

Sample translation of *My Year in a Tent* by Tiny Fisscher



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1.

11 October

Today is a very special day. Not just because it's my birthday (I'm twelve now), but because it's the International Day of the Girl. *And*, last night I completed sleeping in a tent for 365 nights in a row! This is how this came about:

Our teacher, Mr Khan, organised a challenge week. Not one like you see on YouTube all the time, he said (breaking an egg on your head in the hope it's a boiled one and stupid stuff like that), but to raise money for a good cause. We were allowed to work in groups, if we wanted, and we had a week to come up with a plan.

‘Challenge yourself,’ the teacher said. ‘Collect money for others by doing something you wouldn’t normally do.’

I normally went to bed with my night light on, but I couldn’t ask money for not having my light on, could I?

So, I talked to my parents about it.

‘We just called it “bob-a-job”,’ my dad said. ‘Why do they have to have such fancy names for everything nowadays?’ My dad is sixty, and a little bit old-fashioned sometimes.

‘I think “challenge” is great,’ Mum said. ‘Let those kids think of something other than the usual – cleaning windows, weeding gardens, washing cars, taking glass to the bottle bank. ‘Come on, think of something,’ she said encouragingly.

Later, she was sorry about what she’d said, because the following week (the entire class had come up with ideas, except me), I thought of a challenge that didn’t exactly make her jump for joy.

On the contrary.

This is how I got my idea:

Mr Khan showed us a photograph on the whiteboard in class, of two Syrian brothers in a tent camp. The older one had his arm around his younger brother. In his other hand, he held up a slipper as if it were a mobile phone that he used to take a selfie. His little brother looked fearfully at the ‘camera’, while he himself grinned cheerfully, as if taking a real photo with a real phone.

‘Maybe, this boy is just as scared as his brother,’ the teacher said, ‘but his imagination helps him to forget for a moment.’

I felt goose bumps at the back of my head, all the way down my neck and back. The goose bumps even went all the way down to my toes. Because however much I wanted to be the older boy, I *felt* like the younger one. Even if you don’t need to flee bombs or other violence, you can still feel scared. You can be frightened of the dark, for instance (which is silly, of course, because what can darkness do to you?), you can be afraid of scary noises, intruders,

slippery creatures, or animals with long thin tails. Or things that *might* happen but haven't actually happened. Or you can be scared of walking on the black stripes of the zebra crossing because they're said to bring bad luck. That is a lot of things to be scared of, but I do give these examples for a reason: last year, I was scared of *all* of these things.

But then I saw this photo of the two brothers, and suddenly I thought, *what if I sleep in a tent as a challenge to raise money for refugee children? On my own, in our pitch-black back garden?*

I tried to push it away immediately, because my stomach was already in knots. After all, I was chicken, a mouse, a scaredy-cat. But at the same time, I didn't *want* to run scared anymore. So, there was hardly anything more challenging to me than sleeping on my own in a tent in a dark garden...

Still, the idea stuck in my mind. During the break, I told my best friend (maybe my only friend) Fluff. Fluff is not her real name, it's her nickname. I've known her since playgroup. When I stroked her soft blonde hair on my first day there, I said 'Fluffy', or so I've been told. I'd only just learned this word, because Mum had bought new towels that were 'soft and fluffy'. The girl with the soft blonde hair became my best friend, 'Fluffy' was shortened to 'Fluff' and I don't think I've ever called her by her proper name.

Fluff thought my tent plan was great, but when I carefully put it to my mum later that day, she wasn't happy at all about it.

This is what happened:

'You, sleep in a tent?'

'It's for challenge week, to raise money for refugee children.'

'Oh, but Swan... Outside in the cold and damp, at this time of year?'

'That's why it's a *challenge*.'

'It's October already, it'll be much too cold to sleep outside.'

'I'll survive.'

'Still, I'm not so sure about this.'

'Still, I want to do it.'

'Dad and I will need to think it over.'

'You mean *you* need to think it over. I'm sure Dad will think it's awesome when he hears about it.'

'Well, I agree it's awesome, but...'

'Well then. I'd like to do something that an eleven-year-old girl wouldn't normally do. Something *I* wouldn't normally do.' The latter I said in capitals. In neon. I looked at her defiantly. 'You yourself said "think of something", so I did!'

Ha, I got her there. But still she muttered, 'Yes, but this...'

When I told my dad about it that evening, he was really enthusiastic. 'That's a super challenge!' he said.

'Mum doesn't think so.'

'Not true,' my mum said, 'it's a good challenge, I just think it's a little frightening.'

'Well put,' I said, '*you* think it's frightening.'

Mum was silent.

'But so do you, don't you?' she said.

That's when I exploded. 'I do! That's why I want to give it a try! It's a CHALLENGE!'

That shut her up, didn't it?

To make a long story short: they gave me their permission. But what none of us knew at the time, was that my challenge would take longer than a week. Much longer – it would take a whole year.

It was a scary, difficult, exciting and bizarre, yet at the same time wonderful and instructive year. A year in which I didn't only experience a lot and learn a lot, but also one in which I raised a large amount of money.

