

Memoir

YEAR OF A BEAR

IRMINA JABŁOŃSKA

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A BEAR**

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To all souls that need to come back to themselves.
I hope this will be of use.

Irmina Jabłońska
Scarborough 2023

There is only one journey. Going inside yourself.

Rainer Maria Rilke

PROLOGUE

I wrote this journal as a record and archive of the self-actualising practices and methods I was exploring, learning to use and developing from the moment I embarked on a journey of reconstituting myself, self-realising and finding loving care and loving compassion to who I am within.

You will find here narratives that I lived by and believed whole-heartedly throughout the years. Narratives that today I see as self-protecting mechanisms, ways of thinking I chose to hold on to, that were, for the time being keeping me safe and sane. I am thankful for the ways I managed to survive different chapters of my life thanks to these “tactics”, but I am even more grateful for the changes in narrative that I found liberating, healing, bringing ease and peace of being.

Changing the narrative is the only way to move forward, to heal, to see and feel things differently. And what is actually really beautiful, is that

A Change is a Thought Away.

Give yourself a chance to change your way of thinking, feeling and, effectively, moving through the world. It does take practice. It's not going to happen overnight. The thinking patterns are often coming back to us in the least expected - or rather: most difficult, so actually MOST expected - but *least wanted* moments. Practicing rewiring the ideas we had about ourselves and the world, through changing our perspective, changing our routine, changing our environment, changing friends and adding new connections

we give more attention to (this doesn't mean you have to abandon all your old friends - sometimes a wise time management and adding new friendships through which you can learn to nurture new practices that serve you better at the time is just enough!).

I invite you read my story with an adjustment in mind - forget the meaning of the word "I" as if it is a story about me, as if you were only an observer that wants to learn what was MY life about. Replace my "I" with your "I", with a thought about yourself. Read it as if it was you writing it, as if it was your story, and then - see how it feels. As you read, take your time. Don't rush through the story to get to the end. Take it paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, and take it in as if it was *your* story. Some parts might not exactly match or feel resonant, but I can bet you - there are parts of you that have been in *exactly* same places. Revisit them. And think of how you can change YOUR narrative when you do so.

CHAPTER 1

CHALLENGE OR PUNISHMENT?



“What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger”

Friedrich Nietzsche

My underlying pattern was always to challenge myself. In most of the cases it was to prove myself, to show myself that I can do this. I appeared as “strong” to the kids in primary school. And I think they meant *mentally* strong back then. I grew up without a father, brought up by a single mother and grandparents in a rural Poland, in a house without bathroom facilities nor central heating. We also never had a car, so long walks to reach public transportation and hitchhiking became part of my life from the moment I turned 6 and had to go to school.

I had a happy childhood, nevertheless. I loved adventuring around the countryside, visiting new places, climbing new trees, building new toys, playing with new kids. I guess, one could say, I wasn't afraid of many things. I just really loved exploring.

Somehow, very early in life, however, I decided that “What doesn't kill us, makes us stronger” by Friedrich Nietzsche and “A man can be destroyed but not defeated” by Ernest Hemingway are going to be my life mottos, and I lived

by these truths for many years. Actually, until I came to South Africa, when a more positive message appeared - "For everything there is a way, and if there is no way, there is a little way." That gave me hope. Hope that I don't *always* have to suffer in order to progress. That creativity and an open mind can also shape me. And that an open heart and mind will always carry me, wherever I go. I was 27 when that shift arrived. What led my narrative until then wasn't discouraging - because I would still push myself, but it was daunting - because I thought that the pushing never ever ends!

I sometimes wonder, if all the "breaking" that I would accept upon myself wasn't because I wanted to punish myself for not being loved enough by my father for him to try harder to stay in my life. Today, I know he was trying, and it was my mother's conscious choice to not keep him in her and my life, but I only had that conversation with my mother when I was 34. Up until then, I whole-heartedly believed that I was abandoned and unacknowledged by 50% of my Makers.

