

If I fly too far

Here I will tell you my story. The one that started a few years ago when I first decided to gather my toothbrush and laptop, 21st century essentials, say 'a presto' to my friends and kiss my mother goodbye. It was time for me to see what the world had to offer beyond the borders of my little Italian city, it was time to leave home, face my fears, make big decisions and undergo some important changes. A few years into this experience I found myself volunteering at Maison de l'Europe Bordeaux-Aquitaine, where they asked me to write a personal article. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to share my adventure, one that I share with many youth across Europe, and that hopefully inspires others to depart as well.

June 18, 2018, a plane leaves Roma airport, direction, Madrid. It was my first time flying alone, my first time in a foreign country and above all it was the first summer away from my hometown, and I was happy about that. There are plenty of motivations that drive young people to travel, sometimes it is curiosity, often it is the desire to have fun, *for me it was a need for air*. Ever since I was a child, my city, located in an unknown region of central Italy, gave me a sensation of being buried, a feeling that grew over time until it became a primary goal for me to get out of that bubble and seek a new place where I could learn how to breathe.

I do not vividly remember the details nor the bureaucratic process that got me on that plane, I think I wasn't fully aware of what was happening. At the time, still being a teenager, I was only moved by the desire to leave the city and *forget who I was*, starting over again in an unknown place even if only for a month.

The destination didn't matter, but the money unfortunately did. So I set out to find a way of travelling, without asking my parents for money. That's how I discovered EVS and was able to gain experience abroad with a small budget. I entered my information, and a little circle next to the Spanish capital appeared on the screen and caught my attention; after a few clicks, a motivational text, and a rather hurried video call, I found myself selected for a project regarding the informal education of children living in poor neighborhoods of Madrid.

Arriving at the Spanish airport, my future roommate, Marzia, approached me, carrying a large yellow suitcase and gesturing in a way that even I, an Italian, found exaggerated. She introduced herself and surprised me in two ways: her gaze distracted by every single thing around us and her speech, so active and at the same time precise, it made me shy. The discovery of her age, 23 years old, made it worse, as I was 18. Over the next few days I got to know my other roommates, all of whom were older than me and had much more experience and stories to tell. Unsolicited thoughts arose, thoughts of which I hoped I left them in Italy. Like; "You're not ready for this job," " You don't even know Spanish, how are you going to make friends? You will be alone," "They were obviously wrong in selecting you, you have nothing to contribute."

I know, truly depressing. But at the time, unfortunately, my mind was so busy convincing me of these thoughts that it had no time to notice my qualities. So this work ended up being done by others, namely the very roommates whom I believed were better than me. Throughout the

month they devoted themselves constantly to emphasizing the positive things I had to offer, and between talks on German philosophy, advice on how to get over a breakup, and nights at the club until being kicked out by the bouncer, I had thus found myself in the adult world, and I was wanted, *and I liked that*.

When I returned to Italy I was physically the same, same young face, same raised eyebrows, and same questionable clothing. Yet a lot had changed, many of the conversations I used to have with my friends no longer interested me, and I was finally questioning the doubts I had about myself, the desire to travel had remained the same but the motivations hadn't, the love of the world had taken the place of the hatred I harbored for my city and the desire to know myself had replaced the desire to forget who I was.

The path, however, is not linear, in the winter of 2021, I wondered for the first time if this lifestyle of constant airport lines, goodbyes more frequent than hellos, and constant adjustments was my destiny. Before I never questioned it because all I was leaving behind was a city too small, in my eyes, and a family too dysfunctional for me to miss. In 2021 I was in Turin, the city I chose for my studies. The city where I loved to walk for hours without taking public transports because it was too beautiful to stay locked in a tram. But above all, the city where I met a group of friends who in only two years filled me with so much love that I finally understood the concept of family.

However, that winter I had to choose: to send an application for an Erasmus experience in Sweden or not. I, who loved to travel and had wanted to go on an Erasmus since I was a child, finally had the chance to fulfill this dream, moreover in the country of the northern lights, and I was undecided. I wondered: "*Why even leave a place I am comfortable with? Should I do it just because I've always done it?*" Priorities in life change, and what at one time presents itself as the solution, may prove to be an obstacle at another moment. At the time I did not reason this way, and so, between the desire to improve my English and the fear of having to give up the formula that had made me feel good so far, I left.

The story ends well, and by the end of my year in Sweden I was so happy that I thought I would stay and live there. Looking back, though, I think that leaving was a mistake because it wasn't done for the right reasons. I want to discover other places *because that is what I feel like doing* and not because I feel an internal obligation. When I finished this last trip, some Italian friends had difficulty with approaching me, and the same goes for me. I was more confident, I knew what I wanted and often how to get it, many accused me of 'not recognizing myself anymore,' but the opposite was true, *it was the first time I felt like myself*. There are few friends left in my hometown, however, my relationship with them has improved and I am happy about that.

Right now, I'm in France, and I need to choose which other place to go next year for my studies; so it seems obvious to me how I still have a desire to discover new worlds and myself. However, there's a persistent fear within me—that by truly understanding myself as I move forward, I might change so much in the eyes of my loved ones that they'll eventually leave me behind. *When should you stop?* When you realize you've tested yourself enough,

and it's no longer about learning more about yourself, but about putting down your backpack, computer and toothbrush, and hugging your friends and kissing your mother again?

I honestly do not have an answer, however, I found a song that perfectly expresses how I feel, it is called " I am Not Who I was " by Chance Peña.

 [Chance Peña - i am not who i was \(Official Audio\)](#)

To all future travelers, or those like me who are already on the road: good luck.