This is my story.

2.

A Bizarre but Brave Plan

'Well, well,' the teacher said when I told him what challenge I had chosen to do. The other kids were planning to do things like having a cold shower every morning, thinking that's the most awful thing ever. Some planned to take their neighbour's dog for walks, while they were afraid of dogs. Or they tried to read a big fat novel in a week's time – when they thought reading is stupid and boring – and do a presentation about it for their family, or everyone in their street. That sort of thing.

Some kids raised money for animal shelters, the food bank, guide dogs, sick children, something to do with nature, and so on. Other kids worked in groups. One of these went for a swim in a lake every day to raise money for children with muscle disease.

'And what about you, Swan?' Mr Khan asked on the day that we had to tell him what we had chosen to do.

I took a deep breath. 'I'm going to sleep in a tent in our back garden to raise money for children in refugee camps.'

Some of my classmates dropped their jaws, a few others snorted, and several said, 'That's so cool!'

And the teacher said, 'Well, well.'

'You're going to sleep in a *tent*?' Lorna said scornfully. 'Not much of a challenge, then.'

'That's easy for you to say,' I said.

'Why?'

'It might not be scary to sleep in your back garden, but ours is dead creepy.'

'Yes,' Fluff agreed. 'You do know that Swan lives at the end of this quiet country lane where there are no streetlights, right? There's a ditch and a field behind their farm, and their garden is humongous, with trees and all.'

Lorna snorted derisively. 'They can probably afford it.'

I nearly exploded. 'What's that got to do with anything?' I cried. 'Yes, our garden is big, but the house is small and quite old. Besides, my parents inherited it. So there!'

The teacher gave me a stern look.

'So, you think it's seriously scary to sleep there?' Lorna said mockingly.

I stared at her and took a deep breath. 'Yes, I find it really scary.'

'That's very honest of you,' the teacher said. 'Not many people dare to admit they find something frightening.'

'I'm scared of spiders,' Marti admitted. 'And cockroaches.'

'I hate toads and frogs,' Jamilah added.

'I don't,' I said, and I didn't lie. I think toads and frogs are fun animals.

There must be loads of them in your back garden,' the teacher said. 'Just as well you're not scared of them. Have you thought of how much you'll charge per night?'

'Four pounds,' I improvised. I quickly calculated that if one person would give me that for seven days, I would have twenty-eight pounds by the end of the week. I would ask my parents, Uncle Jake, Grandpa Cowart, Grandpa and Grandma France, and Paul and Mary, who live a little further down the road. If I was lucky, I could camp up a few hundred pounds just like that. I would literally grow rich while I slept! At the same time, though, it made me a little sad. For how could you help thousands of refugee children with just a few hundred pounds? What difference would a single week make? Shouldn't I try to keep up my challenge for much longer?

'I think it's a brilliant idea, a week in a tent,' Mr Khan said.

I could hardly believe what I blurted out next: 'Not a week, Sir, a year.'

If silence could drop with a thud, there was an ear-splitting thud at that moment. And with that thud, my stomach began to contract as if someone had punched me there.

A YEAR??? WHY DID I SAY THAT?

'A year?' Jamilah exclaimed.

'Pfff, as if you can keep it up that long,' Lorna said.

She shouldn't have said that. Angrily folding my arms, I said, 'I bloody well *can*.'

'Why do you think she won't be able to keep it up, Lorna?' the teacher wanted to know.

Lorna snorted. 'A year is mega long.'

Other children were getting involved. Some thought what I had proposed was really cool, others just laughed about it.

'It's a bizarre but original and brave plan,' the teacher said. 'What do your parents think of it?'

'They don't know yet.'

Lorna exploded with laughter. 'Your parents don't even know you're planning to sleep in a *tent*?'

'They do, but they don't know for how long!' I cried.

'Sure, as if they'll give you permission,' Lorna muttered.

The teacher ignored our squabbling. 'I think you're very brave,' he said, 'but for a whole year... Won't your education suffer?'

I was certain it wouldn't.

'It's autumn now, it'll grow cold soon,' Mr Khan said.

'I can take a hot water bottle.'

'And when it freezes?'

'There's a solution to everything.'

Mr Khan grinned. That's what he always said, that there is a solution to everything.

He began to hand out worksheets, but soon my thoughts began to drift. A year... was really very long... What worried me most, though, was: how am I going to tell my parents?

4.

Time to Explain

When I made my plan, I was hoping to sleep in the tent we used for our camping holiday two years ago. My dad got it down from the attic, but it turned out to be mouldy.

I panicked. 'What am I going to do now?'

'We'll buy a second-hand one,' Dad said.

'But that costs money,' I said. 'Which will be taken off the amount I'll raise. I'll have very little left then...'

'Don't worry, we'll use it for other holidays,' Dad reassured me.

If only you knew, I thought. I hadn't told him about the year yet. Was it possible to use a tent for that long?

My dad found a website with second-hand camping gear and began to scroll down.

My mum joined us, too. 'What do you think of this one?' she said, pointing at a small two-person tent on the screen. 'So you can have visitors once in a while?'