I lived in disbelief, very low self-esteem and a sacrificial mindset of constantly giving people reigns over my life. I would always wait for the other to make their call and only then check-in and see if it's aligned with what I was thinking. If it wasn't? - "oh well, they are probably right". This behaviour would maybe remain unnoticed for me for a lot longer, but meeting my Nemesis faced me with the true facet of the sacrificial lamb that I was. And that is: feeling as "it's me who is a victim here". Victimising myself. Thinking of myself as if everything that happens in my life happens TO me.

"It's the outer world that constantly is trying to break me" - was the narrative I lived throughout. And "it's the other's people's fault as well". Since I have given them the

reigns over my life by sacrificing my own right to decide, it obviously was them making the calls. And yet, I would blame them for the results. And then, I would feel like a poor little bear cub that can't yet climb a tree, helplessly crying that "I can't!", "I don't know how", "I won't make it", "I'm not yet good enough".

As my Nemesis was pushing harder and harder into my helplessness, critically pointing out my child-like behaviour, I would start shifting. But the shift would come with anger. Resentment. And one more time - blame: "He's making me do this", "It's all his doing", "he is just so cruel, challenging me so harshly".

All that he was actually doing was simply seeing that I am capable and trying to show me and encourage me that I can take the ownership. He saw the big bear-like creature in me. At the beginning of our relationship we talked about spirit animals, and he imagined me as a bear. I actually did not like that reference because "bears are big and fat", and so I became a teddy bear (in Polish a word "miś" is both, a small bear and a teddy bear, and it is used as a cute diminutive). Yet, from cute and lovely couple word, it slowly turned into "baby bear" and "bubu bear", both full of judgement, bluntly pointing out my helpless victim mindset. That was the difficult part. Nobody has ever said to me that I am behaving like a baby. And when one hears that.... Ohhh boy, it hurts.

And so the inner narrative sounded like: "How can I be behaving like a baby, if I've done so much in my life. I've been recognised in so many ways before already. I can handle myself. I've lived in multiple countries, I speak several languages, I traveled a lot, I always challenge myself and do well when I do it. I am not a baby anymore! LEAVE ME ALONE!!!!".

That last part is interesting. As if a panic button goes off. A split. Inner division. Total confusion. This doesn't make any sense. "I am strong and I challenge myself" AND "I am a helpless baby" at the same time?

It's when I felt true feeling of loss when I realised I was letting my life happen *to me*, instead of *with me*.

Yet, before I felt that I truly lost something, I made conscious decision of letting it go and I found enough reasons in my head to prove that point, to quiet my guilt and to feel like I am making the right decision.

What am I talking about? About sacrificing friendship with somebody that truly, deeply, lovingly, daringly, honestly and unconditionally, simply cared for me. Somebody who would take time helping me make sense out of this world, but also look at me and with love and care tell me where my shortcomings are. Somebody who would look at me with pure, non-judgemental, objective eye and accept me for who I was. Somebody who accepted me rejecting them. Somebody who loved enough to let me go when I decided to do so, because all I needed at that time in life was to feel that I **FREAKING CAN DECIDE ON SOMETHING**. That "I am not a baby that doesn't know what to do!". "I am making this conscious decision now, see? Watch me!". I was learning to make calls in life. Only that. Making calls. Taking decisions. It wasn't yet the lesson of consequences. That came in later. I just learned how to make *a decision*. I was 28.

Why did I let her go? Well, this is going to be a story full of excuses, and I really do want you to see the depth of the feeling of loss that I felt instead, but I will share this story, because it's relevant to know that we all have our reasons and sometimes those reasons are feeling a lot more important than the connection we are losing, OR we are simply not

ready to face and deal with both: following the strong reason AND doing all the work of maintaining and nurturing that connection.

At that time in life I was just at the beginning of my journey of living in South Africa and as I took that challenge on, I went “all-in”. I took a plunge. I did it because I followed the life I dreamed about and I was ready to do *whatever it takes* to make it happen. How I *knew* that South Africa was offering me life of my dreams? I didn’t. But I *thought* I did, because I saw just enough signals for me to think that way:

1. Few years back I took a coaching session at which I was asked about my “perfect life”, and I imagined a beach house with a loving partner... a sense of striving in business, feeling accomplished, joyful and fulfilled.

