

Last pictures of Calais

STORY - Paul Marques Duarte is a 20-year-old short-movie director who signed the petition 'Appel de Calais' (Calais' Call). As he was visiting the jungle, he met a young teenager from Sudan. Here is his story.

From 11th January to 15th February 2016, a young Sudanese migrant took pictures of his everyday life with a disposable camera. The pictures in the article are the last ones he took of Calais. Once the photos were developed he did not want to see them but he authorised me to publish them, as well as the story of how we met.



Today it is 11th January 2016, it is 6:05AM, and I am wandering in *Gare du Nord*, waiting for the train which will take me to Calais. I buy a disposable camera as a 'get-together present' for my friend Sadig, who I will see a few hours later in the jungle.



Sadig is sixteen and has lived since September 2015 in the Calais slum. He had to leave Sudan, where he has no family left. I met him by chance when I first came to the camp, back in October 2015, while I was looking for the theatre. Through his smile, his look and his remarkable dignity regarding his situation, I saw in him a little brother. We talked and the story he told me struck a chord with me for a long time.



Late November 2015, winter was getting harsher and harsher. My family met Sadig, talked with him during several weeks and offered to house him as well as help him start a new life in France. He spent a week with us and became very close with my brother – as I expected. During the days we spent together our cultures clashed and it was a great experience for my family as well as for Sadig.



But above anything else – that is the opportunity of building a new life here in France – Sadig wanted to go to England. He went back to Calais, hoping to cross the Channel and reunite with his uncle. Every week, he would give us news: about the camp, about yet another night in the cold, yet another night in the dark, about yet another another attempt to slip through the net and reach Great Britain.



The cold is biting me, and I am wearing several layers of clothes. Today, it is 15th January 2016, and I am meeting Sadig at 10:30AM in the middle of *chemin des Dunes*. He also has a present for me: a sketchbook and crayons that English volunteers gave him. He knows that my brother likes to draw and asks me to give him his present. I, on the other hand, offer him the disposable camera and show him how it works. Today, *l'Appel de Calais* is opening a law centre in the middle of the Jungle and Sadig wants to take a picture of that first.



On the way back home, I cannot stop seeing the faces of lonely minor migrants that I met in the camp. For the first time in my life, I am crushed by these images which suffocate me and keep me awake at night. One week flies by and I am still seeing in every French teen I encounter on the street a youngster from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sudan or Syria, left alone in this gigantic crowded slum. Sadig no longer has a phone. It is now impossible to get any news from him and about his situation. Every day I wonder where he is and how he is doing. My brother draws in the sketchbook that Sadig offered him a picture we all took together at home.



On 16th February 2016, my phone rings and an English number appears on the screen. I recognise Sadig's voice. He seems tired and tells me that he is giving up on the idea of going to England. The situation in Calais is getting too difficult and violence is increasing between migrants, inhabitants and the police. Sadig cannot deal with this anymore. He wants a roof to live under, a school to go to. He wants a future to believe in. I meet him a few days after in Paris. Noticing that he does not dare to ask me (probably because he does not want to bother me), I invite him back home to live with us.



One week after my offer, Sadig is slowly getting used to life at home. He asks me to teach him French while he waits to be sent to school. Every day is a new opportunity to learn more about each other's culture. He is astonished by the way dogs are taken into consideration in European families. I show him our dog's medical record and when Sadig opens it, he stumbles upon my dog's passport. The situation is quite surreal for him as he has no official papers. Sadig is the first to laugh about the situation, and we laugh as well soon after.



While he is getting ready for his first meeting with the *mission locale** for unaccompanied foreign minors of our department (county), Sadig brings me the disposable camera that I had offered him a few months before. He tells me that he knows the pictures which are inside and that he does not need to see them again: they already appear in his dreams every night. He would like to offer them to me and allows me to share them, so that people can see what it is like inside the jungle. So that they can see the jungle through the eyes of somebody who spent six months there and hopes never to come back.



Today, as you gaze at the pictures, these pieces of everyday life, Sadig's future remains uncertain. Even though there are many complex procedures, he is hopeful. Sadig already speaks a few words of French and tries to learn new ones every day. His phone rings regularly and on the other line is one of his friends, telling him how the situation in Calais evolves, or rather how it stagnates. Nothing seems to progress. Hundreds of children are still by themselves in this slum, their hope of a new life in England fading little by little as time flows.



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www.telarama.fr/monde/dernieres-images-de-calais,139858.php

Translated from French into English by Yuna Mathan