

THE STORIES: CONTEH



First name: **LAMIN**

Last name: **CONTEH**

Age: **22**

Country of origin: **GAMBIA**

Living in **Italy** since: **2014**

SHORT SUMMARY

Born in The Gambia, at the age of 10 Conteh's parents sent him to Mauritania to study Qur'an and Arabic. When he came back to The Gambia, he started working as a teacher. He had problems and my life was in danger, so he had to leave his country. After a very difficult journey through West Africa, Libya and the Mediterranean Sea, he eventually arrived to Italy. Little by little, he learned the language and started understanding the way of living in Italy. Conteh was married in 2016 and can now plan for a better future.

"A LITTLE BIT OF MY STORY"

CONTEH'S STORY

Conteh was born in The Gambia. His father was a businessman and a practised traditional medicine. When he was 10 years old, his family sent him to Mauritania to study the Qur'an and the Arabic language. He had a project in mind: to create a school in his town for children who couldn't afford school fees. So when Conteh was 17 and returned to The Gambia, he started planning for his project and worked in a school in his town, Bundung.

CONFLICT AND ESCAPE

But after a while, Conteh started experiencing some problems that couldn't be solved by the institutions, because in his country there is a lot of corruption and injustice. The situation became worse and worse, until his own life was in danger and he had to leave Gambia.

He travelled through different West African countries, from Senegal to Mali by bus; to Mali to Burkina Faso, to Niger. Then he was told that the war in Libya had ended, so he decided to go there, because he thought he could work there with his Arabic and religious knowledge.

But he found this decision to be wrong. A nightmare began when he had to take a journey through the desert. He suffered from a terrible and deadly dangerous crossing. He was eventually picked up and stuffed in a pick-up truck so full with people he even couldn't breathe. Some people died. They didn't give him water as you had to take your own. The traffickers told them it would be one day travel, but in fact it was one week. The first city he arrived in was Gadron where he started to regret his decision to go to Libya. He was kidnapped with other people. They thought he couldn't speak their language, but Conteh could understand them, and learnt that they wanted to sell them to someone. Conteh told his friends that they wanted to sell them, and so tried to escape. They found a way to escape, but couldn't remain in that city, because they would find them, so he moved to Tripoli. Conteh found that living in Libya was even more dangerous than Gambia.

Because if this he decided to take the sea, because he knew how dangerous it could be to go back, and so the arduous journey across the sea seemed like the better option.

He suffered from a terrible and deadly dangerous crossing.

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STRUGGLING IN THE NEW SOCIETY

When arriving in Italy, Conteh stayed for a while in a camp with many other people. It was difficult to understand what was going on, because they weren't told anything about the organization and they were guarded by security service. One day Conteh and a few others were picked up by police and took to the airport with a bus escorted by two police vehicles. They were put on an airplane and were not even allowed to go to the toilet. At that point Conteh told himself that there were no difference between where he was from and where he was then.

But thanks to the Association and the good people he met things started getting better.

A teacher started coming to see him and giving him Italian lessons. In the beginning it was difficult because in his school back in Gambia he only learnt only English and French. He struggled to improve himself as much he could to communicate with people.

He didn't have many cultural problems because he left his country to study when he was ten, so he is quite used to staying in a foreign place and to deal with new cultures.

Conteh still had some problems because things are not so well organized here and commitments are sometimes not fulfilled.

Conteh and his companions sometimes had to ask for explanation because they were not given complete information on their situation or on the Italian system. When this happened, they acted as a group. Being a group and able to share their problems has been the way they are able to get through difficulties here in Italy, and helped them to understand better the culture they are living in. They are now meeting good people in the city where they live.

BELONGING AND GIVING BACK TO SOCIETY

Little by little, Conteh has found ways to continue dealing with his interests: reading, football, visiting new friends, helping people.

He has also discovered new passions for theatre. This has allowed him to meet new friends and also Italian friends too. With them he shares time talking and eating together, but also in social activities and commitment.

Conteh is still studying Italian, but also achieving Italian diplomas and qualifications to be able to develop his work opportunities. At the moment he works as a cultural mediator for the Association which welcomed him in the beginning. He enjoys this work, although it is sometimes difficult to deal with all the different situations he faces.

In 2016 Conteh met an Italian woman and they got married later that year. They are planning a future here and in The Gambia. In the future they would like to be able to spend their lives both in Italy and in The Gambia.

**His passion
for theatre helped
him to find new
friends.**