2. When I arrived in Cape Town, I fell in love *at the first sight*. It really was like a lightning from the sky. We met, looked into each others’ eyes (he has that skill to look you straight into the eye) and his magnetism truly captivated me. It was a hunch, a strong feeling, a powerful pull, an attraction that I couldn’t explain. I never felt anything like that before. So I followed it. We often follow strong, intense feelings in our lives as if we think that “if it’s intense, it must be right”. The intensity is usually there for other reasons. Most of the time it’s there, because we subconsciously notice something in that person that we *suppress* in ourselves or *desire* in ourselves and we strive to bring it back, learn from that person, reconnect with that part of ourselves by vicariously living their lives, instead of ours.

3. One day we were walking down the beach in Scarborough, Cape Town, and I realised that this is this person’s life. They are making my dream life happen real-time. I was amazed. All my life I lived in conviction that I

have to a) get good education, b) get a good job c) work my ass off for the next 30 years before I can afford to buy a house d) vacation destinations with beach and sun are vacation destinations - one goes there for 2 weeks a year, and comes back home to grind. I honestly didn't think that people make life happen in those destinations. I think I thought it's only for the locals, or something. Total disconnect from reality. Anyways...

So I arrived to South Africa with \$3k savings in my bank account (in case I decide "this isn't for me" and fly back home to my mother...), with a partner-to-be, my magnetic dream-like man I decided to figure my South African life with, and with a promise of working with a local tour company on their marketing.

Sounds almost dream-like? Well, not exactly. My partner and my best friend did not get along at all. I had no savings to support myself if the collaborations didn't work out. We had no car and we lived in the countryside, with no public transportation in the area. I just arrived to a new country, and it's not just any new country, it's South Africa - one of the top crime-affected countries in the world. I resigned from my corporate job without a real tangible paying alternative. I decided to share life with a, let's be honest, complete stranger (we met for 2 days in person a year earlier, when I was travelling across South Africa, and then followed that up with a bunch of Skype calls throughout the next 6 months, before I decided to fly down...). The collaboration with that tour company I was supposed to do marketing for was not going very well at all (different expectations). And on top of that my co-dependancy and baby-like helplessness of sorts (victim mindset) combined with strong-willed and very defined partner who considered

himself a guide for me, was just that one drop that overflowed the cup. I could not handle even ONE more thing. And that ONE more thing turned out to be one of my most important friendships.

My friend's visit to South Africa was a real treat for me at first, but soon it turned out into rather big difficulty. Two strong characters, my partner and her crashed over my head. Both of them somewhat fighting over me. One out of need, the other out of care. And so it felt as if I had to choose. Either I follow my already deep-in journey into life in South Africa with all its challenges I was facing at a time, or I fight with my partner and with myself to maintain the relationship with a friend, where I had no capacity to hold any more space for anyone anymore.

So yes, I broke up... with her.

How I realised that I made a mistake? She made yet another gesture in my direction. One last trial of reaching out to my heart. She wrote a letter to me 3 months after we broke up. A long message on Messenger. A message that I did not respond to for the next 3 long years.

Warsaw, 12/22/18, 1:56 AM

Irmi,

While cleaning for Christmas, I came across your letter - the last one given with gifts, in which you asked me not to give up on us, to just give you time... thank you for it - I'm not sure how well I understood it then... but now, in the face of what happened between us, I understand it perfectly.

I wonder if, when writing it in South Africa, you had a subconscious feeling that things would turn out this way...

When you gave up on our friendship, I thought that if it would help you become yourself on the other side of the world, then so be it. That's what friends do, they give up their ego and let go when the situation calls for it. I have always been good at "holding on", so I thought that my lesson was to learn to "let go"... And since I also felt a lack of symmetry in the relationship, which your departure made very clear, so it was easier for me - I forgave and let go...

