

# EMOTIONAL TREASURE BOX

A collection of true stories, disturbing but  
full of triumph



## What happened to the Heart

Bilateral initiative developed by:

### **About EEA and Norway Grants**

The EEA and Norway Grants represent the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway towards a green, competitive and inclusive Europe. There are two overall objectives: reduction of economic and social disparities in Europe, and to strengthen bilateral relations between the donor countries and 15 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. The three donor countries cooperate closely with the EU through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA). The donors have provided €3.3 billion through consecutive grant schemes between 1994 and 2014. For the period 2014-2021, the EEA and Norway Grants amount to €2.8 billion. More details are available at: [www.eeagrants.org](http://www.eeagrants.org) and [www.eeagrants.ro](http://www.eeagrants.ro)

### **About the RO-CULTURE Program**

RO-CULTURE is implemented in Romania by the Ministry of Culture through the Project Management Unit. The Programme aims to strengthen social and economic development through cultural cooperation, cultural entrepreneurship and cultural heritage management. The total budget amounts to approximately 34 million EUR. For more details: [www.ro-cultura.ro](http://www.ro-cultura.ro)

# **What happened to the Heart**

## **Emotional Treasure Box**



**About the project**

Project Promoter: Mediation and Community Security Center Foundation

Project Partner: Foreningen Hedda (Norway)

Non-reimbursable funding value (100% EEA and Norwegian Grants):

607,324 RON (122,040,83 EUR)

Duration: 4 months (November 1, 2024 - February 28, 2025)

Implementation location: Iași (Romania) and Oslo (Norway)

## About the bilateral initiative:

### **Emotional Treasure Box - What Happened to the Heart**

Combining 5 cultural fields (literature, visual art, theater, music and dance), the bilateral initiative shows the transformative effect of art and healing through the direct involvement in the creation of a group of 12 women and 17 children exposed to the trauma of domestic violence - assisted by the promoter (Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation) and partner (Foreningen Hedda, Norway).

The entire endeavor is based on the life stories of these women, who went beyond trauma and who shared with us their history and how they managed to overcome it. Their stories are the basis of all the cultural products created: this book – in printed format, an audiobook and the script of a show that premiered at the National Athenaeum in Iași on February 22, 2025, around the Dragobete holiday.

The creative team that gathered around these stories was composed of the two writers – **Paula CIORTAN** and **Diana KOLCU**, social workers within the foundation, but also passionate about writing. For the women who participated in this journey, the writing process was a therapy, for others we put on paper what they wanted to tell us. This volume also includes, in addition to 12 dramatic and liberating stories, several author's stories by the two writers.

But nothing would have been possible without the most incredible and creative team of artists inspired by the originality of director **Dana COJOCARU**. The team of actors transposed with emotion **Ana HEGYI**, **George COCOŞ**, **Ioana Natalia CORBAN** and the young **Cristiana ŞERBAN** crystallized words into dance, movement, emotion on the soundtrack of **Tudor NICORICI** and the scenography signed by **Alina DINCA PUŞCAŞU**. Then, to make everything magical, choreographer **Oana FLORIEA** and the twelve little ballerinas created five original dances inspired by the music of Norwegian singer-songwriter **AURORA ASKNES** from her latest album **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HEART** and last but not least, by Aurora's book, with the same title.

All these cultural products, plus others, adjacent to the creative process, can be found on the website [www.cmsc.ro](http://www.cmsc.ro) of **Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**.

Technical team: Project Manager **Elena Petronela Ţerban**, Project Assistant **Cătălina Mîtel**, Communication Expert **Laura Albu**, Financial Manager **Andreea Radu**, Procurement Expert **Irina Simiuc**.

If we were to quote **AURORA**, the one who inspired a heartfelt team from Romania and Norway from the **Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation and Foreningen HEDDA** to set out on their journey – we continue the adventure of the last 25 years in which we communicate with women and girls who have a warrior soul and feel misfit, misunderstood or weirdos. It is a project in which we want to give courage to women and girls who have gone through violence or are still in a toxic relationship, who believe that they are alone with their children and that they cannot escape the prison of life they are in now, in the shadow of the one who killed their dreams or buried their hope for a life free from fear.

**Laura ALBU,**

President of the Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation



My first thought when I started writing the first lines in the description of this book was that the life stories of the women-survivors with whom we have been actively working for the last 4 years would inspire other women who are going through similar situations. In addition to the fact that this way women can walk the path of healing, they can have the opportunity to realize that they are not alone and that there is a life without violence. Any of us can find ourselves, at some point, in the following pages as if it were our story. Look in the mirror of life and you will discover that you are your own savior!

**Elena Petronela Ţerban**

Project Manager

I think the idea of this artistic act is to find the place where you connect to your heart, like you have an intuition... nothing has to be structured, and reason is not the only important thing... it's more about what you want to express and then we'll find ways to fit things.

**Marius Kolbenstvedt**

writer and actor - Motfaidinger, Norway

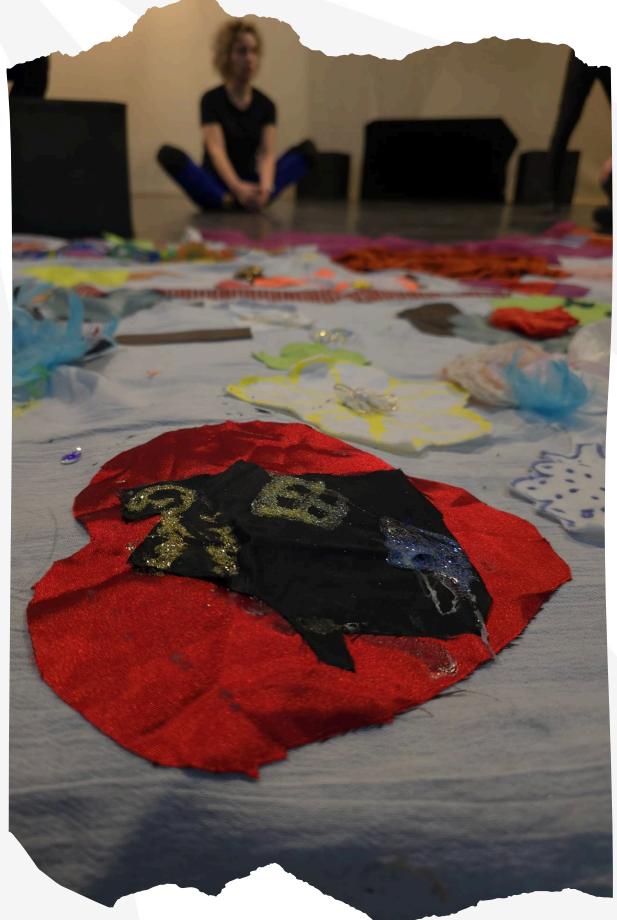
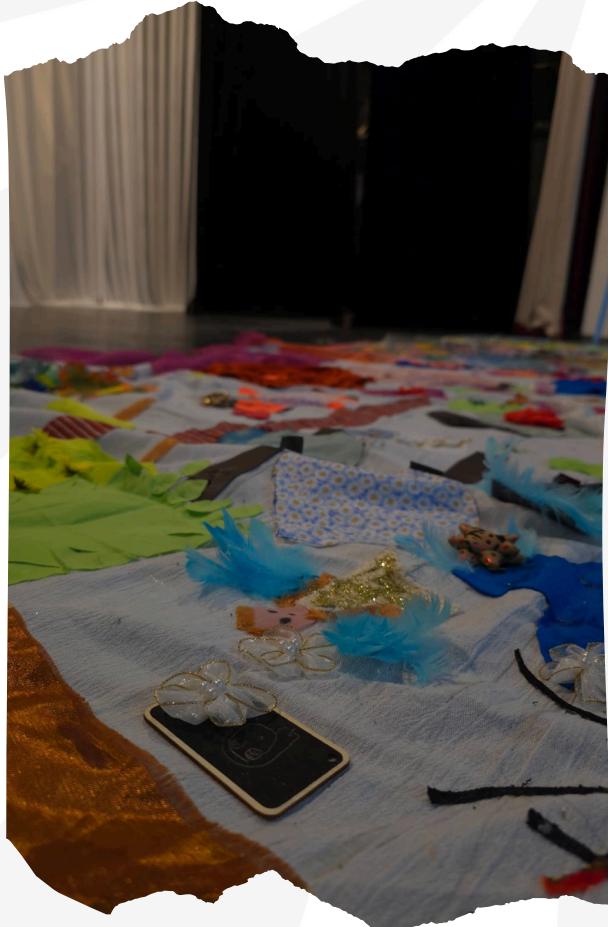


What happened to the heart? The point is that the heart here was broken... we work with broken hearts and we work with healing hearts.. and we work with the beauty of the heart.. so that we are all there on stage. We are here because of a wonderful idea and the perseverance of a wonderful woman named Laura.

**Jorgen Lorentzen**

Director, Foreningen Hedda, Norway

# Stories written on canvas



# Stories written on canvas





## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



A collection of true stories, disturbing but full of triumph

Publisher: Community Mediation and Security Center Foundation



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



"I had been crying for three days, I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't eating, I couldn't do anything... Until my 7-year-old daughter came into my arms, wiped my tears and told me to sit on the carpet, and she climbed onto the couch and opened a box above me from which 30 little hearts fell out, cut out and colored by her, and on each heart it said "Mommy, I love you!". That was the moment I realized I had to get up and do something."





# What happened to the Heart

## Emotional Treasure Box



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## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



Writing about the suffering of others is never a neutral act. It is a direct encounter with pain, a fragile bridge between past and present, between storyteller and writer. In the project in which I collected the stories of former victims of domestic violence, I was not only a witness, but also an intermediary of pain. It was a difficult experience, both for the mind and the soul. Difficult, because each story brought with it a baggage of immeasurable suffering, and I had to receive them without letting them bring me down. Heartbreaking, because in every detail, in every hesitation of their voices, in every unspoken tear, I felt the traces of traumas that should not have

existed. Creating and guiding writing through suffering is a dangerous game. Each word becomes a balancing act: how to tell the truth without reviving the pain? How to shape the story without loading the text with your own emotion? Writing becomes a battleground between empathy and objectivity, between the need to preserve authenticity and the desire to protect the soul—mine and those who entrusted me with pieces of their past.

Throughout this project, I learned that suffering, no matter how severe, finds meaning when spoken. Words cannot erase what happened, but they can offer comfort, bring understanding, and sometimes even liberation. Perhaps this is one of the most difficult roles of a writer: to take on not only the act of writing, but also the responsibility of carrying forward the stories of others, with all their fragility and strength.

**Paula Elena Ciortan**



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



# Parts of the Soul

The Dream (small), the Desire (timid), and the Melancholy (mighty)

**Paula Ciortan**



It should have been as simple as riding a bike with training wheels. I should have been ready for what was to come. "Should have" is steadfast, but how much does it really matter?

I was small, I was young, I was innocent, and most importantly, I was myself. How much the journey through life can change you—how sad. It should have been simple, but simplicity becomes complex when you're thrown into life's waves, clueless about how to

avoid the currents. Yet this time, what follows the beginning isn't sadness but, on the contrary, hope—even goodness.

Even when life caught me off guard, I realized that many of the things I feared weren't as frightening as they seemed. Many times, I found myself laughing at what once seemed complicated, understanding that often the hardest part is simply the fear before trying.

My journey through the world didn't change me in the way I was afraid it might. It changed me in better, more beautiful ways. It taught me to see that simplicity can be pure and magical. Like when you take off your training wheels and ride a bike for the first time, feeling the wind in your hair and freedom beneath the wheels. It was just like that—a fragile balance at first, but then, what speed! What joy!

But surprise—this isn't about me anymore. Now, we're unraveling the story of Clara and the threads of her soul.

In a bustling city, among tall buildings and streets filled with hurried people, lived a young woman named Clara. She had an ordinary life, but her soul was divided into three parts that intertwined every day: the Dream (small), the Desire (timid), and the Melancholy (mighty).



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The Dream, though small, was always with her. Clara dreamed of simple things: a house with a garden full of flowers, a dog and maybe a cat to be her companions, and a place where she could feel she belonged. The Dream was like a ray of sunshine piercing through the clouds on a rainy day. Small, but always there, urging her not to lose hope. She carried it in the pocket of her heart, like a talisman of the happiness yet to come.

The Desire, timid and delicate, whispered things Clara didn't often think about. It told her she could gather the courage to enroll in a writing or composing class, to talk to the classmate who always smiled at her over coffee, to take a spontaneous weekend trip. But Clara often hesitated. The Desire was there but too afraid to come out, perhaps scared of failure or the unknown.

The Melancholy, mighty and strong, sometimes arrived like a thick fog. It made her look back at what could have been, at moments from the past she had left behind with difficulty. At times, Clara felt trapped by the Melancholy, like in a spider's web. Yet even in those moments, she knew it was just a part of her, not her whole. The Melancholy wasn't bad—just sometimes it pressed too heavily on her shoulders.

One late autumn day, Clara woke up with the thought that she needed a change, to be something else—anything, anytime, anywhere. The small Dream whispered more insistently, the timid Desire stirred more than usual, and the Melancholy showed her that not all roads led backward; some would lead forward if she found the courage to step.

So, without overthinking, she took a day off work and headed to a quiet park in the city. There, she opened her notebook, one she hadn't used in months. The timid Desire found courage, and for the first time, Clara began pouring onto the blank page the thoughts and words that had been invading her mind, unafraid of imperfection. She wrote. She wrote about everything. She wrote about emotion, about trees, about clouds, and about a little girl with big eyes full of hope.

That afternoon, the small Dream grew a little, the timid Desire came into the light, and the Melancholy transformed from a burden into a source of inspiration. Clara understood that all these parts of her soul were necessary. Without the Dream, she wouldn't have had anything to aspire to. Without the Desire, she wouldn't have had the courage to try. And without the Melancholy, she wouldn't have appreciated the moments of peace and introspection.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



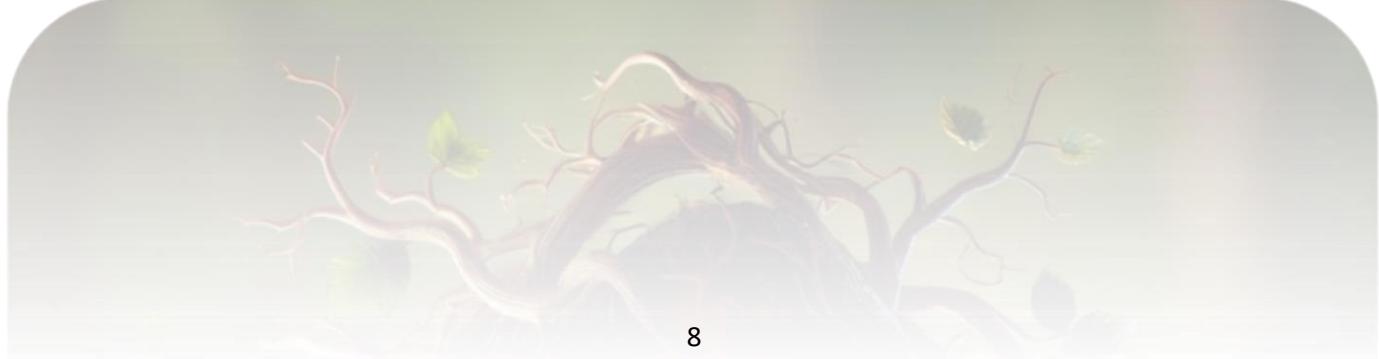
She went home with a lighter heart, knowing that even small dreams have the power to grow when nurtured, and even timid desires can become reality if given a chance. The Melancholy was no longer a mighty enemy but a natural part of her journey, reminding her that the beauty of life comes from all the emotions we experience, whether sweet or bitter.

And so, Clara continued moving forward, with all the parts of her soul together, more at peace than ever, discovering that she didn't need to be ready for every step in life. Sometimes, the beauty lies in not knowing exactly what comes next. And instead of worrying, you learn to embrace the uncertainty. Because more often than not, the surprises life has in store aren't traps but unexpected gifts, full of light and laughter.





## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box





## The One Who Saved Me



**Author: B. Gabriela-Ramona**  
**Editor: Paula Ciortan**  
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

My story... I don't know how to begin, to be honest.. I was born with wide and fearful eyes in an orphanage in Hălăucești. For seven years, that institution was my home. The center's walls were old, showing the marks of time. The paint was peeling in places, and the windows, though large, had metal bars that often felt more like a prison than a playground. The distinct smell of disinfectant, combined with the hastily cooked food, filled the air every morning, and the sound of the caregivers' heels echoing through the long, dark corridors was our daily wake-up call.

