6th I went to school and said bye to my class, and they said "you are so lucky." Mohamed and my Mom and my Dad and I went to buy stuff that we need, then we got ready to go to the airport.

On May 7th we woke up at 3:00 am, we left at 4:30 and we got to the airport at 7:30. We had the airplane flight at 2:45. My Dad and my brother Mohamed and I were in the airplane. I got so scared, and my Dad said "what are you so scared of?". I said I am scared of the plane because is my first time to see airplanes, I see them in tv but I never seen them in my life.

When I arrived in the United States, there was so much food in the car and at the house. There was a bowl of fruits in the kitchen that was always full even though I always stole the bananas and the apples.

I went to school with my brother and he knew everyone in school. And I learned some English and meet new people and had a nice month. We had to go back to Morocco. We said "Bye" to Mom Pier and "thank you so much".

In 2017, my family would have to move to another town, so I could keep going to school. Few girls were allowed to go to school beyond 7th grade. That's when Pier offered me to continue my education in the United States.

I lived like most other girls in Armed. Girls cannot finish school. They have to get married at 13 to 30 years-old men. I believed that would happen to me and I would have to get married young too.

I don't want to get married, I want to get educated but I don't know what will happen to me in the future.