

## **My dear friend Takis**

*George Zisis*

Takis has always been a part of my student life. I had never heard the word 'autism' before. Our teacher spent an hour or two explaining to us what it means for a child to have autism and then, everything seemed simple and easy. A little attention with our movements, the tone of our voice and a little patience until Takis adapted to changes in his routine and intense stimuli from the environment, and gradually we were all a team.

When you have knowledge you also have understanding. I realized this a few years later when my class and I visited the Royal Theater to watch a theatrical play. When we descended the imposing staircase and found ourselves in the center of the hall, everything seemed happy and festive. The anguished cries of Takis, who sat down and was beating his hands violently, made me realize the intensity of the sounds and colors in the room. Looking around, I saw some kids walking away in fright, others looking at him in bewilderment and others scoffing. Unconsciously, we, his classmates, made a circle around him, held hands, and sat down trying to calm him down. In no time, we were able to put our hands on him and calm him down. To be honest, I was very angry. However, a classmate of mine stepped out of the circle and approached a group of staring kids.

"Do you want me to introduce you to our classmate Takis? Do you want me to explain what autism is?", were his exact words.

To my surprise, the children answered yes. Our classmate explained to them in simple words the challenges that Takis faces and the way we behave in these circumstances. The children not only listened attentively but also asked many questions to all of us. One of them even approached Takis and asked him about his favorite movie hero.

Willingness to communicate, discuss and learn can eliminate the unnecessary obstacles placed in the way to accept, support, include and respect all people.

## **The story of a girl named Afolabi**

*Paraskeui Karali*

Afolabi is a girl who's fifteen years old but even though she is pretty young, she has gone through some difficult times in her life so far. Let's start by saying that she originates from Africa and more specifically from Ethiopia. Sadly she lost her dad when she was only two years old. This caused her mum to struggle a lot financially and leaving them no option but to migrate to Greece hoping that she could get a head new start. Unfortunately it didn't go as planned. Their first years in our country were tough. Her mum couldn't find a job because many employers refused to hire her due to her skin color. Their lives went on like that until Afolabi turned ten. They were staying in shelters for homeless people while her mother was trying to learn Greek and also teach Afolabi some. She wasn't being accepted to attend any school because she didn't have Greek citizenship and she wasn't properly vaccinated. This changed when they both became legal Greek citizens after living seven years in Greece. Their life suddenly turned better. Her mum got a job and Afolabi was able to attend School. Everything was going alright until her mum got diagnosed with coronavirus which led to causing her a lifelong disease, which meant that she couldn't take care of her daughter anymore. Her only option left was to give up her rights as a mother and put her daughter in an orphanage. As Afolabi was growing up in the orphanage she realized that all the kids there started getting adopted. It made her really sad every time someone was getting adopted because she didn't understand the reason, they didn't choose her. Until she found out the sad truth. One day a couple arrived at the orphanage to adopt a teenage girl. The people that worked there suggested them adopting Afolabi. They were excited to meet her until they did. The man's first comment was "I think you misunderstood our request. We need to adopt a white teenage girl". When the employers asked

them why they didn't like Afolabi, their response was "She really differs from us" and "No one will even believe that she's our child". After that day Afolabi never saw herself the same way. She started questioning her beauty and her appearance. She didn't like her skin color anymore and was trying to find a way to become white. Now every time someone entered the orphanage to adopt someone she wasn't excited because she knew that it wouldn't be her. She started feeling ashamed about her nationality, her past, her hair and this caused her many insecurities. But little did she know that her day was coming. One day she was sitting on a bench reading a book when a man walked up to her. "Here she is, that's the girl I want to adopt". She was shocked but still replied "I'm sorry but if you are playing some kind of joke on me I would rather not participate. I know that you don't want to adopt me sir due to my skin color, but I don't mind at all anymore". She never liked being told lies but what if the man really wanted to adopt her? "Look, I'm really looking for someone like you. I didn't come here to adopt a kid that can be taken care of by anyone. I Want to help a kid really in need so that a lot of kids can get to experience what it really means to have a parent that cares and provides for them. So what do you think?". Afolabi reluctantly agreed and when the adoption was legalized, she moved in with him. She started getting better and soon enough her wounds had been healed. She says that "Just like how Jesus accepted the samaritan even though Their nations didn't get along well, this man accepted me for who I was even though I wasn't white and he became the best dad I could ever ask for"

### **The story of Nikos**

*Potolios Alexandros*

Diversity is one of the first concepts we perceive and reflect from the moment we are born. Diversity is divided in different types such as external and internal. There is no doubt, without diversity life would be monotonous and indifferent as you can imagine dear audience. We would all be identical, there would be no interest and no particular purpose. We need to be more receptive to other people's preferences, not to discriminate them for their personal choices. Now as far as our subject of discussion is concerned, well the diversity I would like to tell you the following story.

