

## My story with Fatima

*Olga Ambrosanio*

*Tyr, January 2016*



It began before ULAIA. While volunteering at several refugee camps in Beirut 13 years ago (Mar Elias, Burj al Barajne e Shatila) I came into contact with Assumoud and I was struck by the care and support they gave to children and their families, so I decided that I

would sponsor a child as well.

I did this through the Italian NGO 'Un ponte per...' and I was matched with Fatima from El Buss camp in Tyr. She was tiny (4 and a half), chubby, with a little button nose!

The family, extremely poor and with four children, lived in a house which lacked the basic necessities. A few years after I took on Fatima her father died.

One year I decided to go and meet her. Shyness personified! She's little, I told myself. I'm a stranger. I don't speak her language. It's normal, isn't it? The social worker who came with me every time agreed.

Her letters which arrived, written with the help of the social worker, enabled me to get to know her a little, her interests, how she was getting on at school and the situation at home, which was gradually improving.

Then I established ULAIA and began to visit Tyr more often and see Fatima regularly.

Nothing! Her shyness grew with her. She wouldn't speak to me but I had the feeling that she didn't 'hate me, quite the opposite! A real puzzle!

In fact, even when she was good at English and we could have communicated she continued to remain silent when we met and in the last two or three years almost like a game we spent our time together exchanging notes. She found it funny and so a kind of complicity was established.

Winter 2016. A miracle! Fatima is now in her final year of secondary school. The next step is university. At last her mother has agreed to my giving her a mobile phone. Up to now she has always said that there were other priorities. She is also letting me take Fatima to Beirut for the day.

We had a good time and she began to talk as if it was the most natural thing in the world as if we had known each other for ever, which, in fact, we have (almost). The first text she sent me said, " I really enjoy being with you!"

Insh'Allah ( my words) I have waited 12 years !

My story with Fatima will continue until she finishes university and so... watch this space for the next episode!