However, your words still bother me - the suggestion that I am partly to blame for the fact that you didn't get along with guys, because you chose what I advised you, because you were susceptible to my opinion, more than you should have been... I don't remember the exact words, but that was more or less the tone.

I can't get over the fact that even the shadow of such a thought was born in your heart. Is that really how you feel about your years of friendship with me? Could it be that, despite years of knowing you, you started to look at me through Marius' eyes...?

Because the fact - maybe I didn't understand some of the things - your attitudes, back in South Africa, where you sometimes behaved like a different person, a bit opportunistic, so pragmatic to the point of pain, stripped of your kindness and sensitivity that I

appreciated so much in you... but maybe that was what they expected from you circumstances... I wanted to understand.

I wanted to understand so that you wouldn't have to be alone in this, and I have the impression that that's partly why you pushed me away... as if you felt that until you burn everything behind you, you won't rise as a "new you from the ashes."

But do you really believe that to be yourself you have to burn everything for yourself?

If you felt too dependent on me (is this how I understood your statements?), did the path to "independence" really lead to dependence on someone else?

After all, by erasing years of relationships...?

Is the fact that we depend on humans in some sense a bad thing at all? That we love, that we rely, that we trust...? I have the impression that this has become a sign of weakness for you... while true friendship and love are based on unlimited trust... and it is the ability to rely and trust that requires real strength... because we are "naked" in front of such people - without armor or masks and vulnerable. thus potentially much more...

So why give up the ability to be really close to people... I don't understand.

*

I know that I have high expectations of myself and others, that sometimes it is difficult to meet them, that I say what I think and that was sometimes difficult for you.

But you are also thanking me for this in this letter... for honesty and fighting for us. And please don't give up...

I don't know which of these shades of you is more you, where you are going and whether we still share a common language where you are going. But I know one thing - it all depends on:

- willingness*
- choices of both parties.*

Regarding the elections:

I couldn't get over the fact that, despite the change of place and boyfriend, you were making your choices and sense of value dependent on "someone" again, and I guess you couldn't stand my expectation of "more" and that I was pointing it out at you instead of showing understanding.

But I understand, and I miss you, I miss us.

I just felt like the proverbial piece of shit... just an accidental victim of your revolution - it must be there for a breakthrough to take place...

And in terms of willingness:

You really don't want to have me in your life - the one you're building? I thought I'd ask - after all, you asked me - to give you time and not give up...

Your Karolina The Brave (although a little sick and tired:)).

Ps. The magic of Christmas will reach where summer is, let it bring back faith and hope...

Sometimes it feels like there are so many things in this world we cannot control.

But it's important to remember the things that we can.

Like forgiveness, second chances, fresh starts.

because the one thing that turns the world from a lonely place to a beautiful place is love.

Love in any of it's forms.

Love gives us hope.

Hope for the New Year.

3 long years of suffering and being taught, but not really learning, how incapacitated I made myself by not taking agency over my life, by not taking ownership for the things that happen in my life, and by not taking responsibility for the feelings that arise in me.

One day, when the relationship I was in, one more time hit a wall of discontent, disconnection, and not being able to find comfort and consolation in that partner, I went back to the letter my friend wrote to me 3 years ago. I went back to read it again, because I felt that “that was one moment and place in my life when I felt somebody actually cared”. I started reading again. And then it hit me. Only then I realised that all along I was blaming the other for what happens in me, for my traumas, for my feelings, for my hurt, for my pains. And for what was happening in my life. It’s only then when I realised that I was letting myself down by not taking the responsibility for my own life and for what I am feeling. These are MY feelings for god’s sake! I was denying myself agency over my own inner world. How devastating. How disappointing. How truly sad it was.

I replied to her message. I swallowed my pride, and after 3 years I decided to write back. With a full disclosure that I don’t expect any response, I apologised deeply. Even asking for forgiveness didn’t feel right. I just simply apologised.

Scarborough, 1/30/22, 3:11 PM

Karo, Karolina,

Despite the years that have passed, the time that has flown and the space that has grown, please read this letter - a response to your message sent on December 22, 2018. Thank you for writing it.