Our story began in Thessaloniki in the house of a simple everyday family of three. Giorgos and Panagiota have a fifteen – year old son, Niko, who is a homosexual without his parents knowing it. He lives an unusual life, one would say, as due to its particularity, it is closer to himself because he feels that both his family and school surroundings will not accept him. So, one day he decides it's time to open up to someone starting with his family and more specifically his own parents. Thus, at noon, after college, while his mother was in the kitchen and his father at work, he made the decision to speak [he enters the kitchen]

Nikos: Hi mom

Mrs. Panagiota: you' re back already

Nikos: I want to tell you something serious

Mrs. Panagiota: go ahead, I'm all ears

Nikos: I love a boy

[Ms. Panagiota didn't know how to react]

[Mr. George enters the kitchen]

- What is going on here? Why are you like this?

-Ask your son I am very confused!

- Dad, I love a boy...

[requires silence]

-Go to your room now!

The very next day both parents took Nikos to a psychologist as they believed he needed medical support. But no matter how many sessions he had with the doctors, for him nothing was going to change. He had made his decision. The days went by, and Nikos was more open TO his favorite teacher Mr. Papadopoulos than with his parents. As the days passed Papadopoulos, who showed great understanding and stood by Nikos, was finally able to understand the problem. SO, one day he visited the house of two parents and talked to them. After a long discussion he managed to make them realize that this kind of attitude was hurting their child. The two parents understood, and when Nikos came back from school, he received a big hug and another big apology from his parents. Since then, his parents who have now become his biggest supporters together with his teacher Mr. Papadopoulos have affectionately embraced Nikos and offered him safety and protection.

So dear audience, I strongly encourage you to embrace all people accepting their difference because diversity makes our lives more beautiful and interesting and if you ever find spectators of such a situation react as different is not bad.

### **The true acceptance**

*Mpatsiou Despoina*

When Anna got pregnant by accident, she was only 16 years old. The father of the unborn child had disappeared, and Anna's parents would not even talk with her. She wanted to study at university and become a complete person. Everyday she went to school, did her homework and when the baby was born, she also looked after it. The following years were difficult. Anna never told her son the truth, she was afraid he would leave her too. She did not have much money as she was not paid enough. Her son, James, was also being made fun of because he did not have a father and the problem was that he did not know the reason. Both needed someone to accept them. One day after James had finished school, he asked the big question "who was his father." Anna did not know how to react, she wanted to show her kid that she really loved him although life was not easy for them. And when she hugged her son as tightly as she ever did, she found true acceptance. Both had grown up with the same pain and the same empty heart but could not see that the answer was each other. Since then, they did not need anyone.

So, who is thirsty for acceptance and who is there to give love? Both characters are thirsty, and both want and need to be accepted, but the love of a mother is to give her child whatever it needs even if she needs it more.

### **What is your favorite colour?**

*Misailidou Smaragda*

One day many years ago a Greek male student approached a classmate of African origin as she was sitting alone. The girl from Africa was wondered: "What are you doing next to me? My skin color differs from yours." He replied saying: "We all have differences! Why aren't you bothered by my white skin? Why should your dark skin bother me?". Soon after she added, "I'm sorry for my manner, but my whole life revolves around being colored. I had just accepted that this would never change from my personal experience from school all these years but also as I saw my parents being separated from other people, being unable to find a job just because of their color." At that moment, he came and stood with them a fellow student, he didn't say anything, just apologised to the girl for all the times he looked at her strangely because of her skin's color. She forgave him and became a big company. Many people hadn't dared approaching her until then, because of their fear of being unfavourably criticised for this action.