Our rooms were simple, austere. Four beds lined up in an orderly row, with white sheets and thick blankets that kept the winter cold at bay. Each bed had a small drawer, where we kept our few personal belongings – a stuffed animal for some, an old book, a found photo, a handwritten note. I was born unlucky, I often told myself. My parents were wandering through Iași, and my guardian angel, one of my mother's sisters, was in Bucharest... She wanted to. She tried to raise me, but my parents said "no" and took me back home with them years later after abandoning me.

They sent me to school, but every day there felt like torture. I was like a fish out of water, with all eyes on me, as if they could sense that I didn't belong there. They called me wild, and whispered behind my back, pointing at me – the crazy one from the state, some called me. They saw me as different, as if I came from another world, one where I lacked the warmth of a real family and the small securities they considered natural.

Their words etched themselves deep into me, like echoes repeating day after day. In their eyes, I was a stranger, and my impatience, sometimes my distrust, only reinforced their beliefs. I remember, sometimes, feeling their gazes and the hands pushing me from behind, accompanied by giggles, and the teachers passing by without offering me more than a hasty glance. In those moments, I wanted to run, to hide, to find a corner where I wouldn't feel like a foreign piece in this puzzle.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



The only love I felt was around the age of 12 from another aunt in the village. She took care of me, I confided in her, I vented to her, and she taught me about the church. Thanks to her, I experienced a small piece of life so well. But, surprisingly, the one who saved me died when I was 19.

Her name was Elena, a name that seemed to perfectly characterize her, like a destined choice. Her hair was gray, an intermediate shade between white and black, and her physique was frail and delicate, with a small and slightly slender silhouette. She arranged her scarf with a skill that seemed to follow a silent tradition, in a way that was neither too simple nor too elaborate, like a subtle choice of balance. Her black shoes, discreet and elegant, perfectly matched her modest and refined style. She always dressed in neutral shades, avoiding bright and contrasting colors, as if she wanted to remain in a discreet shadow, without standing out too much. She always seemed to blend into the atmosphere, but at the same time, she had a special presence, difficult to ignore.

She left this world five months before my nineteenth birthday. She didn't have time to give me my birthday gift... and even now, I feel like I'm still waiting for it, as if it's something that hasn't happened yet. Every time I think about that day, I feel an emptiness in my soul, as if time had stopped and my longing to have her near remains alive. I imagine what it would have been like, how she would have smiled and hugged me, but instead, all I have are memories that seem to fade



with each passing day.

When she died, I felt as if the branch beneath my feet had been snapped, leaving me suspended in

mid-air, without any support, without any direction. It was as if an entire universe inside me was collapsing, leaving only an echo of a place that had once been full of warmth and meaning.

We saved each other; she saved me from a desolate and ignorant life, and I saved her from the death of things done wrong. It was a Wednesday, the first time I saved her... A pot of boiling water had spilled on her weary legs. I applied cream and assured each other that everything would be



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okay. The pain seemed to subside, but in her eyes, I saw a deep weariness, a weariness that came from beyond the wounds. They told me I had to be home, that I had responsibilities. But my heart couldn't listen. I needed her, and she needed me. Until one day I ran away from home. I went to her, without thinking too much. I just felt I had to. I reached her, but I didn't find her as I expected. That time I found her collapsed on the ground, alone and helpless. Twice I was able to save her, but the third time I couldn't... How painful. And now I relive that day when I found out she was gone... I was at my sister's house, holding one of my nephews, with the scent of a baby around me. Outside, a cold, penetrating wind was blowing, making me feel the cold in every fiber of my body. However, despite the cold, I couldn't explain why I felt a sense of unease inside me, as if everything had stopped for a moment. Suddenly, I went outside, as if I could feel someone calling me there, and that's exactly what happened. My sister's neighbor called me from the fence with his deep voice.

He was a simple man from a rural world, a modest man, without many opportunities and without many people around him. He looked at me with his gentle eyes, as if he saw more than he should, and his presence seemed to deepen the silence. But he broke the silence and uttered the hardest words that I still carry with me today. "She's gone." For a moment, I didn't know what world I was in, whether it was the real one or just a dream. I looked around, searching for a sign, a clue that not everything was over, that maybe it was all just a test, a trial that I would overcome. But there was nothing. Nothing, just silence. My heart was pounding, but not in the familiar sense of a normal beat. It was a heavy beat, full of deep sadness, like an echo of a lost path.

Without wasting any time, I ran inside, and instinct told me I had to leave there as soon as possible. I started gathering things without any clear plan, just with a strong feeling of needing to leave. I chose to dress in red, to wear that sweatshirt of hers, because even though everything was falling apart, that object held a vivid memory of the moments when everything seemed normal. It was the only thing that connected me to what had been. Then, I ran home, without any plan, without knowing exactly what I would do or what I would say. When I arrived, I found my parents at home and, in a burst of anger and pain, I shouted with all my might: "I hate you!" The words came out of my mouth without thinking too much about them, as if they were going to free me from all the accumulated tension. And, deep down, I hate them a little even today. Everything else has faded since then. The gifts, the kind words, and the memories, one by one. I live with the guilt of not



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being there when she decided to leave for good. Today, though, I live by what she taught me, my life is good and easier thanks to her. Sometimes I sit and imagine what I would say if she were here for just a second... But I would tell her to forgive me, to forgive me for not being there for her as I had promised so many times. My mother never loved me, even though I'm her spitting image, but I felt true motherly love from Elena. She was my refuge whenever I cried, suffered, or despaired. Today, I have Bella. She's another her who loves me unconditionally without many words, just actions and a little tail that wags whenever she sees me. She's a part of me, and I can honestly say I love her more than my mother. She was the most beautiful gift I ever received; in her, I found salvation.



Now Bella is a mother. She has five puppies, and I'm so proud of her. I thank God. I'm proud of myself. Thanks to my aunt and Bella, I'm human, I'm alive. They saved me from everything, even from life itself.



## What Changed Me Forever



**Author: Paula**  
**Editor: Paula Ciortan**  
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

What makes the difference between a successful story and one left in the shadows of time is Perspective! How we relate to what happens to us is the most important thing. We can go through a "rough patch," or more beautifully said, a disaster - but we are heroes only if we survive and rise again, again and again.

When we manage to ask ourselves, "What do I need to learn from this experience?" "What skills do I need to develop to get through this stage?" we are already changing the narrative. It's no longer just "This is my luck." We are no longer mere victims of fate, but we take the reins of our lives into our own hands. And we don't wait for a prince on a white horse to save us. We save ourselves. We become the heroes of our own story.

In short, I like to write, I think you've figured that out by now, but let's move on to my story. The interesting part.

XX

What changed me forever began in the most unexpected way. Not with a formal greeting or a planned meeting, but with a few messages exchanged in a virtual corner of life. That's how my story with X started.

At first, it was just conversations. Drawn out late into the night, filled with life ideals, shared dreams, and a desire to explore the world through each other's eyes, we had mutual friends and he seemed like an interesting guy. Our discussions were beautiful and dreamy. He wrote me poetry. Lots of it. Beautiful poetry. Those poems found a special place in my heart. They were more than just verses—they were fragments of his soul, given to me. He seemed like a wonderful man, loved nature, people, and had many interests similar to mine. He seemed like the perfect man. He had a charming, masculine, deep voice. He was athletic and strong. He inspired confidence and was very charismatic.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



Wow. I felt like he understood my pains and inner struggles (because he complained about not finding his place in the world and complained about others around him not understanding his aspirations). He seemed like a lost genius to me then... He told me he had found the love of his life and couldn't wait to have a family. He admired me and complimented me. He gave me gifts. After two months, we went to the seaside, where he proposed to me. A month later, I quit my job and moved with him to another city where I knew no one.

There, in his mountains, was the place I had dreamed of all my life, in peace and lots of nature. The air was clean and cool, and the sounds of the city—the honking, the hurried footsteps, the fragmented conversations—seemed far away, like an unclear dream from a previous life.

There, I didn't need to hurry or play the perfect role, I didn't need to be tense anymore. Every moment flowed naturally, without the pressure of meeting others' expectations. I could be me. At first... Only at first.

And it was there that things got worse, because it was just the two of us. He would throw tantrums of jealousy, saying I didn't know how to look at him, or where I was going. Over time, I also found out why, in fact, he suspected me of doing what he was doing. All this time, every girl who seemed more interesting to him was the love of his life and he wanted to have a family and children with her, he had a script and he used it without hesitation repeatedly (Yes, I read his messages, after a long time, many suspicions and confessions). Of course, he cheated on me. Of course, he wasn't what he had initially played, he had just carefully studied my profile and adapted the lies to impress me.

Nothing I did was ever good enough for him. I couldn't cook right, I didn't clean properly, I didn't know anything. All my friends were bad influences, my habits, quirks, and passions were ridiculous and pointless. Even my personal journal wasn't truly mine. And if I tried to hold him accountable and explain my boundaries, he would initially slam his fists against the wall to scare me. Then he would push or shove me, but just enough to avoid leaving serious visible marks. Of course, I was the one who took everything too personally, didn't have a sense of humor, exaggerated, and was generally labeled as crazy. My plans had to be postponed because he wanted something spontaneous, and there was an argument if I didn't do things his way. Sometimes his anger would start from nothing, and I began to be afraid to say or do anything wrong, as if I were walking on a minefield every day.



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The love and avalanche of beautiful, tender words from the beginning quickly and surely turned into contempt, insults, and mockery. From being the queen of his life, I became a worthless human. But I still believed that my love and patience would change him. I could see his pain, I could see that he was a wounded man, very insecure about himself. I could see that he needed validation. I understood his inability to control himself when he was angry. I tried to soothe his suffering with my gentleness. But even then, I was called fake and cunning.

I thought I was doing a good thing. It's just that all my gestures, beautiful at their core, fed a monster—an unhealthy attachment, habits that were harming me. I was giving up bit by bit of MYSELF for him, for the sake of the relationship. And so, I dried up. I ran out of energy, out of the will to live.



I left him a few times, but he would become charming again, the ideal man, the mature and loving man. I would give in to his insistence and tears and return. He was an intelligent man who used his abilities strictly in his own interest, he manipulated with skill and knew how to exploit the weaknesses of his "adversary." After almost a year of the relationship, I found out I was pregnant. It was the last time I gave him another chance. And guess what, he was the ideal partner for many months until I gave birth, with fewer outbursts. But after I gave birth, he returned to his role.



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I had no one else, my family couldn't support me then, and I was scared. I tried calling the police once, but I knew I needed an "escape plan" from that prison. Because that's how I felt, trapped. Emotional violence could also be exerted from a distance, and I felt very vulnerable, especially as a new mother, still adapting. He threatened to take my child away, and I actually believed he could do it because I had started to believe everything, he told me about myself (crazy, stupid, clueless, sick, etc.).

I sought resources to feel better, I read, I turned to the DGASPC for psychological assistance, in secret, when I "went for a walk with the child" because I depended on him financially and he didn't agree with therapy and psychologists.

The departure happened suddenly when I was trying to put the child to sleep late at night. After a previous argument, he came in recording with his phone to provoke me into reopening the subject,



after much insistence I lost my temper and pushed him out of the room. He left the house and told me he had already called the police and they would come in the morning to kick me out, ONLY me. Then I called them. And I asked for a protection order. I left in the following days for a DGASPC shelter.

A year and a half of horror followed. The child loved his father and I couldn't deprive him of the bond with him. But everything I did became an object of blackmail, in front of me he would say he wanted to reconcile, but behind my back he would go to institutions

and say I was crazy, trying to take the child away from me.

Of course, he had no basis for his accusations; they were just words. I slowly recovered over these 18 months, with therapy, reconnecting with friends and family, talking to women who had gone through similar experiences, but most importantly, by detaching myself from him and returning to myself!



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Now we're just parents to our child, each in our own home. There were many protests from him, but I was steadfast, I was firm, and I set boundaries. I no longer accepted any kind of bad behavior from him and I only communicated what was strictly necessary. It was hard because I wanted to justify myself and convince him many times, but I learned to stop feeding the fire. I learned to let go of control, to let people live their lives exactly as they could, I regained my power and managed to understand myself better, to heal some old childhood pains, to take steps towards the person I wanted to become. Paradoxically, all this storm helped me become more balanced and calm.

Educated, with degrees and diplomas... I didn't think I couldn't fix something. I didn't think this could happen to me. His behavior wasn't foreign to me. On the contrary, it was the most familiar. Although my previous boyfriends and friends adored me... My mother hadn't been as supportive. And he reminded me of her. And deep down, I agreed. I saw myself exactly as he behaved towards me. Because that's how I was taught by my mother's words. That I had no value, that I was good for nothing and didn't deserve anything good. Yes, it took such a twisted situation to understand something deep inside me, and honestly, that's often how it happens, we just need to see situations from the right perspective, but each one hides a treasure. And, although we don't like to admit it, we learn the most important lessons through pain.

Today I know that I am a wonderful person, who also makes mistakes, and still has a lot to learn, that I deserve the best and what's right for me. That I'm talented at many things and have skills that I can share. That I'm unique and deserve to be loved and appreciated. And all of this is true not just for me. Now I'm doing better, I've just returned to work after a 4-year break, but the most important thing is that I am ME again, that I am free! I can dream again, I can enjoy what's around me and I have an open heart to love the beauty that surrounds me. Currently, I'm focused on being a better parent and a more balanced person. I know that this whole story has made me an even more valuable person because I can authentically understand others in their suffering and finally, I am at peace with my past.

Today, I feel more complete, more authentic, and more connected to others. My story is not just about loss or pain; it's about transformation, about the courage to move on, and about the beauty found in humanity. And I know now, without a doubt, that every experience was necessary to become the person I am today – at peace, grateful, and ready to live with an open heart."



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box





# What happened to the Heart

## Emotional Treasure Box



# Today



**Author: Ancața-Maria A.**  
**Editor: Paula Ciortan**  
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

It's hard to find the right words... It feels like I'm not writing for myself, but for a stranger. Yet, I feel the need to put these thoughts on paper. Lately, I've been wondering who I really am and what I truly feel. I often feel overwhelmed by the need to better understand the path I've taken and how those moments, sometimes difficult to face, have brought me to this point in my life. Perhaps by writing, I'll be able to understand more clearly what's going on inside me.

I can't deny that I love this child. Not because she's perfect or because she has something special on the surface, but because I find myself in her story. In her history. M, my girl. She's a child I adopted, even though I already have two biological sons, but she chose me, in her own way, to be her mother. I wanted to be her mother with all my heart, without any hesitation, because I felt there was a deeper connection between us than words can express. Looking at her, I realize that she is like a mirror reflecting a part of my past - a painful part, but one that, over time, has become a part of me. Maria is the reason I wake up every day with a desire to move forward, to protect her, and to tell our story. Our story, which teaches me every day about love, redemption, and hope. Because, ultimately, what I want most is for M to have a very different childhood from mine, one filled with love, security, and possibilities.

Xx

My childhood was marked by absence. I remember how hard I tried to earn their love. I was always trying to please everyone – to be accepted, appreciated, understood. Even a little bit. But every time, my efforts seemed futile. It was like fighting against raging waves, without a rudder or direction. From a young age, I learned to work for any kind of love or attention. I had to prove myself, to show that I could, that I was capable. This meant making efforts that shouldn't have been those of a child. My work was like proof of my existence, as if only through it I deserved to be seen or loved. But the feeling of not belonging was overwhelming. I wrongly blamed myself



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for everything that went wrong in the family. I felt that I was the problem, that because of me something was missing or broken.

My mother was a ghostly presence in my life. Her gloomy face, her emotional absence, were the things that defined me back then. When she was physically present, she seemed to want to escape – from us, from responsibilities, from everything. And she found a way to escape: alcohol. I don't remember moments of warmth, not even the simple gesture of steam rising from a pot of food cooked with love. The food she cooked was rare, and we, the children, felt and noticed that lack. Hunger became a silent companion of my childhood. Days passed, and my stomach was empty, but not just of food, but also of warmth, of affection. I had learned to endure, to be patient, to get used to the lack. That was our life – a long series of moments when we felt pushed aside, useless, invisible. When my mother wasn't lost in the fog of alcohol, she would sometimes cook. But even then, her gestures had a clear direction. Not for us, the children, but for my father. Three vapors replaced each other – the vapor of alcohol, the vapor of rare food, and the vapor of indifference. Us? We were chased away from the house, as if we were annoying strangers who had no place there. The table was not a moment of unity, but another proof of the distance between us. Most of the time, we watched as she prepared his plate with special precision, while we remained on the sidelines.