When I read it, I didn't understand it at all. I couldn't look at the situation from your perspective, I couldn't see myself, you or anyone else as they really were.

So, first of all - please forgive me for not replying.

It came to me when I was going through probably the darkest period of my life, and that's probably why I had more regret, anger and self-pity than readiness for transformation. 3 weeks ago I broke my spine. (Ironically?)

Please allow me to respond to your words from that period. I think that even if you think about it all differently today, you were already deeply aware of what it was really like. And I didn't have the humility to listen to you. As if nothing was reaching me. I had to learn "the hard way".

I apologize.

For blaming you, putting responsibility on you for what is happening in my life, for lack of an open heart, lack of love and understanding, lack of maturity, lack of faith in your own strength and character, lack of inner strength to persevere in this friendship, lack of moral backbone, for giving in to the situation and losing you in it, for total deterioration. I lost myself. I'm sorry.

I don't blame Marius for what happened, and a lot has happened in our lives. Pain, intensity, suffering, torturing each other, madness. I believe that he came into my life and I came into his to achieve something, go through something (or maybe crawl through something), learn something. Two hurt people. I believe that we came into each other's lives as part of a soul

contract - to solve and work through unresolved issues within us. A hard lesson. But necessary.

I don't blame you either. Or anyone else. And this was probably one of the greatest lessons I had to learn - to take my life into my own hands and stop thinking that what happens to me, what other people say, even those closest to me, determine my reality and future. Stop giving the reins of my life to other people and finally trust myself, my own strength, my own personality. And simply just love and respect myself.

Today I know that this self-love and self-respect do not mean that I should reject the love and respect of others. The intention itself makes it worth listening, taking into account, but still having your own understanding and filter. However, for a long time I was lost and couldn't recognize it. And maybe that's why I had to cut myself off - I was under Marius' forging hammer and his feedback was harsh enough for me, I couldn't accept more criticism, more testing.

So - sorry. Again. For rejecting you. That I burned everything behind me and that I couldn't be a friend to you. That I couldn't trust, love, rely, be open. I kept my guard up. My whole life, really. And in the most dramatic way, this guard and selfishness (not self-love) came out and caused hurt. I'm sorry.

You wrote: "Why give up the ability to be really close to people... I don't understand"...

The answer is simple - out of fear of rejection. It's easier to be the one rejecting. It's easier to hurt than to be hurt. It's easier to be independent than dependent. Hah, and South Africa gave me a life so incredibly dependent, and on someone who was able to press every possible button in the machine... Irony of fate? I don't think so.

I had to go through it. And not that I wanted to. This was not my planned revolution, a rise from the ashes. It was a grinding of all possible weaknesses, uncertainties, fears and nightmares. And it was extremely painful.

Losing you was painful too. But because I felt that I was choosing a "different life", and your system of values and signals you sent me, advice you gave me, conflicted with the reality I signed up for at that time, I thought it would be better to leave. That it will be easier for me to build a new life. Especially since I thought I would die without Marius.

So - once again - I'm sorry. I lacked awareness, openness, spirit. I lacked the strength to hold on to my soul, to myself. The good, strong, loving one. Although - she couldn't really leave either. Because I had to keep my guard up, not show weakness, fight for myself, not give up.

It turns out that life is full of paradoxes - we must go through trials by fire to understand and appreciate true value.

I don't expect you to reply. Nor that you will forgive. You may not even get to the end of this letter. However, I just want to tell you that I am thinking about you, I wish you the best and I want the Universe to surround you with love, respect and happiness, because you deserve it. Because an open heart is something I could learn from you, but I kept mine too closed to even listen. I just hope my actions haven't caused yours to go into hiding. Because it is important. Rich. And valuable.

*With Love,
I.*

*Sometimes it feels like there are so many things in this world we cannot control.
But it's important to remember the things that we can.
Like forgiveness, second chances, fresh starts.
because the one thing that turns the world from a lonely place to a beautiful place is love.
Love in any of it's forms.
Love gives us hope.
Hope for the New Year.*

We then started talking. And things opened up.
Lightness arrived.

