

MY BEST TRIP

It all started at the beginning of the summer of 2011. I was only six years old, but I was about to have the best holidays of my whole life. My family, that is, my parents, my brother and my sister, took a plane along with me and we flew all the way across the Atlantic ocean to North America. We were going to spend two months in Montreal, a beautiful city in Canada. Due to my young age, the memories I have from that summer are a bit blurry, but I've got a general idea about everything, and my parents have told me countless of stories about our stay there. Besides, the things I do remember I couldn't forget them even if I tried, they are engraved in my memory forever.

The day for the journey came, and we were all extremely excited. I couldn't wait to arrive and see what was going to be our home for that oncoming summer. After eight long hours of boredom, discussions with my big brother and tiredness, we finally got there and we couldn't be happier. We took hold of our suitcases and then we were on our way to our house. And what a house! It was two stories high, with a basement underneath the lower one. The living room and the kitchen were like the typical ones you see in movies, and there were four different bedrooms, all of them decorated beautifully. In my opinion, my room was definitely the best one, aside from the fact that the windows didn't have blinds, and back then I was such a scardy cat and I was afraid because I thought someone was going to climb through the window. But don't judge me, I was only six! What I loved the most about our cosy house was the garden. It had always been my dream to live in a house with a garden, and my wish had come true, even if it was only for a short period of time. As you can see, I absolutely adored the house. It was great. And not to mention our neighbours, I had never met such kind and lovely people. They were very sweet to us, even though we had only just met them. But enough about our temporary home. I'm going to tell you about what I did in my stay there.

For the first month or so, on weekdays my siblings and I went to a summer sports camp and spent the day there. The first day I was quite nervous, as I couldn't speak English at all. My vocabulary was something along the lines of "hello", "elephant" and "open the door", but I soon learnt that I had nothing to be afraid of, when Helen, one of the monitors, introduced herself in Spanish. She wasn't the only one that was able to talk in my language, another monitor called Marcella could too, and to my immense relief they didn't seem to mind when I followed them around. Anyway, not knowing English didn't stop me from making friends either. On the first day I already rubbed shoulders with Mara, who would be my best friend throughout the whole camp. I still don't know to this day how we did to communicate, we just did some weird movements with our arms and hands and kind of understood what the other was trying to say, I think. As strange as it may appear, this seemed to work fine enough. So, needless to say, I didn't learn any English at all. I know I should have tried to take advantage of this situation and learnt to speak a little, but as I've said before, I was only six years old, I didn't know any better.

That first month in the camp I had so much fun. In the mornings I would get up early, get in the car and our parents would drive my sister my brother and I to the local university, where we would spend the morning doing different sports and activities. My personal favourite was a game called gaga ball, in which you had to dodge a ball and try to eliminate the others hitting them with the ball below the knee. I also really liked tennis, which I seemed to have a knack for, and american football. After a few hours we would stop and have lunch, and then we would go to the swimming pool to do some activities there.

These were normal days, but Fridays were a whole new different story. Each Friday there was a different theme, and we dressed up in costumes related to the topic. All the children from the camp would get together and we would do different games and activities the whole day, all having to do with the chosen theme. For example, on the last Friday the topic was the world, and they divided us into countries. I was part of the group that represented South Africa, so I dressed in yellow, with my face painted in south african colours and a monkey hat on top of my head.

On the last day of camp we were all so sad. I went home crying my heart out and nothing my parents said could cheer me up, but although the first part of our holidays had ended, the other was still yet to come. From that day onwards my family and I started travelling around the country, going to different cities and even doing some hiking trails. I only have snippets of memories about those small trips, but I remember quite vividly one where we went to see whales. We boarded a ship that took us on a little journey, and I remember

going to the outdoor part of the ship to see better, but quickly returning inside after getting soaked by the rain.

One day we took the car and went all the way to New York. We were very excited, and everything went swimmingly for the first two or three days but then a hurricane was announced on TV and we had to go back to Montreal, so we didn't get to see everything we had planned. However, we didn't let that lower our spirits, and we continued doing trips to places near our house.

Sadly, all the good things come to an end, and our holidays were no exception. On the last days of August we took a plane that brought us back here, and even though we were sad that our stay in Canada had ended, we knew that that little experience would always have a little spot in our hearts. As for me, I know that if I were to go back now, with a few more years of age, I would learn more, but I wouldn't change those summer holidays for the world.

MY UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER

My despair began little by little to make presence. Silence was such, that inevitably the ticking of the clock that hung on the opposite wall completely invaded my ears. Minutes and seconds passed, but the page remained blank. Not a single letter had been written on it. No idea had arisen from the mind of its author. During the last hours, I had dedicated my time to just opening and closing the tabs of Word and Newlink, without any idea of how to focus my work. Many times I read the mechanics of the contest, stopping at the proposed topics, but my head refused to work. The task was not difficult, but the absence of inspiration made the composition a challenge.