In those moments, a silent question weighed on my soul: why didn't we deserve a little attention, a little of what she could offer? It was as if we existed but were not seen. Every day meant facing not only hunger in our stomachs, but also a greater hunger – the hunger for love.

My father? I remember clearly, as if it all happened yesterday, how I looked at him at the age of five. My father was my idol. In my childlike eyes, nothing seemed more beautiful, more grand than him. He appeared to me like a figure from a fairy tale, a man who filled the room with his presence. He was handsome. Not just ordinary handsome, but the kind of handsome that made people turn their heads when he walked down the street. His hair, always styled with a perfectly drawn line by a comb, shone in the sun like black silk. His eyes were a deep brown, a shade that seemed to encompass the tranquility of autumn forests, and a smile that seemed to hold a promise – one that, as a child, I firmly believed. And there was his elegance. I remember the sound of his footsteps – firm, calculated, the echo of well-polished shoes on the cold floor. He always wore impeccable clothes: well-tailored jackets, perfectly white shirts, with buttons that discreetly



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shimmered in the light. I loved watching him tie his tie. His movements were so precise, so natural, as if he were performing a dance that only he knew how to do.

When he entered the house, there was something about his posture that filled the room. It was as if everyone should stop and look at him.

Looking back, I realize that in those innocent years, I put him on a pedestal. But at five, I couldn't see the cracks in his perfection.

All I saw was the elegant, handsome man whose smile made me feel that the world was a good place.

Slowly, the man I revered turned into a monster. A monster not in appearance, but in the way he made us feel – small, insignificant, worthless. At first, it was just the tone of his voice, which became sharper, harsher. There were the looks he cast, those looks that could freeze the air around him. Gone was the gentle smile I loved, replaced by a harsh grimace, full of discontent. Then came the harsh words. Words that hit me harder than any slap. His anger became a permanent guest in our house. From a word spoken too loudly to a plate accidentally broken, anything could trigger a storm. I was too young to understand that he wasn't fighting with us, but with his own demons. All I knew was that my father, my hero, was making me tremble.

Years later, as I matured, I vowed never to choose someone who resembled my father. I told myself I would be careful, that I would learn to recognize the signs of a toxic environment, and that I would do everything I could to protect myself from such a relationship. However, life has a way of testing your resolutions. At first, it was all milk and honey. Everything seemed perfect, like a fairy tale where the world always smiles and the clouds are just white spots on an intense blue sky. The relationship had that newness glow, full of promises and shared dreams. But, as they say, "new brooms sweep clean." As time passes, new objects lose their shine, and reality begins to seep through the cracks of initial enthusiasm. I never wanted to get married. The idea of putting my life





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in a pre-established pattern, of accepting the norms dictated by others, never appealed to me. I wanted to live freely, follow my own paths, and decide for myself what happiness means. But it seems others had different plans. Everyone around me wanted to change me. Everyone told me how I should be, what I should want, how I should live. Some did it out of love, with good intentions, believing they were helping me "find my way." Others did it out of a kind of social obligation, as if my life were a puzzle that needed to be assembled according to their norms. That's how I met him, my future ex-husband, by chance, convinced by those around me that he was some kind of prince charming. He was exactly what others wanted for me, as if they had molded him according to their wishes. A serious man, with the right words, with an air of stability that seemed to offer me the "perfect life" that everyone dreamed of, except me. For a while, I thought maybe he was the solution. Maybe, with someone so settled, I would find my place too. Or maybe, tired of fighting against everyone, I decided to go with the flow, to try to be "normal." I don't know for sure.

Our marriage wasn't a tragedy from the start. The first few months were actually beautiful, perhaps because of that initial glow that any novelty brings. We were learning about each other, finding common ground, and he seemed genuinely eager to make me happy. However, slowly but surely, small cracks began to appear. It started subtly with demonstrative aggression.

He would destroy everything in his path just to tell me "this could happen to you too." Then came the control, the isolation from family and friends, and the harsh words that weighed heavily on me. Words that hurt me and probably will continue to hurt for a while. And finally, the first blows came. It felt like a lightning strike. When he hit me for the first time, I felt my world crumble, and all my dreams built around him were stained with ink. Looking back at that moment, I don't know how I got there. When I felt his palm hit my cheek with unjustified force, the world stopped, and everything became a series of confusing, almost unreal images.

Our biggest enemy was his mother – a wicked woman with a harsh soul. She didn't seem to have ever had room for tenderness in her heart, and if it had existed, it had certainly disappeared long ago. She was the kind of woman who kept the house in perfect order, but the souls within it in total disorder.

The relationship between her and my husband was perhaps even more complicated. He was a "mama's boy" in the truest sense of the word. It didn't matter that he was an adult and had his own



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family; for her, he was still the child she had to guide, advise, and above all, control. She had made him dependent on her approval, and he, weak and insecure, could never say "no" to her. If she said

something was good, then it was. If she decided I was the problem, then that's how it had to be.



Every day, she made my life harder, but she did it in a calculated, subtle way, so that she would appear to be the victim. I worked side by side with her in the household – washing, cooking, cleaning, running from

morning to night – but it was never enough. In her eyes, everything I did was wrong. "You don't cut onions like that, let me do it." "Did you forget to dust there? What kind of woman are you?" "This woman still has a lot to learn!" she would say to my husband in a honeyed voice, but one that betrayed contempt.

The worst part was that my husband believed her. No matter how hard I tried, no matter how much I tried to keep the peace, she had a special talent for twisting reality in her favor, making herself appear to be the martyr who carried the weight of the house on her shoulders, while I was just a burden. Far from defending me, he took her side. That's how my ordeal began. I woke up every morning with a knot in my stomach, knowing that the day ahead would be another test, another "who's the better housewife" contest that she would always win. Not a day went by without a poisonous comment, without a complaint strategically slipped to my husband. Sometimes I wondered if she actually wanted me to leave, or if she simply enjoyed keeping me under her thumb, seeing me bend, trying to reach an impossible standard.



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For years, I lived in a continuous nightmare, from which there seemed to be no escape. The beatings, the humiliations, and the insults had become part of my daily routine, and each day began and ended with the same thought: When will it all end? I hoped for liberation; however, it might come, but years passed and nothing seemed to change. Everything had become a vicious cycle. Everything I did was criticized. If I made a mistake, I was punished. If I tried to do well, they found something else that wasn't in its place. It wasn't just about the cutting words, though they had the power to tear me apart. It was about an entire mechanism to destroy me, to make me believe that I was worthless, that everything I was and everything I did was wrong. The beatings came like a sentence, without warning, without escape. Sometimes, my husband would lose his temper over the silliest things – a poorly washed dish, a remark he considered inappropriate, a complaint slipped in by his mother, a thought of my own evolution. Other times, it was just a natural continuation of the state of tension we lived in. There was no longer a clear line between punishment and cruelty. Sometimes he beat me for things I hadn't even done. They were just excuses, and I was the scapegoat. Every day, I wished it would all end as soon as possible. I often thought about running away, about what it would mean to leave everything behind. But where would I go? Who would believe me? Who would help me?

The world only saw their perfect mask and had no idea what was happening behind closed doors. Sometimes, even I began to doubt myself. Maybe it was my fault. Maybe I deserved everything that was happening to me. There were moments when I felt I couldn't take it anymore and I would run down the road like a madwoman. I would run without knowing where, without having a plan. I would just run, feeling the tears burn my cheeks and my heart pounding desperately. I prayed that someone would see me, stop me, ask what happened. I looked into the eyes of passersby, hoping one of them would recognize my pain and do something. But no one did anything. People looked, some with pity, others with curiosity, but no one came close to ask if I was okay. I sometimes imagined that a stranger would appear, like in a movie, and save me. That he would hold out his hand, take me away from there, and take me to a place where I could breathe again, without fear. But that never happened.

It took thousands of moments of despair, thousands of sleepless nights, and hidden tears for me to understand something simple but profound: the hero I was waiting for was, in fact, me. No one was coming to save me. There was no knight in shining armor, no hand reaching out from the sky.



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I had to be the one to take my life in my hands, the one to rise from my own suffering and find the courage to say "Enough." That realization didn't come suddenly. It was as if I were regaining my sight slowly, after years of living in dense darkness. The first signs were timid thoughts, which I didn't even dare to say out loud: What if I leave? What if I try to free myself? These questions haunted me for months, until one day, something changed. I decided that it was enough. At that moment, I realized that I had nothing left to lose. Everything had been stolen from me: my dignity, my self-confidence, my freedom.



All I had left was that little spark of hope that refused to die. And then I knew: if I stayed any longer, I would lose myself completely. And I couldn't accept that. I walked out the door without looking back. Every step I took was like a release, as if the weight of years of suffering was beginning to lift from my

shoulders. I walked down the street without knowing exactly where I was going, but feeling that any place was better than that. I promised myself that I would never go back to that place of suffering. That I would fight for myself, that I would be my own hero, no matter how difficult it would be. And, slowly, I succeeded. I discovered the strength I had always had within me, but of which I had been unaware. The strength to rise, to say "no," to live my life by my own rules. Today, I look back on those years with pain, but also with gratitude. Because, beyond suffering, they taught me who I really am. And they showed me that no one, ever, could take away my power to decide my fate. Today I look at her, my child whom I saved from the arms of neglect and oblivion. More than ever, I feel connected to her forever, even though I did not give her life. Today we are 4 souls, me and my 3 children, who fight against evil. Today I am no longer alone in my fight. I have built a safe haven for my heart and for their hearts. My children are now my light, and the love I have for them gives me the strength to face anything. Together, we have overcome fears,



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we have overcome the past, and now we are a team, a united front that refuses to be defeated by the darkness that once haunted us.

Today, I educate my children and tell them what life is like, as I learned it on my own skin.

Today I look at them and I am proud. Today I look at my adopted daughter's childhood and I am proud of her and of us. I tell them about the courage to say "no" when something is not right, about the importance of loving themselves and protecting their souls. I tell them that every step they take in the world must be one they take with their heads held high, even when the road seems difficult. I teach them that they are never alone, that together we can overcome any obstacle, and that any wound can be healed through love and self-confidence. Today, I am me, I am well. I am no longer a prisoner of my own fears. I have learned to allow myself to be happy, to live freely, to appreciate my moments of peace and quiet. I have not forgotten where I came from, but I have learned to look at myself with new eyes, with the eyes of a person who has survived and who, now, is building a life of which she is proud.

I am grateful for everything I've experienced, for the hard lessons I've learned, for the strength to rise and move forward. It's not easy, but I know that every step I take now is one towards a better future for me and my children. I am grateful for the love that fills my heart, for the courage I found within myself, for the family I have created, and for the inner peace I have learned to cultivate. Today, I am free. Today, I am me.

In the end, I want to tell all women to seek help without hesitation. We know how difficult it is to go through domestic violence, how much it makes you feel powerless and hopeless. Call the authorities whenever necessary. Don't let them take your freedom anymore. You and your children deserve more. You deserve life.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



# I Am Myself



**Author: Diana**  
**Editor: Paula Ciortan**  
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

I am Diana. I am the mother of a wonderful 10-year-old boy, and my life is a story filled with unexpected moments and valuable lessons. I am a tall woman with blonde hair and brown eyes, always wearing a warm smile. People say I have a gentle character, radiating a calmness that inspires those around me. I firmly believe that nothing happens by chance—every step, every event in our lives has a hidden purpose. I am courageous and optimistic, and whenever I set a goal, I always find a way to make it a reality.

This is my story—about the power of belief, a mother's love, and the surprises life has in store when you least expect them.

Nine months ago, I had the courage to end a marriage that lasted almost 10 years, a relationship marked by the narcissistic traits of my former partner. My relationship with my ex-husband began over a decade ago, seemingly carefree, like a game. He was 19 years older than me, and at that time, I never imagined getting married or starting a family. The age difference and my lack of emotional maturity allowed him to craft a carefully constructed image—a charming, tall, confident, financially stable man who seemed capable of taking care of me and loving me unconditionally. In the early years, the relationship seemed ideal. He was attentive and caring, pampering me with dinners, trips within the country and abroad, and small gifts that brought me joy. Everything seemed perfect, but what initially felt like a beautiful dream gradually turned into a toxic relationship.

All of this made me fall in love with him, but I didn't feel I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. During this period, as a contraceptive measure, he told me he was taking injections that would protect me from pregnancy. Believing him, I trusted that there was no risk. However, after almost a year of being together, I became pregnant. His explanation was that he had forgotten to take his injection, but I later realized that everything had been premeditated and meticulously planned by him.

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In my mind, considering that my grandfather had just passed away, the thought came to me that I needed to bring this child into the world, seeing it as a sign from Divinity.

One of my mistakes was not discussing these matters with anyone. My relationship with my father wasn't good, and I didn't feel comfortable enough with my mother to talk about such things. Moreover, my relationship with my ex-husband seemed stable, even though, in reality, I hadn't had enough time to truly understand him as a person. He was a secretive man who didn't share details about his past, and because of this, I remained in the dark for a long time about what lay behind his facade. He assured me that he would take care of the child and support me in everything related to raising and providing for him. He was happy that we were going to become parents, especially considering his age of 48, a time when he didn't expect to have children anymore. Everything seemed to proceed normally at first: we got married, the child was born, and our life seemed to follow a natural course. Then, everything went from bad to worse. My husband lost his job and refused to look for another one, claiming he couldn't leave the child with anyone. He stopped being attentive to me and began looking for reasons to argue, leaving the house and only returning in the morning. During this time, I discovered he was addicted to gambling, specifically





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slot machines. Although I noticed these changes, I kept moving forward because it was difficult for me to manage alone with a small child, and my parents didn't support me. On the contrary, they encouraged me to stay with my husband, no matter the situation, for the child's sake.

As a father, he was obsessed with the child and believed he knew best how to care for him. This attitude often pushed me aside, with him frequently insulting me, even in front of the child. When the child was just two years old, during an argument, my husband became enraged and strangled me until I turned blue, even though I was holding the child in my arms. In those moments, I felt a profound fear, especially with the child present, unable to defend myself as I should have. After that incident, I went to my mother and told her what had happened, hoping to receive at least a bit of moral support.

However, her response profoundly surprised me, as she told me, "That's just how men are." I realized that she, too, had endured the same treatment from my father for years. It took me almost two years to gather the courage to leave, to make that radical change in my life, and to stop being a victim. During that time, I was constantly blamed for everything that went wrong or poorly in my daily life. I felt increasingly distanced from my son, and my role as a mother and a woman was disregarded, treated with disdain and ignorance. He constantly threatened me during every argument, saying he would take my child away and destroy me in every possible way. I received no compliments, kind words, appreciation, or gifts. He didn't communicate, was secretive, and acted behind my back. He deprived me of love, attention, tenderness, caresses, kisses, and behaved coldly and distantly, leaving the house without saying a word.

I accepted this behavior for the sake of my child and to preserve the illusion of a complete family. Growing up in a traditional family, I believed it was normal to make sacrifices so that my son could grow up with both a mother and a father. I thought it was better to stay in a complicated relationship than to risk breaking up his family. At first, I kept everything to myself, not telling anyone what was happening, hoping these were isolated incidents and that he would change. However, as time passed, things worsened, and I began to see them differently. It was as if I woke up to reality, like an animal caught in a trap, unable to escape a painful and suffocating reality. My soul was torn between staying in the marriage for my child or leaving to save myself.

After deciding to leave him, truths about him began to surface. Hidden among his clothes, I found documents revealing that he had been accused of sexual offenses involving minors. During the



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divorce trial, it was confirmed that he had been imprisoned for 3 years and 6 months for gang rape involving a minor. Additionally, the police informed me that before meeting me, he had convictions in England as well.

He turned my child against me from the age of 4, and now, my son is entirely manipulated. He has been told that I chose another family, that I hurt his father, and that I used to hit him when he was little. During the trial, his



father presented a video where my son jumped on my stomach, and I told him it hurt and to stop. When he didn't stop, I moved him off me onto the bed and gave him two light slaps on the leg. After I left the room, his father (who had been filming the entire scene without intervening) told my son, "Your mother hit you, didn't she? It hurts, doesn't it? Don't worry, it'll just be us two." Emotionally manipulated, my son began to cry.