CHAPTER 2

FROM SELF-SACRIFICE TO SELF-WORTH



On my journey to understanding what *self-love* is, what it means, how to give it to myself and how to feel it fully, I first needed to comprehend what *love* is.

For most of my life I actually didn't know what love is. I had no point of reference in my own or my mother's life as of what truly loving a man means. She never shared her personal experiences and would feel very guilty and never admit anything even when I saw her with somebody or knew that there are some deeper feelings that are unsettling her "when that one man is around".

I had however a good understanding of what *family love* is. Family love meant to me "I belong" - I had then that deep sense of knowing, that "where my family is, that's where my home and safety is" and "these are my people, who will look after me; this is my tribe, my safety net, my protection". I still have that knowing deep down engraved, even though I am not connected with my blood-family very much. Over the years I have created a lot of new families around myself, during my studies, during my work years and also, eventually, in South Africa.

But romantic love? I had no idea. For a very long time I couldn't tell if what I was feeling was love, attraction, infatuation, lust or rather only the need to be wanted / seen / appreciated / desired / accepted / validated / recognised / acknowledged, etc. Most of my relationships have started from infatuation and carried on because of my need for validation. I have developed some kind of love to my long-term partners, truly caring for them and wanting for the things to work out between us, but only when I actually *felt it*, which was very recently, I realised that all that I felt before was not it... It's actually devastating when I think about it.

When I was leaving my first long-term relationship (5 years), it took me an entire year to admit to myself that we are not a couple anymore, that my boyfriend is actually dating somebody else while still trying to keep things going with me and that the only reason that I am not leaving is the fact that I believe I am not going to be loved or wanted by ANYBODY else. Today I think he pitied me, so he stuck around. Yet, when I finally left, he was livid. Desperate. As if I actually did break his heart. I guess it was more of a broken ego at that stage. Or maybe I did...? I was fighting so hard during that last year to maintain our relationship, that maybe I made him believe that there is something to fight for? That I actually truly want this? That this is real? I don't actually know. We never managed to have a healthy conversation afterwards. Or any conversation at all. And yet - the moment I sensed a scent of self-worth, I left. And, no - it wasn't self-worth that I found *in myself*. It was, again, validation coming *from affection* that my best male friend has offered me.

And it came through a "Pebble Proposal".

Male Adelie Penguin (a common species in Antarctica) during courtship, presents the female with a pebble as a gift.

A pebble symbolises affection toward a mate and if the female accepts the gift, they bond and mate for life.

My pebble gift came in so unexpectedly that I actually didn't bring it to realisation at all... and I did not accept it. I looked at the pebble, acknowledged it's nice shape but did not choose to keep it. I didn't give it a second thought. I didn't allow myself to consider it as a meaningful gesture. I let it go pass me.

We were on a beach in Tanger, Morocco, traveling with 4 of my girlfriends from University. My friend joined us for a stretch of a journey and Tanger we were exploring together. Surrounded by my girlfriends in that moment, who all knew I was in a long-term relationship, I instinctively rejected the gift. A form of self-preservation stroke the cord: "I can't let my girlfriends know that I have feelings for my best male friend" was ringing in my ears. I thought I will compromise my integrity by accepting the gift. Yet, truly, it was another self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-abandoning and self-disappointing moment in life. And all it was needing at the time was *courage*.

Only few weeks later I found it in myself to ask about that gesture. And so the groundbreaking pebble has opened up the gates of self-worth for me. It was like a signal from the universe, that "yes, I am lovable", and "yes, I can leave relationship that is not fulfilling", and "yes, I can start following my own dreams, since I can clearly see that my current partner's life path and mine are going to be very different". I knew, we want different things in life. I knew, we are not interested in being together anymore. I knew, we should have ended it all a year earlier. BUT.... Fear of abandonment, fear of loneliness, fear of not being wanted or

loved again, fear of not managing on my own, etc, have kept me from taking a step towards my own betterment.