I could see this tent was way too small to use for a whole year.

'I like the idea of visitors,' I said carefully, 'but in that case I think it's better to choose one you can stand in.'

'Ah, but it's only for a week,' Mum said.

'A year,' I muttered.

'Hmm?' Dad said absentmindedly, scrolling through some images.

'Not a week,' a said a little louder, 'a year.'

There was a silence. 'A year???' they cried in unison, looking at me as if I'd said I want to jump from an aeroplane without a parachute.

In other words, it was time to explain.

'A week is nothing,' I said. 'That's not much of a challenge.' I was lying through my teeth, because even a single night sounded scary to me. 'Plus, I want to raise a lot of money, because you can't do much with a few hundred pounds.'

'Make it two weeks then,' Mum pleaded.

'Or a month, at most,' Dad tried.

'I want to do it for a year,' I said. I still didn't understand, myself. Had I gone crazy or what?

'Where did you get that idea?' my mum asked.

I shrugged my shoulders, feeling cross. 'Don't you always say that it's important to persevere? Well then. I want to persevere for once.' I thought of all the clubs I had joined and left after a few months. I either didn't like them enough, or they became too much, with all those other kids around me.

'If it needs to be a week-long challenge,' my dad began, 'then a month proves you can persevere, right?'

I mumbled something.

Dad cupped his hand behind his ear. 'What did you say?'

'Nothing. I just want to do it for a year.'

'Once you've set your mind on something, that's it,' Mum sighed. 'You're as stubborn as a mule, just like your dad.'

'Hey hey,' Dad said, 'what's wrong with wanting something badly?'

He had a point there. He himself had often done what he liked. He'd had several jobs. First, he was a handyman, then he wanted to be a physiotherapist, then a psychotherapist, and finally he discovered that he preferred being a handyman.

'First, I patched up houses, then people, and now I'm back to houses,' he once said. I wanted to know what he meant by 'patch up'. 'It's to make someone or something better, to repair something,' my dad replied. I thought 'patch up' sounded a lot more fun than the rest of the sentence.

'There's nothing wrong with wanting something,' Mum said. But...'

'Well then,' I interrupted her.

Dad stroked his beard. 'Pooh, Swan, a year, that's a long time.'

'Children in refugee camps sometimes need to stay in tents much longer than that.'

'You're not a refugee child, are you?' Mum said.

I impatiently blew a strand of hair from my face. We'd already had this conversation. I folded my hands and pleaded, 'Please, please, can I?'

My parents looked at each other.

We'll have to think about it,' my mum said again.

But we can start by choosing a tent,' my dad said.

5.

A Tent with a Licence Plate

In the end, we chose a tent with a licence plate. This may sound odd, but then again, it was an odd tent. On the outside, it looked like an old Volkswagen bus – a red Volkswagen bus made of fabric, with guy ropes. I gasped the moment I saw it on screen. I just knew this was the one. It had to be. Something to do with being stubborn as a mule.

‘That one!’ I exclaimed.

Dad stroked his beard again.

‘Uhm...’ my mum began cautiously, ‘are you sure that’s a good idea?’

We all knew what she meant. It had to do with Odd, a Norwegian friend of mine whom I had met two years before on a campsite in Norway. During that holiday, something happened that I preferred not to think about, yet I often did. Odd, his parents and sister had slept in the exact same tent. I still felt guilty about Odd...

I bit my lip. It probably wasn’t a good idea to buy this tent. Just as it wasn’t sensible to want to sleep in a tent for a year if you didn’t dare to. Who knew what could happen...

Then Crow came in, wearing his Batman pyjamas. He climbed onto a chair, poked his finger at the screen and asked, ‘Are we going to buy that car?’

‘It’s not a car,’ I said, ‘it’s a tent. A tent with a licence plate.’

[...]

Everything inside me tingled and rumbled and trembled. The trembling was caused by nerves, because it was all very well to make plans, but what would it be really like at night? What would happen, when I was all by myself?

THEN WHAT???

'Are we going to sleep in that tent?' I heard Crow ask. He hopped off the chair and jumped for joy.

'No, just your sister,' Dad answered. 'Your big sis is going to sleep in this tent. In the back garden.' He didn't add 'for a whole year', but something in his eyes told me that I'd found an ally in my dad.

'Really?' Crow cried. 'Can I come too?'

My dad didn't reply, and I held my breath. Dad was okay with it, Mum still needed to be convinced. I looked at her pleadingly, but suddenly I wasn't sure anymore whether I wanted her to say *I'm fine with it*, or *I'm really not okay with this*, because I didn't dare to sleep in a tent on my own, especially not at night...

'Uhm,' Mum said. She stared at the screen in silence. 'You're only four, so you can stay for a night, but not a whole year. That's something only brave big sisters can do.'

Then there was silence. I couldn't believe it. Within me, a mad race between joy and fear started. But eventually, my joy swamped the fear.

I jumped up and put my arms around my mum. 'Really? You're okay with it?'

She sighed, hugged me tightly and said, 'Oh, for goodness sake, give it a go then.'