Currently, my child lives with his father and doesn't want to see or talk to me—not even for a minute. His father's plan to alienate my son from me and his grandparents has succeeded (he



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always threatened that I would lose my child if I left him). I live with the hope that one day my son will learn the truth and process it in a way that will make him want to reconnect with me. I began speaking out about what was happening to my parents, friends, and acquaintances, hoping to find support, but unfortunately, no one could help me. Two years ago, I realized that the solution was in my hands if I wanted change. It was up to me whether my life would continue as it was or if I would do something to improve it. That was a moment of powerful realization when I understood that no one could change anything for me except myself.

So, I started valuing myself more, doing things for me, and putting myself first. After the divorce, I had little hope of meeting another man, rebuilding my life, or trusting that I could love someone again and be loved in return. But someone up there had plans for me. Four months ago, I met the man who tore down all my walls and helped me heal. He possesses all the qualities and checks every box in the psychological, emotional, financial, and social portrait of my ideal man. In turn, I feel adored by him. I find myself doing things I used to enjoy but had forgotten about (singing loudly around the house, which he loves; joking; laughing with my whole heart). He encourages me, and I feel increasingly confident in myself and my abilities—whether in my way of thinking, expressing myself, communicating, or trying new things.

Days with him are completely different from those I lived before.

He holds me in his arms all night, we wake up with kisses, and he always makes me coffee and breakfast, bringing them to me while I do my makeup and get ready for work. During this time, he's around me, caressing and kissing me. Whenever his schedule allows, he surprises me by bringing freshly cooked food to my workplace. He often sends me bouquets of flowers through a courier and loves making various surprises for me (nights out, walks, opera shows, gifts, etc.). In the evenings, he waits to pick me up and take me home, where we cook together, watch a movie, cuddle, and love each other.

This relationship is a complete contrast to the previous one, where I was always in the dark, living with the feeling that I was losing myself. I felt like I didn't matter, that I was only giving without receiving, that every decision was unilateral, and my efforts were invisible. I've learned to love, to let myself be loved, appreciated, and protected, to share tasks and responsibilities in a relationship. I've rediscovered trust in relationships and understood that true love means balance, respect, and mutual support. Life with him has taught me that a relationship isn't about imposed



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roles but about the joy of sharing beautiful moments together—whether we're reading a book, watching a movie, or simply talking like two friends who love each other.

My respect, desires, and decisions are valued, and together we form a couple based on love and understanding. He truly is a wonderful man. Don't be naive; don't stay in an abusive relationship, even if there are children involved!

Be brave, take your fate into your own hands, and find your peace. Listen to your instincts, find strength within yourself, and ask for help! Stop being a victim. This type of abuser will never change, no matter what you try to do. Even if it's hard at first, trust that everything is for your own good and that you will find peace in the end. I did it, and I trust that things will eventually fall into place for everyone's soul.





## Starting Over



**Author: Loredana C.  
Editor: Paula Ciortan  
Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

I turn back time, look at myself in a mirror, and ask myself: who was I? I was a naive child, a child who needed love and security.

My childhood was peaceful, without material lacks. My parents provided everything I needed, but they never showed me the love or attention I truly needed and longed for so much. I was always a good, well-behaved, obedient child who followed all commands... I was like a remote-controlled car, always guided by someone.

I believe that for this reason, at the age of 16, when I met the "man of my life," I wanted to create my own family, where love would reign. I firmly believed that he was the person who would give me the love and attention I was constantly chasing. That's why he was so successful in manipulating me and making me believe that he was always right in everything he said and did. In fact, he wanted me and had me dependent on him. I can't find a valid enough explanation for the fact that I accepted such toxic behavior. For 12 years I stayed with the man I believed to be my other half, the man without whom I couldn't see my life, and I was convinced that my life couldn't continue without him.

What was he like? I try to remember him now, but my mind has blocked the image and memories of him. He was a somber, serious man, with a well-developed physique and a constantly frowning look that made you afraid to say anything to him so as not to disturb him. He always seemed to be dissatisfied with something... especially with me. His soul was like a glacier, which I couldn't thaw even with gestures of love, tenderness, or attention. He never brightened his gaze. And yet, I believed him to be perfect. But, after 12 years, I realized that I had lived only a lie and that my life was not at all easy or happy.

Looking back, I don't visualize so many beautiful moments of our relationship... not even at the beginning. Probably the fame and success he had in abundance during the time I met him made me not see the other very important aspects. However, what I can remember from our beginnings

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is that first episode of physical violence. It appeared right in the first two years of our relationship. I remember him being very aggressive, I was so afraid of him that I hid under the kitchen table. Thus followed many years, with many episodes of this kind, but I cannot describe the action itself because I cannot remember the ways in which he hit me. Somehow, my mind has blocked these episodes. Although, I look at the pictures with the wounds he inflicted on my body, including on my face, I cannot remember. And so many years passed. I came to believe that this is what a normal life consists of.



31, 2023 was the day my life changed, the day I opened my wings and wanted to fly and be happy. I didn't think for a second about the past, about the difficulties that would follow, nor did I anticipate any stage. I gained courage, opened my wings and wanted to explore the world, to know the true joys of life, something told me that life is much more beautiful and I have not yet reached even half of its intensity. But how did I come to this assumption? Hard to say. I wanted to be me and my child, whom I loved and love extremely much and I was convinced that he would give me strength, and as long as I am with him nothing is difficult and impossible.

But, as a specialist, I frequently participated in numerous conferences on the topic of domestic violence. Every time I left such an event, something ignited in me, I lived at maximum levels the feeling of frustration because I was myself a victim of domestic violence without being aware and without making an effort not to be anymore. I didn't have the courage or the power to act. Until one day when I chose myself. March



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I didn't believe that the father of my child would become so bad and that the man I stayed with, almost half of my life, had turned into the harshest man and that he would start the ugliest WAR with me. Many extremely difficult periods followed for me as a mother, he tried to take my child away at any cost and kept me away from him for a long time. I remember even now, 21 days was the longest I was separated from him. It felt like an eternity and one of the ugliest periods of my life. I slept with his clothes to feel his scent and to gain strength.

In those moments without my child, I felt exactly like an aggressive tiger kept in a cage without being able to exert its power. I was a mother, but without a child...I searched for my child and couldn't find him, he kept him hidden from me. I appealed to all the competent state institutions, but they all shifted responsibilities from one to another... in vain...

I was left only with God and prayers. I lived with fear, the fear that I would never see my child again, but deep down I knew I didn't deserve this... I was afraid that my own child would forget me, that he wouldn't want to see me anymore or that he would be angry with me for abandoning him. I was aware that he didn't know the truth... that I was looking for him in every minute of my existence and that I was struggling like a storm at the windows to see him again. I was a good mother, I often told myself this... and I constantly imagined how warmly I would hold my child in my arms. Only he mattered then. There were many episodes when I knew nothing about him, but the reunions were always wonderful. The first Christmas when I wrapped his gifts without his presence... I had hope that at least he would let me hear his voice. But, it wasn't like that. The holiday brought with it a feeling I had never experienced before. I couldn't visualize my own child's face. My mind had gone crazy. My mind couldn't remember my child's face, I repeated to myself. And for a second I froze, I knew nothing about myself. Who? What? Where am I? I felt that he was being forced away from me... I felt that he didn't want this either... and I also knew that he had no choice. But, I didn't give up. I bandaged my wounds again and again and managed to win a small battle in the declared war. I managed to reunite with my child. After 21 days. 21 days of fire extinguished with tears and sighs. When we reunited, I felt like I was in Heaven, I felt like I was seeing him for the first time and that I had given birth to him again. I looked at him and rejoiced in every part of him.

Today, we are no longer separated. I am the same devoted and loving mother. We see each other, we hug each other and we promise that everything will be alright. Although 2 years have



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accumulated in which I lived in chaos, in uncertainty, in fear, in disappointment, in anger, in frustration and in injustice... In just about everything. There are many feelings that I have experienced, diverse states, but from all of these I have learned a lot... or, extremely much. That experience was the most significant for my life and I am convinced that I will never let something like that happen to me again. I learned that I matter and that in difficult times I am my own best friend. I am convinced that life is preparing a new plan for me soon, that it will change. I am grateful that I was able to learn many things, that I always found my strength, but especially that I accepted the people who left my life, but also those who came. I am sure that I will be happy, I believe and I strongly desire this. In any difficult situation I find myself in, I always find the strength to move forward and to manage in any situation. As long as I have my child by my side. The golden rule.

And with all this, the most important thing I learned is that I am stronger than I thought. Much stronger.

A mother, Loredana





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# My Life



**Author: Dorofte Maria**

**Editor: Paula Ciortan**

**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

Life isn't always fair. Sometimes, hardships come at the most vulnerable times, and childhood should be a time of innocence and joy, not suffering. My story is one of struggle, pain, but also about survival. It's about how I found the strength to take my life into my own hands, even when everything seemed to be going downhill. This is my story. My life.

All beginnings always seem to come from the same story. All the hardships seem to decide to start in the most vulnerable period of life, childhood. I, to be honest, had a very difficult childhood. My father was not the king of the castle who would love and protect us. He was rather the servant who reigned over glasses of wine. He was a drunkard. He would come home drunk, beat my mother, then us, and to escape from his hands we would run into the forest, trying somehow to protect ourselves from the cruelty shown.

At 21, I got married, believing that I would escape from suffering and that I would start a new life. But, unfortunately, fate had something else in store for me. He hit me from the start, too bad I realized it later. First with sharp words, then with dubious behaviors, and finally with cruel blows without a shred of mercy. He would come home drunk, beat me and destroy everything we had, including the jars of food that kept us alive.

When I became pregnant with my first boy, the nightmare did not stop. He would kick me in the belly. He took advantage of the fact that I had nowhere to go, and that's how I lived with him for 23 years full of... nightmares. I was already pregnant with my second child when we started building the house. He didn't do anything, so I should say I was building... I was building, not us. I carried water and made adobe bricks to raise the long-dreamed-of "palace."

How did I meet him? I met him when I was 18 years old. My brother took me to a disco and that's where I met him. But, I can't say that God brought him into my path, but rather the evil



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one. From the very beginning, he showed who he really was. I remember he probably took my first and last gift, a pair of socks, and I hung them in the roses in front of the house, and he, seeing this, started to speak badly to me.

I should have realized by then what kind of person he was, but I just wanted to get away from home and the nightmare my father created. I hoped it would be okay, because I liked being a housewife, taking care of the family.



The first time he hit me... I will never forget it. I was seven months pregnant with our eldest son. My husband worked at R.A.J.A.C, it was payday and we went to Iași to shop. There was a bar in the station, called Amarandei. It was very hot outside. I went inside and there he had a shot of vodka, he put me at a table with a glass of

soda in front of me, and then he sat down to play on the slot machines. When I told him I was sick and wanted to go home, he took me outside, grabbed me by the shoulders and kicked me in the stomach. When we got home, the beating continued.. worse, much worse.

For years I endured and lived with the hope that the next day would be better.. it wasn't. It was worse. I decided to divorce when he raped me in front of our children. The children were in the next room initially, and he said he wouldn't go out because he had a woman. Seeing that I didn't want to do that, he took a knife and threatened me. The eldest son tried to stop him, but she pushed him and was about to cut him with the knife. The next day after these things, I took the children and went to the police station. I told them that my husband raped me, but they laughed and said that such a thing was not possible. However, despite the laughter, I filed a complaint. The criminal case was opened, but in court it was dismissed because I didn't receive the summons.

After the divorce, I returned to where I had left off, to the house of my sad childhood. This time, it was just me and my children. I was finally safe.



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But, hard years followed. Years that tested me in ways I never thought possible. I struggled with material deprivation, with the insecurities that haunted me day after day, and with my own addictions. It was not easy to escape the environment that held me captive, that vicious circle of suffering and judgment.

Everyone judged me. People I thought were close to me pointed fingers at me for having the courage to leave “the man.” They said I was wrong, that I chose the easy way out, but no one knew the truth. No one knew what I had been through. What I had endured in silence, the nights when I cried out for help, the days when I felt helpless and lost. And they, the ones who never lifted a finger to help me, were the first to condemn me.

I raised my children as best I could, with what I had. I made sacrifices that only a mother can understand. The older ones, when they grew up, went abroad. They built their own lives, far from the chaos and hardships we experienced together. It was hard for me to see them leave, but I knew that there they would have the chance that I couldn't give them.

The little one, though... he was my greatest trial, but also my greatest blessing. His diagnosis of Down syndrome came as a shock, but I didn't lose hope. I loved him with all my heart, just as he was, imperfect in the eyes of the world, but perfect for me. However, one day, the world took away even this last piece of happiness. My brother, instead of helping me, did the thing that hurt me the most: he called the authorities and told them that I was incapable of raising my child. He said we were living in conditions unsuitable for a child. And they took him away.

It was the hardest moment of my life. It felt like everything was over. But I didn't give up. I fought for him. I gritted my teeth, did everything that was asked of me, even when it seemed impossible. Last Christmas, after years of longing and suffering, they gave him back to me temporarily. It was the most beautiful gift I've ever received.

Today, he is by my side. He is growing up with me, and at almost 18 years old, he has become a handsome young man. His eyes have a special light, and his smile gives me strength. I am proud of him, of what he has become, of everything we have managed to go through together.

The hard years didn't defeat us. They made us stronger, more united. I learned to love life as it is, with all its imperfections. And, above all, I learned to love unconditionally, without expectations. Today... I am also proud of myself for leaving. The people in the village congratulate me for my



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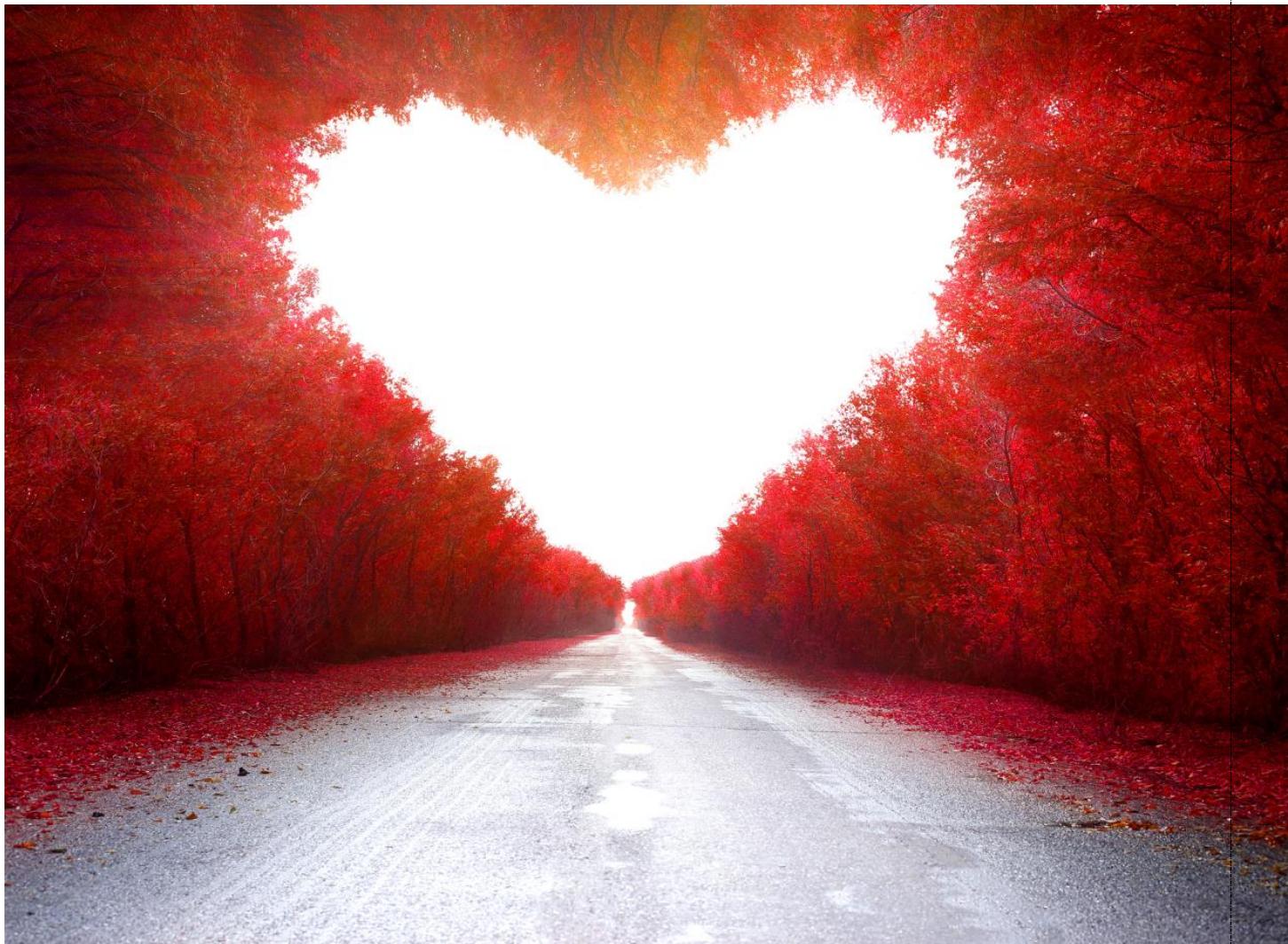


courage. Today, at almost 56 years old, I have Petrică by my side, my support. At first, my heart was full of fear, but he showed me that there are still good people.