How disappointing of me, one would say? In those moments I try think - these were my protective mechanisms. I mean what if I wouldn't manage on my own so well?, what if I wasn't ready to take the step forward?, what if my underlying victim-like behaviour and submissive co-dependant attitude searching for validation would have lead me to ending up with somebody way more damaging to my psyche, body and the entire life as a result?

When I arrive at accepting these protective mechanisms as "the best I could do at the time", I bring in compassion and forgiveness to myself. It's OK to be afraid sometimes. It's OK to be scared sometimes. It's OK if you're not ready sometimes. It's OK if you need more time. It's OK because you are doing the best you can to move on in the most healthy and least damaging way possible. There will always be some "damage" done, as our fearful behaviour usually means that we sacrifice some parts of ourselves, deny ourselves betterment and require our friends and closed ones to deal with those fears head on. But that is what true friends do - *they give up their ego and let go when the situation calls for it.*

And yes, life that is guided by the fears is a compromise. And yes, we do sometimes have to choose that way because every other path seems to be just too wide, too big, too misty, too scary... It is so important to be compassionate and forgiving to oneself in those moments, I can't express that strong enough. If we don't do that, we end up punishing ourselves for that self-abandonment. And I have done that many many times too. In some of the most self-

destructive and self-abandoning ways possible. We will get to those stories very soon...

Did I leave the long-overdue relationship and follow my heart? Yes, I did. I knew I wanted to travel the world, work remotely and live much more adventurous life that my partner was ready for. So I started following my path - right there and then. I took life coaching sessions where I envisioned my dream life and put in place actionable steps in order to get there. The goal: *beach house with a loving partner and sense of accomplishment*. The way to the goal: a) get experience in working remotely, b) build confidence and courage to move through the world without being inhibited. Actions steps to the goal: a) look for a job that will facilitate that c) may the job be already abroad to “kill two birds with one stone”, ie. get myself out of my comfort zone, start working and operating in English full time, start traveling AND working in an international team all at the same time. Actionable steps to the goal: a) start the job search, browse through 10 offerings a day b) apply for 3-5 positions a week c) start preparing myself mentally to the adventure that awaits. What I actually did with my Actionable Step point a) was: go to LinkedIn, search for the jobs that match my skillset with no filter as per *where* it was. The destination was not an objective at a time. Then I applied *only* for the positions that allowed me to press the “apply now” button, which meant that it was enough to have optimised profile, and no need to write a motivation letter or any additional form of proving myself. I was applying for jobs everywhere, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, USA... 2 weeks later I got a call from Budapest, Hungary. An American Multi-Cultural High-Tech Company with their East-European Hub in Budapest was looking for a Digital Marketing Specialist with

East-European background and languages. It was a hit. A week later I was packing my bags and flying up for an interview. I got the job immediately. I accepted it immediately. And 2 weeks later I was sitting in Budapest office learning about new systems, company's culture and best practices. It was a 180° pivot in life. And it felt like my life has only started now.

Oh, and did I get together with my best friend? Well, we tried to see how it would feel to be together, but we knew that we are better off as friends. The pebble was all I needed at a time. And the knowing that I am loved. I didn't have to be in a romantic relationship then. I needed to start the journey of trusting myself, giving myself voice, allowing my judgement to come to the surface and learn to make decisions that are aligned with my heart, soul and life that I desire.

CHAPTER 3

FROM SELF-ABANDONMENT TO SELF- ABUSE



Did you think that the journey will go upwards from here on? I'm sorry to disappoint you, but no. It is only when I started opening myself to the life that I wanted, that I realised *the real life starts now*. The challenge starts now. The painful growth starts now. I have now left the island of comfort and organised reality, jumped straight into the waves of unexpected circumstances, new encounters, new experiences, hardships, adjustments, learnings... What I did have at my disposal was my core values, my integrity, my deeper *why*, my dream - the desired life, the vision, the gut feeling, the intuition and the protective mechanisms that I *had to* trust for simple self-preservation and self-protection purposes.

Yet still, my journey to self-actualisation was not streamlined at all. But the thing is - it *never* is.