Before my mental block, I decided to slide the wheels of my chair and stand up. I went to the switch located a few inches from the door. When my fingers pressed it, the room lit up completely. Music was the only way to evade everything, and maybe in its lyrics and chords, I found the answer that solved the omission of determination and creativity, so I directed my steps towards the drawer of the dresser where my MP3 was. I was so focused on my thoughts, that the pounding of my feet against a small wooden box caught me by surprise. I began to observe the object carefully. Without a doubt, I had never seen it. Curiosity began to invade me completely and I could not help it, so I decided to open the box.

I never thought that inside the wood was a conch shell. My hands began to caress its surface and I lifted the object gently to my ear. The reason? They always say that if you listen carefully, you can perceive the sound of the waves, and I was determined to confirm it.

Suddenly my sight clouded. I stopped being able to see, but not to feel. Freedom. That was the feeling that mainly invaded me. The feeling we all seek and at the same time we need, and which is part of our lives for 3 months. 3 months without worries or obligations. Only the peace and relaxation that we all deserve at some point. What looked like sunbeams began to emphasize my face.

- It's \$ 1.56 Miss!

My eyes regained the vision instantly, but confusion accompanied me. It was then, when I realized that I was inside a car, or rather, a taxi.

- Miss, we have reached your destination! It's \$ 1.56. Are you okay?

I nodded, with millions of thoughts hovering in my mind. I put my hand in my pockets, and surprisingly they were full of money. OF DOLLARS! After handing him the established rate, I got out of the car and I was petrified at the sight. It was a city collapsed by traffic, with wide streets, shops in every corner and lots of skyscrapers. Without a doubt, a modern and captivating city.

Without wasting time and with an indescribable emotion, I went to the Riu Plaza hotel. The lobby was impressive and full of tourists. My impatience to leave my luggage in the room made me run down the long corridors and as soon as I finished, I was eager to see what I would find in this wonderful city.

Taking advantage of the fact that it was practically night, I decided to stop by Times Square and I was able to admire its posters and neon lights. I made a fantastic panoramic of the crossings between streets on the red stairs of the TKTS. I liked the atmosphere so much, that I sat in one of its red chairs while I had a coffee and enjoyed the views.

That was the first New York place I visited. It was just the beginning of a great adventure.

Essential was my visit to Grand Central Terminal, a railway station with more than a century of history and that has become an icon of the city. Its beauty is so amazing, that it has even been the scene of some famous movies. Logical!

The best way to disconnect without any doubt was in Central Park. So much I wanted to know every corner of the place, that I rented a bike and in some way, I felt like a real Neuyorkino. People went there to relax and prepare picnis, and for me it was a place of absolute peace.

Impressive were the views from the Empire State Building, the most famous skyscraper in the world. I went up to the viewpoint a little before sunset, so I could see the city lit up. The image of the city seen from there is one of the things that makes you fall in love with New York.

As a good sports lover, how could I miss seeing Madison Square? As soon as I entered inside, I was speechless. The great hobby that they have there in ice hockey impressed me, as well as the dimensions of

the mythical stadium. And, of course, I loved seeing the New York Rangers. Without a doubt, they showed talent.

Something I longed to visit was the Statue of Liberty. From the Hudson River, I could appreciate this spectacular monument, which is located on Liberty Island in southern Manhattan. In order to be at the viewpoint, the crown of The Statue of Liberty, I had to book the entrance with time, since they are very requested and it is not difficult to understand the reason.

What really impressed me was the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. In the place where the twin towers were located, I found two enormous monuments in which the names of the deceased were inscribed. In the Museum of 9/11, I could see objects of the victims, material that was recovered from the towers, explanations about what happened ... My heart was shrinking with what I saw. Despite this, it is an interesting place that should be visited.

I also had a lot of time to give myself a whim, and that's why I frequented Fifth Avenue, one of the most commercial places. I could not resist their stores, all famous and very exclusive.

The best pictures I took were taken at the Brooklyn Bridge, while the lights of Manhattan were lit at sunset. Impressed I stayed to see with my own eyes the 2 miles of bridge over the East River, which linked Manhattan with Brooklyn.

And to resist the heat, I decided to go to Coney Island, a fairly busy beach in Brooklyn. It is an immense beach of 5 kilometers long with numerous mechanical games of Luna Park. There was always there during the week, since on Saturdays and Sundays, there were too many people to relax.

The cuisine of NY had an infinite offer of dishes of all nationalities, although I decided to opt for the classic and delicious taste of hamburgers and hot dogs.