However, the past haunts me. The nightmares haven't left me, but I live with the hope that I will be okay.

I saw the one who was my nightmare the other day. He had the demeanor of a dirty man, especially at heart. He no longer inspired anything in me, maybe just pity.

Today, family is my lever. I want a normal life. This is what I've always dreamed of.





## The Wolf in Lamb's Clothing



**Author: Alupei Elena-Simona**

**Editor: Diana Kolcu**

**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

One early summer morning, I was staring at my reflection in the fogged-up bathroom mirror. My face bore the marks of a continuous struggle, but in my eyes, there was also a glimmer of hope. Life had not been kind to me in recent years, but something kept me standing: my little girl, my ray of light. Everything I had lived through, every tear and every hidden wound, now had a deeper meaning because from that pain had been born the greatest gift of my life.

I met my former partner at a time when I thought I was invincible. He was charismatic, charming, and seemed to understand every corner of my soul. But gradually, I found myself caught in the threads of a story that was becoming darker and darker. Our relationship quickly turned into a maze of manipulation, criticism, and moments when I lost more and more of my self-confidence... I was losing myself. He had an extraordinary ability to change his masks: charming one moment, aggressive the next, just like a chameleon changing colors. All this time, I struggled with the feeling that I needed to understand him, to help him, to be better, to do more. I had come to believe that I was the problem, I no longer recognized the woman in the mirror. The feeling of suffocation was so real that sometimes I thought I was carrying an invisible wall on my chest.

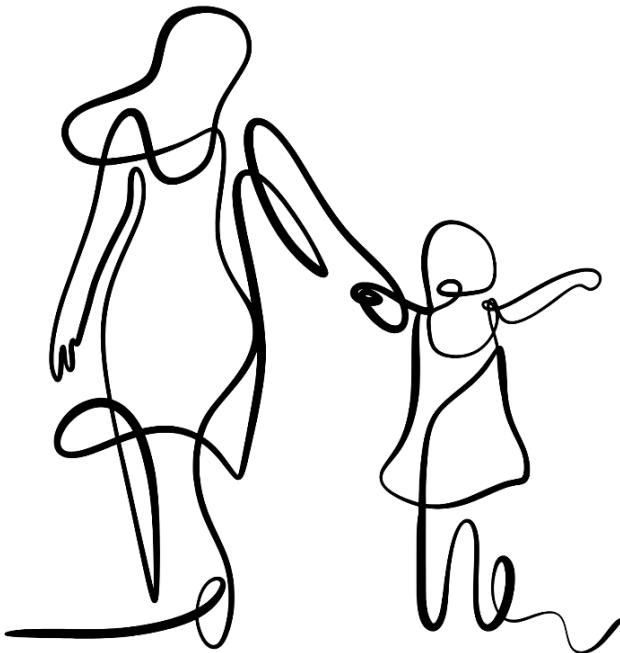
Everything changed when I found out I was pregnant. The first thing I felt was panic... I was thinking about how I would bring a child into this relationship, but at the same time, an immense and unexpected love enveloped me like a warmth. In the months that followed, life with him became increasingly chaotic. He was jealous of the attention I gave to



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the baby and was angry for reasons I couldn't understand. His involvement in the child's life was minimal to none. In his view, since I was the mother, I had to do it all. I tried countless times to convince him to participate in important events for Victoria – games, birthdays, educational activities – but he prioritized everything else, except his own daughter. The breaking point came one night when the conflict between us reached its peak: his shouting mixed with our baby's cries, and I felt that I had to put an end to it... how? I didn't know. But everything fell into place, and eventually, we separated. I took the baby in my arms, and although I was trembling with fear, I left. I only thought about my little girl—how would she grow up in such an environment? I felt a fire of determination; she deserved the best, and I deserved more.

Now, I look at everything that happened with different eyes. There are still battles to fight, and the court proceedings are exhausting... Sometimes the wound of the past presses on my shoulders, but I am in the process of inner healing. My greatest joy now is the quality time I spend with Victoria, through involvement and connection: I make up new stories, we play role-playing games, I try to read as many storybooks that she can understand, then we extract the moral from each story. I try to come up with different little games to encourage her to verbalize what she feels, to understand and manage her emotions. Now, when I watch her smile at me, when she learns new things every day, and when she says, "Mommy, I love you and adore you," I know it was worth it. I love her with all my heart, and I promise myself every day that I will help her build a different future—one where she knows what love, respect, and safety mean. And yes, I am grateful to my former partner for the relationship we had, for our beautiful child, because although he was the shadow, she is the light! I have realized that through all of this, I have learned to transform pain into strength, fear into courage, and loss into gratitude. Every day is a victory, and every smile from me and my little girl is proof that I managed to emerge from the darkness and build a new life!





# I didn't get this far, just to get this far

**Author: Cristina C.**

**Editor: Diana Kolcu**

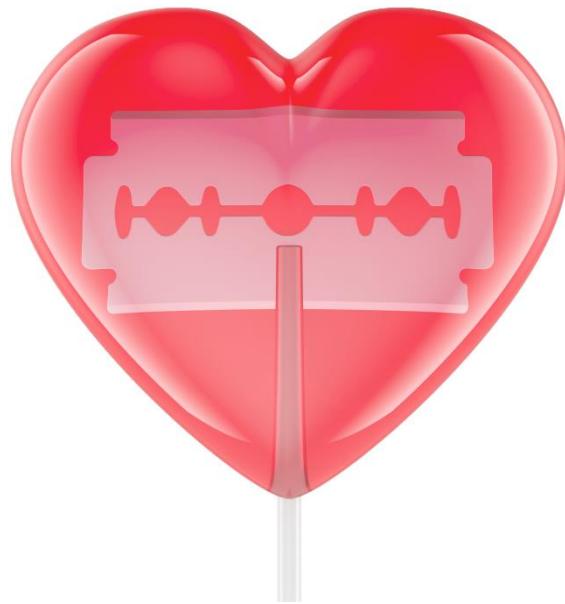
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

This beginning, which is meant to be an introduction, is actually an introduction written as it comes to my mouth or keyboard. Written with difficulty, as I am overcome by fury, I return, complete, delete, complete again and try to compress almost 3 years of life... I am Cristina, other details about weight, height or favorite color in the present story do not matter... I was used to humiliation, beatings and hunger from a young age. I always knew in my heart that I was a fighter and I was always proud that I overcame my condition on my own. With the resources I had, I still believe that someone up there loves me. But I fought the real wars much later. Torn by physical and mental exhaustion, paralyzed by fear and with a little baby in my arms. It is my beginning in the life of a warrior, on foreign land, with different weapons, rules and a different kind of adversary. But above all.....a different stake. When I realized what a quagmire I was in, the Universe seemed to have become deaf to my cries. To turn back time, however, I would not do anything differently, or nothing differently until the point where my baby appears. There is no greater gift from God. In a sad period of my life, barely separated from the love of my life (complicated relationship of circumstance, but with extremely much love and respect), I met him. As much as I was aware of what he is and the fact that he was neither the smartest, nor the most mannered or very schooled nor did he have other wow qualities, he managed to hook me in his narcissistic hook. He probably found the free space, and me, almost 34 years old, yearning for balance, stability, the family I never had and children.

The differences between us were absolutely visible as a level. Everyone around me discreetly drew my attention to the fact that he was not right for me. Not that I ever considered myself a princess, but I am a real, meek, educated woman, with common sense, respectful. And in him, the lack of these was very, very visible. Rude in speech, arrogant, without manners and without a gram of

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general culture. He judged and laughed at all my friends and anyone who did something with his life. They were all fools and the women were whores. Except for his mother and sister. He did not exclude me. With the risk of offending someone.. he was an effeminate hillbilly. Well, he somehow managed to arouse some interest in me and in a few days he had already moved into my house and gave his opinion on how badly I did everything in life. How much of a can my car is, how dusty my house is, how useless my diplomas are, that I don't have the school of life like him and other observations. He, a failed leech, led a parasitic life, picking up a penny from his parents' pension for drugs, cigarettes, gambling and obviously good food and warmth at my home. Thief with a criminal record, chicken thief.. not some thug, don't get me wrong. In everything he did he was an amateur. But at that time I didn't know these things, that's how much it excuses my choice to associate with such a miserable man. I can't say that he bent over backwards to impress me, to court me, to make me fall in love. But that emotional unavailability, combined with some unresolved conflicts from my childhood, resulted in a kind of attraction, a kind of something that pushed me towards him. He didn't give me any reason to love him, on the contrary, as the day passed I discovered how many lies he had said, that the man he presented himself to be at the beginning did not exist and that he was so obsessed with women that he even called one into my house, he couldn't help himself. With all this, I got over at least monthly some escapade, mistake, some swear word, humiliation or a spit on glasses... He entered my life with a bag of clothes and debts. He was extremely nosy, he kept picking me apart, as if he was in a hurry to gather stories, weapons, to destroy me later with them, but also literally, around the house he controlled me everywhere, he had no notions of intimacy or personal space. He rummaged through all the nooks, boxes, agendas, old photos. He even reproached me for closing the door when I went to the bathroom. Suddenly he made contact with my world, as if he had been my lover for years, not weeks.





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He adored the world I was moving in, he felt like he was on stage, he drooled after all my friends, then at home he told me about each one that she gave herself to him.

I made many mistakes in my life, but this was the biggest, I got into a relationship with this social parasite who is not able to do anything beautiful, legal or moral in life, and all he owns is his birth certificate. A "child" of about 30 years. At first I didn't really care about these, the principle was "I have everything we need". But life was knocking on the door...when I asked him to clean potatoes, he looked at me as if I had asked him to go to the moon to pick flowers for me. "This is women's work" the gray-haired child told me. I asked his mother why her child is a leper and she said: "... Read the Bible! There the Lord explains very clearly the role of women in the family!" Mda... auntie believed as other mothers (especially mothers of boys) believe that if you put your child to clean or help you in the kitchen it means that you are not worthy of the title of woman, and you cancel him as a man. They prefer to grow these retards who breathe and make shade on the ground for nothing, they live so we can have stupid people to stare at in amazement. And the manly activities were just as beneath the dignity of the little bird, he didn't do those either. He was important, intelligent, superior, unique... from the high intellectual spheres. Why would he waste his precious time serving other inferiors? Let the fools do the work, he was the boss, he assisted, he supervised, he assigned tasks to others, because he knew, he knew everything even without ever having done anything concrete in this life. He had servants. And so I saved his mother from the leech and I got him...

Then, the "child" began to insult more and more. On a beautiful sunny day, after he made sure I understood from his speech how well all the women in his life looked and how beautiful they were, (he also showed me pictures of them) only not me, he said to me: "Eh, what do you have? You have nothing, you are no better than me. You live in a house for which you pay installments, it is not even yours, it belongs to the bank. You are no better than me!" He repeated this very often... He was right. I was paying the house installment alone and other installments for appliances, furniture, renovations, car, taxes, insurances and I could afford vacations, salons and other whims. Besides this there were other expenses. And yes, all his exes were beautiful, I was perhaps skinnier than a woman would want, but with nothing else below them. That is why I was attacked, devalued. But I understood this late, the wounds had been made... The psychological abuse continued, it came to hooligan beatings which he said were not beatings, because they did not end with blood.



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I knew abuse in all its forms, sick jealousy, imagined stories about me and any male entity that breathed next to me, from the tractor driver who worked on asphalting the street, to the policemen who intervened after I called 112, friends, colleagues, anyone, absolutely anyone was suspect and all considered a bunch of fools, and I a whore who did not miss even an opportunity to cheat.



After a beating with shouts about which he said that it was not a beating and that he was willing to show me what a real beating means, I left this conceited parrot determined that in my life I will never have to deal with any modest intellectual again - so as not to say the stupidest man that the Universe sent me to know closely. But I wake up one night with some nausea and I think to do a pregnancy test. Well, it was positive. It did not cross my mind even for a second the idea of interrupting the pregnancy, so I announced him. I did not want to hide it from him. I felt that I was taking a right from the child, I decided to take the risk of resuming contact with his father. With some Oscar-worthy qualities, he mimicked a supreme happiness, he cried and sniveled, just like another time, saying how much he realized that he wants nothing more than to be in our lives, to calm down and fully assume his role in the family. I remember that he said at one point that we lack nothing, WE have everything. WE have everything. That is, the peasant lacked nothing from me, but he was someone, he said that WE HAVE.



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During my pregnancy, I worked. He didn't; he was fired from his job. He stayed home playing poker, losing money, smoking illegal weed, and going to the casino at night. He asked friends and his father for money, etc. I didn't give him any. I, on the other hand, after work went shopping, alone, brought them home, put them away, cooked... set the table - clear the table. In fact, I think he was the pregnant one. Absurd jealousies, unjustified requests to constantly prove where I am and with whom, photos, investigations, screams, insults about how much of a whore I am, of course. He didn't do anything around the house, the rats were invading us in the garden because the grass had already grown as tall as the house. I only bothered him with cravings twice and I calmed down. Once I wanted cheese puffs and he told me to go get them myself, and another time I wanted fries and he didn't want to make them for me. I continued to mind my own business, I satisfied my cravings myself. If someone had told me this story, I would have found it hard to believe, honestly. I even asked him once, how is it possible that out of all the flaws and shortcomings that a man can have, how is it possible that he has them all? Howww?? I listed them on my fingers, to make it clear to the dumb. I wanted answers, I refused to believe that such people exist and that I found him... I later found out that others found him too and were just as beaten, humiliated, spit on, devalued... Yeah, I think that's his qualification.

It was a pregnancy full of bad memories, humiliations, traumas, crying and abuse. I constantly had to prove to him that I did nothing wrong and I don't do anything wrong, even though he was the one who called women into my house. In an attempt to prove to me that he is a great pillar in the house and a true alpha, he convinced me and his father to change the roof of the house, that he would take care of the rest. Of course, he had no money, he borrowed from his father. It was the worst decision... He made fun of every person hired to take care of the roof, every craftsman, my family and anyone else who participated. He tried to force them all to listen to him, to do what he wanted, he behaved like a master, he gave orders and only made bad decisions. So some workers took their tools and left, others came, they left too... We were caught in two torrential storms without a roof on the house, my work until then was under layers of mud.... I had a few days left until I gave birth. In the last days I drove the car to save things from the house and moved them to his parents' apartment. The house episode was a big drama for me... At the door of the maternity hospital, where couples parted with hugs, I took my suitcase and went up crying in the elevator, cursed and insulted, because the peasant didn't know how to do anything nice, only scandals.