If you know what your priorities are, if you know what your central, most important goal in life is, if you know what your personal choice is, if you know what you want to

represent in life for other people you will be able to come back to it more often than not, by reminding yourself about your identity, respecting and honouring it, and more often than not you will be able to say no to experiences and people that are trying to somehow stretch your boundaries, overstep your lines or test you in some ways. That core strength and awareness that it's there helps *a lot*. And, actually, it really doesn't have to be a super clear knowing of how you want you life to be *exactly*. Nor you need to know all the answers to the questions above all at once! It really is just about having that sense of knowing "this is who I am in the world as for now". For me, for a very long time it was something like: "I am a kind, open-minded, friendly, compassionate, creative person, who will come with an open heart and curiosity to learn more". Just that carried me through a lot of waves and storms. Until the point when it didn't. And that point started actualising itself when I arrived in South Africa.

It is all fine and easy sailing when you come across equally kind, open-hearted, curious people, who will respect who you are, leave you to your own devices and just let you be. "You do you" kind of story. The real challenge starts when you come across people and circumstances that are there to confront you, to test your boundaries, to strengthen you, to prepare you to become a bigger or better version of yourself, or just to prepare you to be able to move through yet another world - for me it was the world of South Africa. But like - for real. I did not come to South Africa to visit it. I came to live in it. And that means knowing exactly what it takes to move through it freely and without fear or hesitation. The thing is that even most South Africans moves through their country *with* fear and hesitation. And I was about to learn how to make it *without*. When you get hit by a wave that is meant to

change you, maybe first even break you, cross your boundaries, use or abuse you, you need to learn to *trust yourself at all times*. And that was my next lesson in life. And it was one of the hardest ones...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Irmina Jabłońska was born in Poland in 1989 - “a year of change”, as she likes to say. An only child, she was brought up by a single mother Maria and grandparents Sabina and Stefan in a small holding on a Mazovian countryside. Rough living conditions (no central heating in a -20C winters in Poland, no bathroom in the house, no private room to wash, sleep or study in) have made her resilient and ultra flexible.

Her mother’s choice of city school over the village school has opened up a life of opportunities for her. Her mom would say to her: “I can’t help you with your homework, but I carry your backpack for you”. Irmina was taught how to hitchhike when she was 6 years old, would know how to chop wood, weld and build with wood, plant vegetables, work in the field and with animals, and start a fire from a

very young age. Her passions were all around exploring nature surroundings and drawing. “Making art was the only moment when she would sit still” - her mother would say.

In her adult life she chose intercultural studies (BA), Ukrainian philology (BA), marketing and business studies, graphic design and advertisement. She then proceeded working in multi-cultural international corporations, to eventually shift towards digital nomad freelance lifestyle, serving entrepreneurs and small businesses in bringing their offering into the world of online business.

When she arrived in South Africa, she got reminded of her deep connection with nature that she always cherished and combined her work as an digital designer and strategist with guiding people on unforgettable nature journeys and unique travel destinations.

She is a passionate outdoor adventurer and mountain lover, with a talent for creating experiences that money can't buy: these wordless moments of awe, connection and heartfelt bliss. Irmina encourages people to go beyond their perceived limits while her joyful and genuinely loving presence makes clients feel safe and inspired alike.

On her journey to self-realisation and finding her life's purpose, she has found that creating spaces and experiences that allow the adventurous souls to explore themselves more through the mindfulness experiences in Nature: whether it is the challenge on the mountain or mindful time in the wilderness is *what lights her soul on fire*.

Her ultimate goal is to help as many people as possible to give voice to their inner Dreamer, their inner Creator, their inner Maker, and **start making their lives as they desire**. She helps them visualise what joyful, full filled life could look

like, and choose to do what lights them up from the inside.

The moment we follow that narrow path in life, the real magic happens. Many new doors opens, and many new directions appears. It's then, when we embark on life of adventure. It's then when we start living fully.

As that is the ultimate truth that she got to live and embody in her life, that is the divine message that she wants to be sharing with the world.

Learn more about me: linktr.ee/irmi.in