Without a doubt, this city has something that hypnotizes you and that something is its charm, which can be appreciated in every place and in every corner of it. Its environment, lighting and history is something that captivates anyone, and I undoubtedly fell exhausted before this indescribable wonder, which made me live one of the best experiences of my life.

I pushed the conch off my ear and as soon as I could, I fixed my eyes on my computer screen.

Almost two pages full of unforgettable and unique memories in the most magical city in the world. Inevitably, a smile planted on my face, and satisfied, I closed my laptop.

My unforgettable summer

There's nothing like walking through a sunflower field, feeling the Tuscan sun on your skin. Even if it's just in your imagination because your physical body is in the car passing by. But sometimes there's an image so powerful that you don't need an overactive imagination like mine to feel it. Images so powerful that can at the same time transport you to another world and abruptly anchor you in this one.

I turned my head to the inside of the car when the radio announcer started talking and silently laughed because I couldn't understand anything. But there's something really soothing about listening how others speak in another language and trying to guess what they are saying, so I just stood there, looking through the window as we finally passed the magical field that turned into an endless sight of green.

But I remember that day specifically not because of the sunflowers, but because of a dove.

Being from Barcelona, I know them very well and see them every day, and I've always been told that they can carry more microbes and illnesses than a rat. You can say I'm not very fond of them. So you can imagine my surprise when I saw two little kids trying to play with one.

I was sitting in *Piazza del Campo* in Siena, with my brother sitting next to me and my father napping on my other side (it had been a long day) when I first saw them. I noticed them because they were speaking Catalan, my native tongue and I always feel that when you find someone who speaks the same language as you in a foreign country, you have some kind of automatic connection. You probably most definitely don't know them but you know you can speak to them as if they are old friends. But back to the plaza.

Those two little kids (a boy and a girl) were trying to feed a dove. I say trying because that dove wasn't particularly friendly and was refusing to eat from their hands. So they settled for throwing the pieces of bread nearby and seeing how the dove would eat them from the ground.

To further understand the situation, you'll have to meet my brother. We are very similar personality wise, we're both pretty introverted but very comfortable with each other. When we are in a new environment, we do this thing where we don't leave each other's side. I think it's our way to cope with the fear of crowds that we have, because we always do it when there are too many strangers around.

Anyway, we were talking about some forgettable thing when we heard someone speaking Catalan. We both stopped breathing for a second and shared a knowing look, one of those where there are words shared that are not spoken out loud. This time it seemed to say: "look we're not alone!" and "aha! We can understand them!". We watched as the two young siblings feed all of the doves in our area and looked at them very perplexed. How could they find doves attractive? What did they see in them? It's a pretty great example of how two people can look at one thing but see two completely different ones. And how sometimes the human mind is so selfish that it refuses to accept that others can think in a different way. How even if I try, there's some things that I'll never understand. Like how some people don't like pineapple on pizza, and some people like doves.

The boy and the girl, let's call them Marc and Anna, fell in love with a dove and even gave her a name. I don't even know how they guessed its gender, but it was kind of a bittersweet moment, because on one hand, they were naming an animal, and that's very cute. But on the other hand, the animal in question was a dove. And I think that by now you already know how I feel about them.

I don't exactly remember the name they gave her but they were soon giving names to other doves. Some had invented names, some had real person names, some had the same name followed by a number two... it was kind of weird but very memorable. My favorite moment will always be when their parents called them because they had to go. Anna chose that moment to ask if they could keep them.

I think that the father was just as perplexed as I was because he stepped closer with the face of someone who is hearing something so unthinkable that it's like it is in a language you don't understand. By the time he processed what was happening (I don't think that seeing me and brother laugh hysterically helped him very much) Marc was getting excited about the idea and began to practically beg to keep them. But the father had very clear that he wasn't going to bring home a dove, so he dragged his kids out of the plaza and I never saw them again.

It's true that with time the memory has faded a little, and some details are not as clear, but I don't think I'll ever forget that day. I do not remember their faces or how their voices sounded, but somehow that makes it funnier to remember. Every time I think about it a little detail changes. Sometimes their faces change a little, sometimes they are completely different. Sometimes the boy is older and sometimes he's not. But these changes make me feel like the memory is mine and that's something beautiful.

I remember that after it happened, my brother and I told the story to every family member that was with us, never getting tired of telling it. And maybe we exaggerated it a little every time, but that always happens with stories.

It was funny seeing each person's reaction. My mum didn't find it particularly funny. She also really despises doves and told us that we could never have one as a pet. She said it like it was a threat, but we told her that we didn't even like them, so she had nothing to worry about. I think that my sister was too tired to listen, and my father started laughing. One of those laughs that are really genuine and invite you to laugh with them.

I can still hear it if I close my eyes