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«The wound is the place where the Light enters you.»

Rumi. Sufi mystic from Afghanistan and one of the most important Persian poets of the Middle Ages.

Dear Sponsors

I hope that you have been welcomed into the new year in good health, and I sincerely wish you much light and serenity.

In Bassam, we entered the new year accompanied by joy and sadness. Exactly as we have become somewhat accustomed to. Nevertheless, we will never get used to the fact that there is so much suffering and pain in addition to the beauty and happiness that we are allowed to experience here again and again.

Today I will tell you the story of Soualiou, the fourteen-year-old son of one of our faithful night watchmen. He died of a bad skin carcinoma on his anus. For over a year, everything was tried to save this young life: chemotherapy, an operation and very painful local treatments. Then several more chemotherapies. How many times did his father, who has a back problem, have to carry his son up ten floors in hospital because the lift was broken. And take him from one hospital to another - nothing was ever too much for him, he never complained.

Soualiou, his firstborn, was very close to him. Whenever possible, he spent his free time with his father in his tailor's studio, which he ran during the day. Soualiou was not interested in football or computer games, he just wanted to be with people. Sometimes I thought he was born as an angel who, after his short mission on earth, would die again as an angel.

In August, Soualiou was better, we thought he was over the worst. He brought me passion fruit and mumbled a barely audible thank you, but his eyes expressed so much love and gratitude that no words could have formulated. Then suddenly he had signs of paralysis and his legs no longer supported him. We had an MRI done and the pictures were a death sentence: metastases in all the bones, especially in the spine and neck. He was completely paralysed, unable to move even a centimetre. We transferred him to our terminal hospital, gave him the small isolation room, which has its own bathroom. I knew that his parents would accompany him day and night. And so it was.



Soualiou in his father's tailor's studio

And when his father slept on a mat on the floor, his mother sat by his bed and vice versa. They looked after him well, massaged him, washed him, changed his nappies, fed him and - they prayed with him. The pain got worse and worse and we could only offer him a little relief.

When I realised that Soualiou was living in the belief that one day he would get well again, I slowly began to prepare him for death. Of course, not without first talking to his parents and asking their permission. I explained to them that one should not let him die with a lie. Of course, I had to proceed very gently. Since the parents have known me for over twenty years and know how I take care of dying people, they gave me their consent. As so often, I asked God for help, because the boy had a very deep faith. I told him that I was quite sure that God had his plans for him, would deliver him from all his pain and fill his soul with light and love. His father often cried and his son told him, «Papa, stop crying. I have received this illness from God. Everything God does is good.» I remind you again, Soualiou was fourteen years old...!

I had nothing else in my heart but the wish to fill Soualiou's soul with joy. We hoped that he could still celebrate Christmas with us, that he could once again come out of the room into the sun, see the twinkling starry sky at night, hear the children rejoice. But - we couldn't get the bed through the door, it was too narrow. Don't ask now how we once got the bed into this room, we had probably dismantled it into its component parts at the time. Yes, we could have put Soualiou on a stretcher and carried him out, but that didn't work either. So we had to find another solution, this one: Without further ado, I asked Aziz to tear down a piece of the wall so that his bed could be rolled out. No sooner said than done! It was indescribably beautiful to see the magic of joy in Soualiou's smile. The Christmas lights, the stars and also the love were omnipresent, especially as he had a lot of visitors from his large family and his parents' circle of friends. He died only at the end of January. At night. As an angel.

And once again I realised that despite the tiredness, despite the pain, despite the sadness, I received



Bless you Soualiou, I will never forget you again, all my life!

again and again this very great grace to make of my life a life of love, of empathy, of humility. How grateful I am for this and also for the fact that my strength, even after twenty-four years, is still there to assist people in the most difficult situations of their lives. What a beautiful life I have been given and what wonderful companions have stood by me. I am talking about my almost eighty staff members, they too have received this light, they too carry in their hearts the happiness of being able to help and give. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff, also on behalf of Marie Odile, my faithful companion, Aziz and the Foundation, for having been and still being with us. Without these eighty people, I would not have been able to do anything at all. What is a locomotive that pulls through the area all by itself? Nothing!

It was not always easy for our people here. In the beginning, they were all afraid of AIDS and didn't dare touch the patients. But they saw how I took the dying in my arms and accompanied them to the end, and they began to do the same. Today there is

no need for words, they help me to carry the heavy burden. They became aware of what a service of love it is to accompany lonely (or lost), poor, sick people into death. They have experienced that all that they can give on their way is never lost again and is kept in the heart forever, that it enriches the soul and the heart, that it makes us rich without making us poor.

Of course, they are not perfect, just as we are all not perfect, of course little mistakes happen. But the way these people, many of whom were not allowed to learn to read or write, distribute their love, nurture with fervour, give with joy and share what they can is as remarkable as it is admirable. I am proud of my staff, what wonderful people! I thank each and every one of them from the bottom of my heart.

Some of our long-serving employees have taken their well-deserved retirement at the end of 2022. This after they all spent between fifteen and twenty years with us. They were happy farewells, but we also became a little nostalgic, because time passes so quickly.



Bassam's large family thanks you all for your generosity

And you, dear sponsors, make all this possible in the first place. A huge thank you to you! Thank you for helping us to be able to help others. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to restore dignity to thousands of people. Thank you for your trust, thank you for your empathy. God bless you!

With my most respectful greetings and wishes

Lotti Latrous

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