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After discharge, I landed in their house, mine was uninhabitable. Ehee, again in their house, cornered, with no place to run, with a baby in my arms and without my family close by. There the jihad was unleashed... he had the child's baptism money. Casino, striptease, women, poker, gambling, women, women again and

again women, he had no shame to talk to me about them, even though they were paid with my child's money. He screamed like a possessed psychopath, sometimes him, sometimes his sister, fights like I've never seen in my life, a ridiculous family, a family only on paper, some mentally ill people from head to toe, and his mother - a religious fanatic, but not being a believer, but a narcissistic obsessed with control and power. All gathered there in a filthy apartment, without a gram of hygiene or decent conditions to raise a baby. Anyway, there followed attacks, screams, abuse, broken phones, until one evening when I felt a fear in my bones... I felt that a crazy beating was about to follow. In general, I was not allowed to leave the house with the child, only alone. He considered that his mother was the most capable person to raise the child. Terrified by his threats, I called 112 and requested to be evacuated, and so I arrived in a village, far from the city, to live temporarily, with a protection order, at my brother's house. Even after I left him, struggles of unimaginable psychological burden followed. The parasite who called himself a dad, because he also bought a pack of wet wipes for the child (and for this he demanded half of the child's allowance), gravitated around me sometimes with forgiveness and oaths, sometimes with insults and death threats. I give you my word, I was afraid and I believe him capable of murder even now. I found out about the Gloria project, where I also called with some fear, I had a number on a piece of paper, left by the social worker from my brother's village. I was afraid of being manipulated,



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deceived, of someone taking my child, I didn't know who I could trust or if I could trust anyone anymore. But I also desperately needed help. I needed someone who would understand what I was going through, not tell me that I was exaggerating or that I was too sensitive. I needed confirmation that I am not a good-for-nothing who harms the child by taking him and running away from his father who was torturing us. And I found it. Thank God, I found it. I found support for my soul and legal support and even a bed to sleep in was for us. For the first time I saw light on my way, and for the first time I felt that I was not alone on the "front". I calibrated myself mentally, I recharged myself with hopes and many dreams for me and my baby. Meanwhile, on my own, I finished my house as much as I could, he no longer participated, of course. And in the spring, on Women's Day, I returned home. I allowed the idiot visits to my home, to see his child, for no other reason. There followed again beatings, abuses, screams, police, fines, spitting, insults, harassment, car chases, control, spying, curses, broken doors, death threats, manipulations, blackmail, child with a broken leg at 11 months (due to his carelessness) ... a maaaajor abuse. I no longer saw a way out; I simply could no longer get rid of the parasite because he used the child to have access to me. Entire CDs of recordings can confirm what I say. I got another medico-legal certificate, he got more fines for disturbing the public peace, until December 1st I survived the emotional abuse, in all its forms. And on December 1st, 2023, the last attack took place, which resulted in his arrest and the criminal investigations, hearings and everything that involved 4 trials began: two criminals, one for custody and another for a protection order. Both I and the child received a one-year protection order with a surveillance device, but the fear I felt during that time, I will never forget it. I heard even in my dream his voice saying to me "I'll stick this knife into you"... I hate him. I detest him. I wish he would never come near us again. From prison he harassed my family members, both he and his parents tried all sorts of methods to manipulate me to withdraw my complaint... negotiations with thousands of euros on the table, nocturnal phone calls, strange numbers, messages of veiled threats, etc.

In a few days the protection order expires and I have to hand over the surveillance device to the police. That is, I am left uncovered again. In a month is the deadline for custody. Then we will continue with the other criminal trial left on the docket, because I will never withdraw my complaints. I am preparing myself mentally for what follows, I know it will not be easy, I know he has not learned even one lesson, I know he is even more motivated to harm me because I went

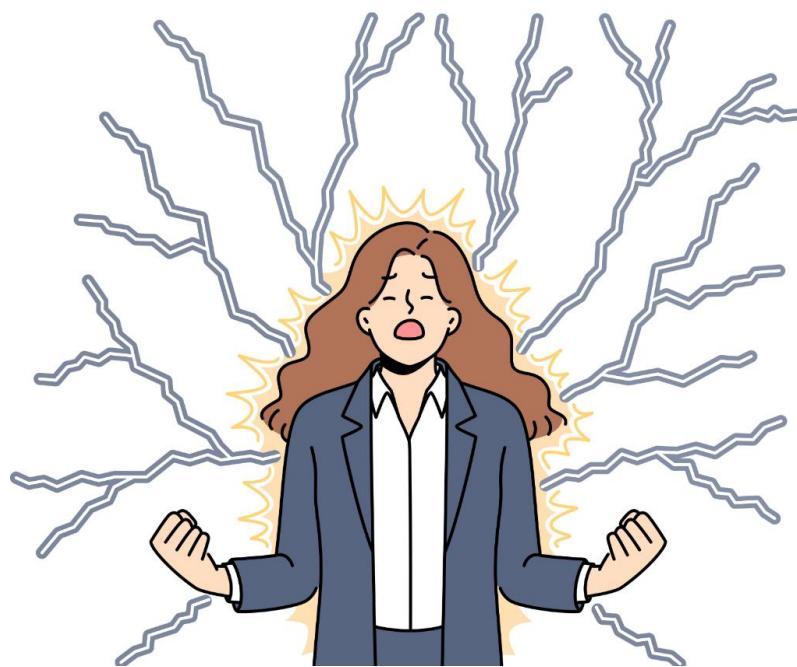


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ahead with the trials and did not accept his parents' money. I understood more clearly what narcissism actually means and how he will never be able to be different because he is wrong from the factory, and the factory is not very good either.

With all this, I am ready for war. I am no longer afraid that someone will take my child away from me, because I have become a dragon and I can breathe fire through my nose. Under no circumstances do I think so destructively and I no longer sabotage myself mentally. I have the courage to confront him in any court, I open my mouth to defend myself, I retaliate. I tremble sometimes, I admit, but I don't give up, I don't give up. I allow myself to cry, to be skeptical, to listen to my instinct and even to make mistakes. I constantly practice breathing fire through my



nose, I don't want to lose this ability anymore. No one will fight for us better than me. And Carol needs a mother and a father in me, I have to be strong for him. It is said about women that they first win wars and then cry... I am convinced that a single-parent family is the lesser evil for a child, than if he would grow up in a toxic, dysfunctional family. I terribly regret the time wasted in this abusive relationship,

thinking that "I am staying for the child"... But it has passed and I will never allow our peace to be disturbed again. I haven't come this far, just to get this far.



# Confession of the greatest struggle for life

**Author: – Cristina (fostă Molie) Brechler**  
**Editor: Diana Kolcu**  
**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**



I was overwhelmed and I could no longer see any escape from the ordeal of my marriage, especially because I was isolated from any kind of help from relatives or friends. I couldn't tell anyone anything, nor could I leave any room for suspicion that I was having a hard time, so that I wouldn't have to endure even more pain.

The psychological, verbal, and physical violence started for increasingly puerile reasons, going as far as violent explosions because the smell of food reached the living room. I didn't know how to please him anymore and thus prevent such outbursts, especially in front of the children or while I was holding them in my arms or breastfeeding. When I failed to answer the phone in the first few seconds of the call, I was given an ultimatum to take only the children, 1 month and 1 year and 9 months old respectively, and disappear into the winter cold before he got home, otherwise he would tear me to pieces when he arrived. I felt that he was not joking at all. Then silence... rejected calls, blocking on all accounts and I knew that he was determined in what he had set out to do. It was the first time I knew that I had no escape. I called an association found on the internet to take refuge there and they told me that they couldn't receive me until I had a medical-legal certificate attesting to the violence. I still had marks from when he broke the mop handle on me because I started mopping the floor without asking his permission. But there were not enough marks to truly show how dangerous he had become. I was advised to stay and wait for him to come, then call 112. I had tried to call in the past and ended up with my head squeezed in the door to apologize in the call that it was a mistake. I knew he could easily annihilate me. He had a gun in the house and an impressive collection of various knives.

I cried, I prayed desperately to God and I accepted that he might kill me or make me unable to raise the children. I waited for him to come home and in the middle of the night he arrived. Trying to enter noisily, I immediately went to open the door for him. In the first second I tried to kiss him

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and he hit me hard with his palm across my face. My ears were ringing from the impact and yet I didn't make a sound and I didn't make any gesture of resistance. I took his slippers and put them back in their place, humbly hoping that he would calm down after the outburst full of anger. He grabbed me by the neck and hit my head against the mirror in the hallway, explaining that if it broke, the shards would serve as knives for my throat. I had the chance that it didn't break, but the 1-month-old baby woke up scared and he let me calm him down so that the neighbors wouldn't hear him. I stayed up all night sitting with him in my arms, at my breast, under my husband's watchful eyes, during which time he checked the house to make sure I hadn't hidden anyone. I gave him no reason to be jealous and I was still in childbed, but that didn't stop him from believing something else. The following days were at the limit of survival, I was hit with the child in my arms so that I fell down. He continued to kick me, I was only trying to protect the baby, during this time he repeated that it was my fault if he hit him because I was an incapable mother. The psychological terror was so terrible that I would have preferred to die, but I knew that I had to resist, protect the children and get more obvious and specific bruises (so that there would be no doubt that I had hit myself on the furniture). I made an emergency plan, I put the documents at hand and I endured further. One day I went with him to his grandparents' house, there, because the fire was not burning well, he burst out and started yelling at me, and when I was bent over to stir the fire, he threw gasoline on it and the flame engulfed my hair. Scared, I started to scream and ran towards the well, but he caught me and bit me on the mouth until I bled. There followed salvos of slaps and punches that continued forcibly in the house, away from neighbors or other possible spectators. I felt that the cup was full and I could not endure more. I asked to live our lives separately and not destroy our lives together, but his answer was that we could only separate through death. I couldn't call 112, because I had tried before and the police couldn't find me even after an hour. I felt deliberately





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mutilated, more spiritually than physically, and the children couldn't stand such an environment for much longer either. I did everything he wanted hoping to get back to Iași and do something for my safety and the children's. On the way to Iași he intended to leave me in the middle of the night at the edge of a forest because one of the children was crying.

The next morning, at 5 o'clock, he was in line at the opening of a hypermarket and he was calling me desperately every minute for useless clarifications. Then he came and made me carry the luggage from the car into the house, as for Dragobete (romanian valentine's day) and because I demanded some apologies, he burst out again violently, asking me to take the children and disappear or he would do something reckless. I felt that it was not a threat said in anger, but he was as serious as possible. His eyes were bulging, his veins seemed about to burst on his face and neck, he was grinding his teeth and I understood that the only way was to comply quickly and get out the door with whatever I could grab faster. That's how I decided to start my journey to freedom, with no way back. I walked with my heart boiling with joy through the winter cold of -17 degrees with two babies with whom I didn't know where I would sleep, but I knew that God would not forsake me. I went directly to the Forensic Institute, I still had ash in my hair and blood on my teeth and from there I received guidance and help adapted to my needs through the Gloria project and DGASPC.

Over time, the emotions I felt, related to the danger I was in, proved to be very real, after a period of time, he came at my apartment and tried to take my life in front of the children. The fact that I am alive is a miracle that makes me fight even more for the victims of domestic violence. I managed to be free to think, to choose, to spend, to walk, to play, to live! Together we are a force and anything is possible for the one who truly believes that things can be better! From the taste of healing,

I share it with you in verses:



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### Liberation

A void in my stomach stops me from sighing  
That gnaws quietly, long since hurt...  
Chills ignite me and freeze me;  
Numb, I watch how it hisses  
My hair, my femininity, my vigor,  
The hope of a last sacrifice,  
For eternity... it fades into nothingness...  
With heavy palms, full of dust,  
I strike the despair from my forehead  
And it leaves galloping towards what's next...  
Small, pearls of ash I gather  
In eyes empty of terrified screaming...  
I embrace myself with balled arms.  
I fear that the end has not ended...  
Where to go, to fade away?  
I don't know what hurts more...  
In eyes of ice I see demons  
And I tear with my palms, everything that still binds  
My soul to the wet and burnt land...  
Everything is extinguished and I have frozen!

In the corners of my mind, icicles grow  
To be my soldiers towards life.  
Do not bite the lips that kissed you!  
For their blood spills wormwood...  
Do not drag me back into darkness!  
Where the demons scream and the angels  
are silent...  
And don't hit my eardrums anymore, tyrant!  
For in vain I have my head bowed...  
I would have preferred not to be... such a  
painting...  
Painted in tears, blood and ash.  
You have crushed without fear a mother!  
Give me back the love with interest! If you  
can!  
To grow from it, at my breast,  
Two angels I borrow from heaven,  
Balm for any crushed soul,  
Solace for wounds and human pains,  
Divine smile and courage for any living eye.

### Liberation...





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# The Path to Self-Discovery



**Author: C.O.M.  
Editor: Diana Kolcu  
Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

From "having everything" to "having nothing" seems like a phrase taken from a book – at least, that's how it seemed to me until two years ago.

I grew up in a beautiful family, with two parents who perhaps took on the role of parent too intensely. From the moment my siblings and I entered their lives, they completely annihilated their own personalities, desires, or personal plans. Their lives were entirely dedicated to being parents, and they did it so well that my siblings and I can't say we ever lacked anything in terms of material comfort. I was always the top student in school, then in high school, and later at university – that's how I thought I SHOULD thank my parents for their care. Whenever I saw them upset, it felt like I wasn't good enough, and I felt a pressure in my chest that told me I needed to do more. I was always appreciated and complimented by those around me, and I believed the world would always be at my feet.

When I turned 18, my parents moved to Spain, and I stayed behind to attend university in Iași. It was a difficult moment, filled with mixed feelings; I was so happy for my parents because they would get their personal lives back after 25 years of being just mom and dad, but at the same time, I was overwhelmed by one of the most terrifying feelings, because I was about to be left alone in a city I didn't know. Luckily, being sociable, communicative, and pleasant, I quickly made friends at university, and I began to enjoy the fact that "perfection" had returned to my life. I was once again the popular and appreciated girl I had been in my hometown.

After a year of university, I met "Prince Charming," who I hadn't been looking for and didn't want in my life. I was feeling good with myself and didn't want anyone to upset my balance. I refused for HIM to be "the one," and I listened to my heart, which seemed to scream for me to stay away



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from him. At the first meeting, my heart was beating so loudly that I thought it would jump out of my chest... but not from excitement, from fear. I ran away for 8 months from the idea of being in a relationship with him, but then we happened to cross paths... The first meeting was in May 2008, I was walking down the street heading to the travel agency where I was doing my internship, and he passed by me from the opposite direction, then turned back and entered the agency after me under the pretext of wanting to book a trip. He waited on the couch for about 40 minutes, then followed me out of the agency and, after a few steps, politely stopped me and asked for my phone number to invite me for a coffee. I refused because I felt that pressure in my chest, but he insisted, and to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling, I suggested he give me his number, thinking that I wouldn't call him anyway. After two months, during which I had completely forgotten about him, fate brought us face to face again – I was crossing the street, and he was in his car, stopping to give me priority. This time, to avoid giving him my phone number, I gave him my email address. After the first email, he convinced me that maybe it was worth getting to know him, and so we went on our first date. It was the perfect meeting with the perfect man – he had planned it down to the smallest detail.

Deciding to be with HIM meant giving up everything that was ME. I gave up a master's program in management, I gave up the close relationship I had with my parents and siblings, I gave up all my friends, I gave up my passions, I gave up expressing my opinions, I gave up wanting anything... With complete trust and sincerity, I put my life in the hands of this "Prince Charming," who was 8 years older than me and had recently divorced after a 7-year marriage. I went with him to the US, thinking I would conquer the world, then we returned to the country and built a beautiful house together, one that seemed to come straight out of a fairytale, we became parents to two wonderful children whom I devoted myself to just as I had seen my parents do, and we even had the perfect dog – a Saint Bernard. From the outside, we were the perfect family picture, in fact, I had even begun to believe in it... even though the storm in my soul had turned into a tornado. I felt so far from myself, I had more and more moments when I asked myself who I was. Perfection had a price

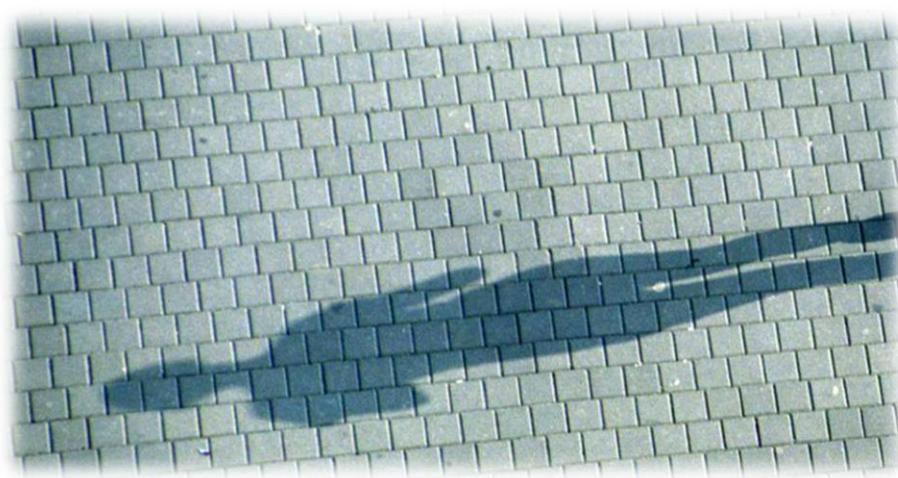


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that I paid for 14 years, but for which I no longer had any resources left. I wasn't allowed to continue my studies, I wasn't allowed to look for a job, I wasn't allowed to have friends, I wasn't allowed to talk to the neighbors, I wasn't allowed to have my parents and siblings over to our house, I wasn't allowed to talk to my parents on the phone more than once a week, I never had money in my wallet or in the house (even though I had my own family business), I wasn't allowed to buy toys or clothes for the children because "I wasn't good at it". I had to announce every time I went out of the house and where I was going, I had to announce when I was coming back, when I reached school to pick up the children, when I went to the store to buy bread... All my days were the same for many years: I cooked, I cleaned the house, I took the children to school, I did homework with them, I accompanied them to extracurricular activities, I mowed the lawn, I dug in the garden... I no longer existed.

I talked to HIM about how exhausted I was and how I felt like a prisoner in my own home, I explained that I needed time for myself as well. His response was that everything I had mentioned were just whims, and that I had everything, so I had no reason to want anything else. But they weren't whims, I felt like a shadow, I felt that if I didn't do something quickly, I wouldn't even be able to fulfill my role as a mother. So, without asking for permission (for the first time in 14 years), I got a job. When I told him I had found a job, he took the children and went to his mother's, saying that he was a busy man and didn't have time to be a nanny. I worked for 2 months, during which I saw my children only on weekends. He promised that if I quit my job, he would be more understanding and things would change. I decided to trust him and quit my job. Everything was perfect for one month, then I returned to being a shadow. I talked to him again, and he told me



that, in fact, the problem was with me, that he didn't know what was wrong with me... The next day, he left home without telling me, took his clothes, and took our 10-year-old son with



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him. I was left alone with our 7-year-old daughter and a small amount of money - 50 lei that I had hidden in a pocket. I no longer had a job, not even a friend I could call, and I was ashamed to contact my parents because they had never agreed with my relationship with him. It was the day I lost EVERYTHING – or at least that's how I felt at the time.

Three days after my husband left – during which I tried by all means to contact him – I reached the peak of despair, I felt like everything I was living was a bad dream, and the reality was too hard to accept... My whole being was in turmoil from what had happened, I didn't even see a solution, I didn't have the strength to do anything... I cried for three days, didn't sleep, didn't eat, couldn't do anything – I was only thinking about my son, who was no longer with me. Until my 7-year-old daughter came into my arms, wiped my tears, and told me to sit on the floor while she climbed onto the sofa and opened a box above me, from which fell 30 tiny, heart-shaped cutouts, colored by her, and on each heart was written "Mom, I love you!" That was the moment I realized I had to get up and do something because my daughter needed her mother. I gathered my courage, called my parents, and told them what had happened. Without asking anything, they came home to me and offered all their moral and financial support.

I went to ask for help from the DGASPC, but they told me they couldn't do anything because it was just "an internal conflict between spouses." There, a lady who was moved by my story advised me to contact the Gloria Project team. There, I found people who,





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without judging me, offered me legal assistance, psychological counseling – and more than anything – moral support.

Every evening, I would go on job websites to submit my CV. I urgently needed an income; I didn't even have my daughter's allowance because it was being deposited into her father's account. I was willing to work anywhere; I wasn't thinking about my studies anymore... I needed a job that would provide for us, but at the same time, I wanted a flexible schedule that would allow me to spend time with my daughter... she needed my presence, already suffering from the fact that her father had abandoned her, and her brother had been taken away from her. During this time, I truly experienced the power of prayer, and within less than a week of searching, God brought the perfect job into my life. I was hired at an art gallery with a flexible 6-hour daily schedule and a salary that allowed my daughter and me to have a decent living.

Amid a painful inner battle, things began to rearrange in my life. More than that, I began to feel like I was living my own life again, after 14 years of feeling absent, like a shadow...

I still live this way today, two years after the separation, with the same heartbreak pain caused by not being able to hug my son as tightly as he liked, but I have full faith that I will be able to rebuild my relationship with him. Desperation and hopelessness are now in the past.

Now I am a financially independent woman, with a wonderful job and an inner peace that often makes me wonder if it's real. In summary, I could say that 2022 changed me, 2023 broke me, and 2024 opened my eyes. This entire journey, from despair and hopelessness to balance, was made possible with the help of people who didn't know me but offered me trust and support, people who guided me on the path to rediscovering myself – the team at the GLORIA Project. The only regret I have now is that I didn't know my worth when it truly mattered. No one ever told me I was valuable, I had to lose everything, including myself, to realize that nothing I had mattered as long as I didn't matter. If you lose yourself, you've already lost everything.



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## Steps towards myself



**Author: Anonim**

**Editor: Diana Kolcu**

**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

I lived for years in his shadow, without realizing when my voice had faded. My presence was nothing but an echo of his desires, needs, and anger. I gave up – without saying a word – on my dreams, my friends, my freedom, on everything good around me. I never knew what it meant to belong to myself until recently.

In the last year, things took a dark turn, threats became part of the daily routine, and humiliation was his form of “affection.” I was a shadow lost in silence and fear. He forbade me from seeing my children, from hugging them when I cried, or even just saying goodnight. There were days when I felt like a mother only in name.

One night, after an argument that turned into something far worse, I saw my reflection in a mirror: my eyes were sunken and empty. That’s when something broke inside me, and I realized that if I didn’t find the courage to leave, I would have nothing to live for... I would lose myself completely. I was aware that even my children couldn’t endure a life of terror anymore; I felt that if I didn’t do something, I would lose my connection to my children, my only pure love in my life, my air and my water.

For the first time, I went to the police... trembling, with my heart pounding so loudly I thought the officers would hear it. I filed a complaint and requested a protection order. The process was an experience that made me feel small, exposed, and vulnerable. I had moments when fear overwhelmed me, and I thought maybe it would be better to give up and return to that cell I called "home". I continued, driven by one thought: to defend my soul and my rights. Then the judge spoke, and his decision was clear; my request for the protection order was granted. For the first time I felt that a corner of the chain that held me prisoner had broken. Even so, it was still hard... In the following days, I started going to therapy. The first session was overwhelming; I remember how hard it was for me to speak, to put into words all the wounds, all the tears I had swallowed. My therapist taught me to look at myself with gentleness, to allow myself to feel, to accept that



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there are people around me who respect me and value me for who I truly am. With every session I attended, I felt like I was peeling away layer by layer of pain and suffering, until, little by little, I began to rediscover myself. I started making progress in my relationship with my two children; I do everything I can to get closer to them, to rebuild the bond that had been so suffocated by his control. Every conversation, hug, and smile from my children strengthens my belief that it's not too late.

I still have days when doubt creeps into my soul, and it's hard to believe that I deserve love and respect. One thing I know for sure: in all my fragility, I had the courage to save myself. Now, for the first time in my life, I am starting to live.





# The escape from hell and the fight for justice



**Author: Sîrbu Elena**

**Editor: Diana Kolcu**

**Publisher: Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation**

On May 5, 2019, my life underwent a radical transformation when I met a man who, in a short time, would become my husband, but also my tormentor. At first, like any love story, everything seemed perfect. I didn't see, I didn't hear, and I didn't understand the truth, and the signs of abuse, kidnapping, and other forms of violence were evident, but I didn't take them seriously. Maybe I ignored them out of a naive desire to believe that "this is normal," or maybe because he always told me that I was to blame. I never imagined that I would become a victim of domestic violence, me, the same woman who would not accept anyone raising their voice at her, the one who lived with the conviction that love means respect. And yet, all of a sudden, I was caught in a whirlwind of physical, psychological, verbal, and even sexual violence. I felt trapped, where love and suffering were mixed, and every day became a nightmare I didn't know how to escape.

In the midst of this ordeal, however, God listened to me. He answered my prayer, a prayer through which I asked for deliverance, even if the answer didn't come in the way I expected. It was a difficult journey, with many sacrifices and moments of excruciating pain, but in every step, I learned to be stronger. God showed me that I can face any hardship, that I can overcome any storm, and that I will always emerge victorious, even when everything seemed lost.

On September 24, 2023, due to the violence I experienced, it was necessary for me to be taken by ambulance from my home. At that time, a temporary protection order had been issued against my husband, and the divorce process was in full swing. During the protection order, my two children and I were housed in a center, where, due to the poor conditions, I became ill. My immunity decreased significantly, and the physical and psychological traumas caused by the violence from my husband were still fresh and painful. My little girl was only 4 months and 4 days old when I

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breastfed her for the last time... my little boy, only 2 years and 9 months old, was taken by his father to be supervised while I was in the hospital, and the little girl was admitted to a children's hospital to receive specialized care. I suddenly found myself losing my memories and being forced to undergo a series of medical examinations: at the Department of Neurology, then at the Psychiatry Hospital (where my husband had tried, unsuccessfully, to have me admitted in the past), and later, at the Infectious Diseases Hospital, due to a visible infection, and also a head injury I received from him on September 4, when he hit my head against the wall and the closet.

I remained hospitalized until October 2, 2023, a period in which no one visited me. The only person who was there for me was a social worker who had my case in mind and who helped me with a breast pump and the necessities for the hospitalization period. I was eagerly awaiting the day of my discharge, wanting with all my heart to see my children and breastfeed my little girl. Every day I spoke on the phone with my mother-in-law, who, at that time, was taking care of the children, telling me that everything was under control. But the truth would come out later. I learned that at the end of September, my mother-in-law made a request to the DGASPC to take my two children into foster care. I only found out about this request on October 2, when I was discharged. I went

urgently to the DGASPC, but the person I came into contact with treated me with contempt, raising their voice and refusing to register my request for the reintegration of the children, a request that should have been submitted within a legal



deadline for the revocation of the foster care. When I returned home, I had a panic attack due to a



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painful retort from my mother-in-law: "that's it, mother, you no longer have any rights over the children, you gave the girl up for adoption, you are no longer allowed to see them." The next 5 days were a nightmare: I lost 10 kg and was forced to live in a warehouse, on a mattress, at the headquarters of the company I own, after my ex-husband changed the lock on the door, blackmailing me to withdraw all complaints and give up the protection order. I didn't give in. I fought for my children, whom I only managed to see for an hour a month at the DGASPC. In the first visit, the little girl showed signs of violence, but the police refused to go to the Forensic Institute to ascertain them, instead, they fined me for calling 112.

It was only on May 8, 2024, after an intense struggle, that I managed to get my children back, but my real battle was only just beginning then. My ex-husband continued to slander me, inventing lies about me, such as that I had tried to commit suicide with the children or even that I wanted to sell the little girl. In the period 2024-2025, he began to declare that I wanted to sell both children for organs.

I have learned, in all these years, that a mentally ill person who refuses to take their medication can only change for the worse, and living in such a relationship can be a real ordeal, no matter how great the difficulties of life may be. This story is, for me, a lesson of survival and courage, a journey sprinkled with pain, but also with hope. And today, stronger than ever, I am ready to move forward, alongside my children, towards a better life.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



### My Luna

Diana Kolcu

A few years ago, Loneliness had made its nest in my soul. I had friends and a few relatives who were close to me, but sometimes, even when I was with them, Loneliness would rearrange its nest, adding a fluffy blanket and taking up more and more space. I tried to get rid of it, I filled my schedule as much as I could, I went to classes, I had a job, I had joined the Student Council, the high school choir, and a volunteer organization. I was tired almost all the time, but Loneliness didn't want to leave its nest; the two of us were always in antithesis – the more tired I was, the more relaxed it was, the more I ran from one activity to another to get rid of it, the more comfortable it became, just like a guest who comes to visit but never leaves. All the activities with which I had filled my schedule did not help me get rid of it, but only to avoid it for a few hours. That's why, many times I procrastinated so I wouldn't go home... I knew that at home it was just the two of us: me and Loneliness.

One of the days when I was procrastinating, my steps took me through the silent buildings and deserted streets, I was trying to find in the movement of my steps a rhythm that would bring me a little peace. The night was cold and damp, typical of autumn... Suddenly, among the rustling of the leaves falling from the trees, I heard a faint meow. I stopped walking, surprised by how fragile it sounded. I approached the bush from which it seemed to be coming and, through the leaves, I saw a small kitten, with gray fur, wet to the skin, with big, yellow-green eyes, full of fear. I felt something inside me break. I reached out my hand, trying not to scare it, and it retreated a little, but then approached, pressing its small, trembling body against my palm. At that moment, I felt it warm my heart, as if it melted something from there... I took it in my arms and gently hugged it to my chest, and it clung to me with its claws and began to purr. I knew then that I couldn't leave it there to face the cold and the dark alone. I took it home and made it a nest out of an old blanket.

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That night, I stayed next to it, watching its eyes that shone in the dark, I felt an unusual warmth in my chest, for the first time in a long time. I named it Luna, I felt that its gaze illuminated even the darkest corners of my soul.



Luna quickly adapted to her new home, and soon became a part of my life. The mornings were no longer silent, but full of love – I would wake up with her scurrying around the room or giving me kisses to wake me up, there were no more desolate moments, because she was there, purring next to me. I liked to watch her stretch her paws, then start exploring every corner, as if she were discovering something new every time. Her presence was like an anchor that kept me connected to reality, a small soul thanks to whom every day I couldn't wait to go home. The afternoons spent together helped me to get rid of the stress of the day. When I got home, I knew she was waiting for me and that she would be there, always, with the same silent gentleness. In those moments, time

seemed to slow down, and all the agitation of the day dissipated.

But one day, Luna disappeared. I had left home in the morning, and when I returned, she was no longer there. I searched for her in all possible places, I put up posters, I asked every neighbor, but no one had seen her. I felt torn, as if someone had snatched from me the last bit of light I had found. The house seemed emptier than it had ever been, every corner of it reminded me of Luna and how she had managed to make that place seem alive. For almost a week, I hoped in vain that I would



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find her at the door, that she would be waiting for me there with her faint meow. I wondered where she was, if she was safe, if she still remembered me. The feeling of loss was overwhelming...

Since Luna had disappeared, I had resumed my habit of wandering without a purpose. One evening, without realizing it, I arrived at the place where I had found her the first time. When I heard the first meow, I thought I was experiencing a déjà-vu, but when I heard it a second time, I almost lost my breath. I ran in the direction of the sound, and under a lamppost with a pale light, I saw her... My Luna! She was dirty and hungry, but when she saw me, she came towards me, crouching, and rubbed against my leg, as if no day had passed. I bent down and took her in my arms, and she started to purr loudly. I cried, there, on the asphalt, feeling an immense joy.

There followed a period of time in which Luna offered me moments of peace, affection, companionship in any circumstances, massages with her claws, the healing sound of purring, conversations from looks or bilingual and many lessons about love.

Two years and a few months, my Luna was by my side, until one day when she disappeared again... Worry overcame me, but I hoped that maybe she was hiding somewhere. The next day I started looking for her in all the familiar places, I went to the place where I had found her the first time, but without a happy ending. I felt a huge void, but also a strange peace – as if her last lesson for me had been to help me manage on my own. I learned that sometimes the greatest change comes from the most unexpected encounters. Luna's presence helped me understand what is truly important in life: to give and receive love. A “meow” heard in time can change your life. That's probably why I now have three cats at home, each of them coming into my life with their own warmth, completing that void in my soul left by Luna. Even so, many times my thoughts fly to her – my first cat, the one that made me love cats and not least, the one that reminded me that life has good... and fluffy parts.

In case you're wondering what happened to Loneliness, after Luna appeared in my life, I completely forgot about it. I tend to believe that it felt neglected and left, but I don't remember when it gathered its nest from my soul. Currently Loneliness sometimes passes by to visit me, but it leaves very quickly – it knows that now I have rules for “guests”.



## A Piece of a Story



**Paula Ciortan**

What I could have been but wasn't. I wanted to be a mechanic.

A mechanic for unwanted, sad, and discarded hearts left in the vague ashes of oblivion. I dreamed of repairing them, opening them, and carefully reassembling them like fragile mechanisms that had lost their essential function: to feel. I imagined bringing them back to life, one by one, putting them back on the path they had abandoned. And in those moments, it seemed to me that there was no more important work in the world.

No, I won't write everything so philosophically. I may be a poet, but once, I was also an innocent child. A child full of big dreams but unaware of the burden and complexity of the world. When I first looked into the human heart, I didn't fully understand what I was seeing. I thought everything could be repaired, that everything could be fixed, just like a mechanic adjusts the screws and gears of a machine. But life showed me that not all hearts can be restored, and not all things can be forgotten.

I made it through a very strange childhood. Raised by people colder than the frost of a late autumn morning, I kept blinking. I had only 5 years of light breathed and stored when my parents decided, for our theoretical good, to leave for another country without us, their children. Somehow, the years passed without being counted and without being remembered with complete joy. One morning, I woke up without the protection of childhood and suddenly, without warning, hit the wall of responsibilities.

No one ever told me what it means to be a woman, what it entails, or how it should be. No one explained who I was or how I should behave in the world I was left in. I learned on my own what hardships meant and why, sometimes, I was seen as one of them.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



By the time I reached the 12th grade, I realized that life had been a mix of moments of joy and unease, of friendships that seemed eternal, and of unanswered questions. But now, everything seemed to be changing. The future, which had once been a distant idea, suddenly became a pressing reality. High school exams, college, life decisions—all piled onto my shoulders. In a way, I felt I wasn't ready to give up those years of freedom, of irresponsibility, but at the same time, I knew the road ahead was inevitable. And in that same year, I met him—a man so simple and peaceful, but if only I had known...

Our first trip together made me believe everything was perfect, that I could trust men again. It was an unforgettable escape, where every moment spent together seemed to outline a new beginning. I felt free and happy, and our laughter and conversations flowed like a clear river. The days spent in the midst of nature, with the sun shining in the sky and the fresh air, restored my optimism and confidence in myself, but especially in those around me.

However, coming from a time when I had been deeply disappointed, I realized it wasn't that simple. In the past, I had lost my trust in men. A previous relationship had left me with wounds so deep and a distorted view of love. During that time, I came to identify with Medusa, a symbol of protection and detachment—and more... but that's another story.

Still, I naively believed he would protect me, love me, and respect me as he had promised. I thought that man was meant for me, that the bridge between us would bring eternity. Yet, I ended up praying for the days to pass so I could be rid of him.

The relationship lasted five years... a relationship so desired by the child in me. I yearned for safety, happiness, and love. But I lost so much of myself... with every day spent in that relationship, I faded.

From the moment it was just the two of us in our own home, it was as if we condemned each other. Slowly, the days, months, and years passed. We deceived, chased, and accused each other countless times... and neither of us gave up. What a folly!

I felt in every fiber of my being that my man was no longer mine alone, that somewhere he had become ours. The relationship was no longer what it had been in the beginning. It couldn't be. The person beside me, in whom I had placed my last breath of peace, became increasingly distant and



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



critical, always finding reasons to make me feel inadequate and small. He criticized my choices, minimized my achievements, and made it seem as though everything I did was wrong.

At first, I tried to ignore the signs, believing it was just a rough patch, thinking it was just a moment... thinking he was wrong, thinking I was wrong... but what we were was wrong. One evening, after a heated argument in which, as usual, I was made to feel guilty without a clear reason, there came a moment of strange silence, as if time had stopped for a moment. Amid the confusion and pain, I felt a flicker of clarity. It was as if, for the first time in a long time, the emotional fog that had enveloped me began to lift. I realized that those harsh words, that subtle manipulation, weren't about me but about a desire to control me, to make me doubt myself.

I understood that I wasn't the problem. I never had been. It had been about trying to make me feel small, insecure, caught in a web of guilt I didn't deserve. In that moment of clarity, I realized I had lost little by little my inner strength, letting myself be trapped in a cycle of doubt and self-blame. But I began to regain my self-awareness. I understood that I no longer had to accept that distorted version of reality imposed on me. Maybe I didn't yet know what I was going to do, but at that moment, I knew I couldn't stay in that state any longer. That spark of clarity was the first step toward finding myself again, toward freeing myself from that emotional trap.

Leaning against the edge of the bathtub, close to giving up, I felt like a wounded panther, trapped in a cage that didn't allow it the freedom to move. This strong being, once running freely through dense forests, had come to feel vulnerable and alone, silencing its suffering.

In a moment of revelation, I found the courage to speak the words I would have given anything to learn earlier. And I screamed: "I deserve myself. I deserve respect, love, and support. I deserve to be me." It was as if the panther, despite its wounds, began to let out a powerful and fearless roar—a cry to shatter the walls of the cage it was in. In that moment, I realized that true love doesn't mean losing yourself to make someone else happy. I understood that a healthy relationship lifts you up, not drags you down. But what for?

My heart trembled with pity, tears were absent, and my breath barely felt. I managed to utter a single NO. Like a drained battery of emotions, I said, "From today, I can't anymore," and I couldn't anymore.

And in that moment, I felt stronger than ever before. In that instant, I understood that, like the panther reclaiming its territory, I had the power to take back my life, my thoughts, my feelings,



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



and my moments. I could finally follow my instincts and become the person I truly deserved to be—a new version of myself. I felt stronger than my past. Stronger than the fear that had kept me captive. Perhaps I didn’t yet know what the future looked like, but I knew one thing for certain: I wasn’t going back into the shadows. I wasn’t letting anyone define my worth anymore.

And so, I tore pieces of myself for fleeting people, but I kept giving as if my heart were an endless spring of kindness and generosity. Every time someone entered my life, no matter how brief or intense their presence, I felt I had to give them something of myself. Perhaps a warm smile, a comforting word, or a helping hand in tough moments.

But without realizing it, those little pieces added up, and the voids within me grew deeper. Yet, I couldn’t stop. Inside me was an invisible force, a deeply rooted belief that, no matter how much I gave, I had to keep going. That, somehow, by helping others, I was helping myself.

And despite everything, today I am grown; I’ve grown a little more. Day by day, I try to become my own person, to belong to myself, and to love every cell in my body. Today I am okay—I try and fail, but I know that tomorrow I can start again without the fear of failure because today I am no longer anyone’s. From today, I am mine alone.





## Masks and Colors



Diana Kolcu

At first, I was an undefined painting, a series of color spots that I chose not according to my desires, but according to the expectations of those around me. I dressed in shades of calm and serenity, hiding the parts of myself that I thought

would not be accepted. I believed that if I molded myself according to their preferences, I would be easier to love, as if I had ever been difficult to love ...

Without realizing it, I had outlined a circle of people who saw me only through the prism of the colors I displayed. They were attracted to the image of blue and yellow that I had built, to the tranquility and optimism that I always projected. But, as the relationships became deeper, I felt more and more acutely that those outer layers prevented me from revealing my true essence. However comfortable it seemed on the surface, in my depths a subtle tension was forming - I was a combination of hidden colors, which the people around me had no idea about.

One day I paused and tried to analyze that feeling of unease. I realized that by hiding some colors, I attracted people around me who expected me to be the calm blue and the optimistic yellow all the time, but they were not prepared for the green of hope that struggled to break through, for the red of my passion and intensity, for the reflective gray that defined me in my moments of introspection. I had begun to feel trapped, although I seemed in harmony, it was a superficial peace. It was a moment of crisis, but also of deep awareness. I understood that if I continued to hide my true colors, I would never be able to build authentic connections, being caught in a game of appearances. It was clear to me that, in order to feel truly whole, I had to accept and show all my shades, regardless of what the people around me might think.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



After this realization, I embraced every color in me and let it flow naturally, without being afraid that I would lose my balance or the people around me. It was a revealing feel-ing - to no longer feel the need to limit myself according to the preferences of others, but to be free, to be authentic. Following this journey, I discovered that true beauty lies in the unique blend of col-ors that make up my soul. Now I know that authenticity is not static, but dynamic, like a canvas that comes to life through diverse and imperfect colors. I embrace each color with pride, without trying to be understood and appreciated by everyone. Now I know that I will be understood and appreciated by those who are just like me - authentic. I know this precise-ly because since I made this change, I have attracted extraordinary people to me, people with common interests and principles, people who have never made me feel that I am too much or too little. Perfection is no longer my ideal - now I yearn for truth, for the freedom to be complex and profound. And, finally, I feel whole.





## LIBERARATION!

Today, I look back on those years with pain, but also with gratitude. Because, beyond the suffering, they taught me who I really am. And they showed me that no one, ever, can take away my power to decide my fate. ... I built a safe haven for my heart ...

I am grateful for everything I have experienced, for the hard lessons I have learned, for the strength to get up and move forward. It is not easy, but I know that every step I take now is one towards a better future for me and my children.

Finally, I want to tell all women to seek help without hesitation. We know how hard it is to go through domestic violence, how much it makes you feel helpless and hopeless. Call the authorities whenever necessary. Stop letting them take away your freedom. You and your children deserve more. You deserve life.

What makes the difference between a success story and one left in the shadow of time is Perspective! The way we relate to what happens to us is the most important thing. We can go through a "difficult period" or, more beautifully, a disaster - but we are heroes only if we survive and get up again, again and again.

We are no longer simple victims of fate, but we take the reins of our lives into our own hands. And we do not wait for a prince on a white horse to save us. We save ourselves.



## What happened to the Heart Emotional Treasure Box



We become the heroes of our own story. My story is not just about loss or pain; it is about transformation, about the courage to move forward and about the beauty found in humanity. And I know now, without a doubt, that every experience was necessary to become the person I am today - at peace, grateful and ready to live with an open heart.

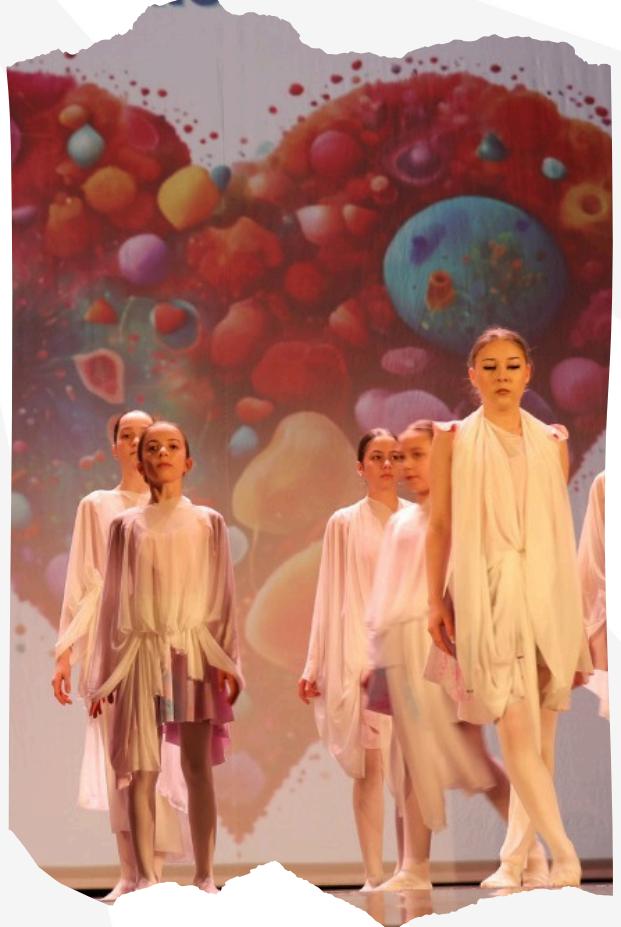
I realized that during all this time I learned to transform pain into strength, fear into courage, and loss into gratitude. Every day is a victory, every smile of mine and my little girl is proof that I managed to get out of the darkness and build a new life!

However, I am ready for war. I am no longer afraid that someone will take my child, because I have become a dragon and can shoot flames from my nose. In no case do I think so destructively and I no longer mentally sabotage myself. I terribly regret the time wasted in abuse, thinking that I am "protecting the child". But it is over and I will never allow our peace to be disturbed again. I did not come this far, just to get this far...

# Stories written on stage



# Stories written on stage



The stories in this book formed the basis of the script for a unique and meaningful show, premiered on February 22, 2025, at the National Athenaeum in Iași. The team that contributed to the realization of this cultural act conveys a few thoughts:



**Aurora Asknes**

"What Happened to the Heart? It's a journey from weakness to strength, from self-destruction to self-healing, a moving and introspective musical journey that explores the loss of spiritual connection in modern society, the healing power of vulnerability, and the call to ignite change by reuniting the heart with politics and personal growth."

"Directing this project was for me like an open window to a new horizon, where imagination took wings and each frame became a canvas on which I painted emotions and ideas. I experienced the joy of giving shape to a vision, of seeing how thoughts come to life through the eyes and energy of a dedicated team. It was an experience that showed me how fascinating it is to create worlds where people can find themselves in our story."



**Cristina Chertz**  
**screenwriter**

"Creating and guiding writing through suffering is a dangerous game. Every word becomes a balancing act: how do you tell the truth without reliving the pain? How do you shape the story without loading the text with your own emotion?"



**Diana Kolcu**  
**writer**

"The project represents a collaborative work of all those involved. Ideas, proposals, thoughts and emotions in a creative synergy of humanity. A step forward in discovering ourselves, creators and viewers at the same time."

**Dana Cojocaru**  
**director**



**Paula Elena Ciortan**  
**writer**



"This project was a challenge for me, a roller coaster of emotions from beginning to end. I started with the responsibility of collecting and retelling the stories of people who have gone through situations of domestic violence and I ended the project with great gratitude for each shared life experience. I ended this project with a renewed conviction that every story is worth hearing and I "enriched" myself on a personal level, both with emotions and with a lot of knowledge about resilience and the healing power of honest expression."

"The show is like the flight of a bird. That's how I feel about this character: a bird that was flying happily and in an unexpected moment was injured on a wing. The road to recovery is difficult, with stones, clouds, storms, but at the end of the "hard" there is always light. The show is my path through life, yours, ours, everyone's.."



**Alina Dincă Pușcașu**  
**scenography**

**Ana Hegyi**  
**actriță**



"... a new project, a new challenge, a new discovery, a new team with beautiful people! Thank you"

"My participation in this project is unique, in the sense that I really feel that I have to contribute significantly artistically, calling on all the experience accumulated throughout my 13 years of stage career. It is a perfect opportunity for me to develop myself even more professionally, in the scenic direction of movement and improvisation."



**Ioana Natalia Corban**  
actress

**George Cocosă**  
actor



"What Happened to the Heart" was a profound artistic journey for me, a process of discovery and expression through dance. I had the opportunity to collaborate closely with my girls, creating choreographies that not only translated authentic emotions into movement, but also brought to life a story about vulnerability, transformation, and the power of the heart. Every moment spent on this project was a lesson in connection, creativity, and dedication.



**Andreea Radu,**  
accounting expert

**Oana Floriea**  
choreographer



"My participation in this project was an intense and different experience. Beyond the numbers and budgets, I felt like I was part of a story that was worth telling. I'm glad I was able to contribute to this project by doing what I do best."

"As a procurement expert, I have painstakingly woven the invisible threads of contracts, ensuring that every artist and supplier finds their rightful place in the splendid tapestry of our cultural endeavor, turning dreams into reality and bringing art closer to everyone's souls."



**Petronela Șerban**  
project manager

**Irina Simiu**  
procurement expert



"The opportunity to witness the staging of these stories represented for me an avalanche of emotions that I relive with the same intensity every time I watch. And we all need such moments to nourish our souls. For 25 years, the CMSC Foundation has unconditionally opened its arms to any woman who asks for help. We will continue to be their voice, a ray of hope so that they feel listened to, supported, protected."

This project was a soulful one for the entire team! It was a challenging project that took us out of our comfort zone. We discovered new skills in ourselves and in our colleagues, skills and talents that would probably otherwise have remained hidden in a corner of our souls. This project was about discovery, overcoming our own limits, but also about healing.

**Cătălina Mîtel**  
project assistant



**If you find yourself in an abusive situation, you can contact us:**

Phone: **0787.878.806**;  
toll-free: **0800.070.017**;  
Website: **www.cmsc.ro**;

Facebook: Centrul de Mediere si Securitate Comunitara  
contact person: service coordinator **Elena-Petronela Șerban**

The **COMMUNITY SAFETY AND MEDIATION CENTER FOUNDATION** offers assistance and support to victims of domestic violence through two licensed day centers:

- **The Counseling Center for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence** for specialized services, offered free of charge, such as: individual and/or group psychological assistance and counseling, legal assistance and counseling, assistance and material support in crisis situations, support groups dedicated to women-survivors, individual and/or group educational work sessions with children who are victims/witnesses of domestic violence.
- **The Information and Counseling Center for Victims of Domestic Violence**, an emergency telephone line (Helena Helpline) with continuous operation, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including public holidays, by calling the single, free, toll-free number **0800.070.017** or in writing by sending messages to the following number: **0787.878.806** for information, guidance and telephone counseling.

# EMOTIONAL TREASURE BOX



Community Safety and Mediation Center  
Foundation

2025