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Learning Journeys  
How to Become Oneself



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# **Learning Journeys**

**How to Become Oneself**

**A Storybook from the Erasmus+ Project  
»Learning Communities in Rural Europe«**

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# Introduction

»Once upon a time there was ...«, »Once there was, and once there wasn't ...«, »Once there was, when there wasn't, there was ...« Such are the paradoxical openings of traditional folk and fairy tales. »The story you are about to hear«, they seem to tell us, »is as real as it gets since it encapsulates truths of what it means to be human. But it is not true in the historic sense, as it did not really happen—or did it?« This difference between historic reality and fabled reality notwithstanding, there are multiple ways in which story and history intersect, inform, and build upon each other.

In personal stories we are sharing snapshots of our lives, stressing certain aspects while leaving out others. Such stories may entertain, comfort, or irritate us. At times, this can be valuable in itself. However, there is something to be gained from personal stories that goes beyond their mere anecdotal value. They can tell us about pivotal points—crossings, turnings, de-

tours—in individual life journeys. In doing so, they may teach us something, that may be important for our own lives. Some things we hear may sound strangely familiar, others may be new to us. We may recognise and contrast them to pivotal points in our own lives, gaining new perspective and insights. Maybe these new perspectives will help us to make sense of own experiences that we had but may not have fully fathomed yet. Or maybe the inspiration we draw from stories can help prepare us for crises—literally: turning points—we may experience at some future point of our life's journey. Maybe we will find it easier to turn what may, at first, appear to be an obstacle into a chance when we have in the back of our minds the turning points other life stories—may they be a warning or an inspiration to us.

Stories are the building materials of our lives and our selves. We are constantly telling to ourselves and to others the narratives of our own lives. And these stories are constantly interweaving with the narrative threads of other lives. In a way, we are inseparable from the stories we tell and live by. This not only applies to human beings but also to places, societies, and ages.

As cultural ecologist David Abram points out, in oral indigenous cultures, stories were an integral part of the surrounding earthly landscapes. In this »storied earth« every place had its story and every story had its place. Certain stories could only be told at certain places or even had to be told when passing certain landmarks. You could not walk by this rock, traverse this hill, or cross this river without telling their unique stories that had been passed on from generation to generation.

This attitude is very different from our modern industrialised mindset. With our ever-increasing sense of space—with our machines travelling to every corner of the world and even into outer space—we seem to have lost our sense of place. It would

be a mistake, however, to think of this storied earth as a pre-modern fancy that has no place in our enlightened modern minds. Instead, there are lessons to be learned from such archaic bonds between man and nature. If there is one thing to be learned from ancient stories, it is that the surrounding landscapes are not inanimate but constantly communicating with us. This constant dialogue between nature and culture goes along with a deeply felt sense of responsibility for and rootedness in the surrounding landscape. Incidentally, this is not tied to concepts of »natural beauty«—rootedness may happen just as well on brownfields. In an age of species extinction, climate change, and ever intensifying destructive exploitation of the earth, these seem to be essential ingredients for life-fostering, sustainable ways of living that may even lead to a new ecological ethics. Instead of acting as the self-proclaimed masters of the natural world, we human beings would once again turn into what we have been all along our evolutionary journey: earthly inhabitants of an earthly world, nature among nature.

With human civilisation evolving, we have forged stories that are so powerful that whole societies and eras have constructed their self-conception by telling them over and over again on various levels, sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly. Such stories were termed »grand narratives«, »meta-narratives« or »master narratives« by postmodernist thinker Fredric Jameson in the 1970s. While political scientist Francis Fukoyama proclaimed in the 1990s the end of all grand narratives and even the »end of history«, other thinkers, such as commons researchers Elinor Ostrom or Silke Helfrich, climate activist Christiana Figueres, and even Pope Francis, pointed out that we need to formulate new life-sustaining grand narratives in order for humankind to survive. One such master story is the age-old narrative of com-

moning, telling of a world in which places and natural resources are not owned by human beings, but, instead, human beings may affiliate themselves to places, by caring for and making use of the unique gifts of nature these places bring forth—a narrative of people being claimed by places instead of people claiming property of places. Although this story is diametrically opposed to the dominant doctrine of extractivist, neoliberal capitalism, there is a long tradition of communities working in constant dialogue with the »more-than-human world«—commonly referred to as »nature«—on a basis of trust, commitment, and equality. Another such grand narrative is the story of the interdependency and interconnectedness of all life.

An ecological ethics based on connectedness can also be a source of political action and resistance: Would we allow this mountaintop to be blown away and ground into gravel, if we knew and had constantly told and retold its story? Maybe not. But maybe even the most archaic stories will not be powerful enough to counter the ubiquitous narrative of the »megamachine«, as historian Lewis Mumford famously termed the entirety of hierarchically organised extractivist practices in Western civilisation. If this were true, then all endeavours of bringing about truly sustainable ways of living, learning, and being would be in vain. By continuing to tell about personal learning journeys, about ways of living that offer life-fostering responses to destructive industrialised urbanised lifestyles, and about the perceptions and values underlying these stories, we believe that it is possible to make a difference all the same.

Maybe there will not be a single one story that can counter the megatechnical narrative with its imperative: »More growth! More consumption! More extractivism!«. Maybe the search for a single one story, a panacea, a one-fits-all solution would itself

be one of the megamachine's hubristic flights of fancy. Maybe it will instead take a multitude of interweaving stories of commonplace wisdom, mundane experience, and vernacular practices that can provide an alternative to the megamachine's doctrine. If such stories coming from all over Europe interweave, they can form a fabric that connects people, projects and initiatives and may even turn into a viable safety net for the challenges of times to come.

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The stories you are about to read are personal learning stories that have been lived and told by persons of various social, cultural, linguistic, and generational backgrounds. The stories are as varied as the people who told them. Mostly the stories were told to us in everyday places and situations: sitting around the campfire, speaking on the telephone, lying in the grass under a weeping willow, during a strategic project meeting, standing in the kitchen preparing food, writing emails, etc.

The stories make visible the wide variety of learning journeys and the challenges connected to these learnings between rural and urban settings. They show how learning may be facilitated and supported by learning communities, but above all they show that deep learning takes place within each individual in very different ways. This dynamic between personal and communal learning is part of a paradox that lies at the root of European culture and European integration: the interplay between freedom and connectedness, between individuality and solidarity.

As grand as the themes that some of stories in this book initiate may be, most of the stories deal with very ordinary, common things—things as mundane as strolling through the woods,

taking a wrong turn, meeting an unpretentious stranger. But as we know from fairy tales, small things may have great effects, and very often they are not what they may have seemed at first glance. Straying from preconceived paths may provide us with crucial insights, and we may emerge from the woods' darkness as different persons. In any event, it is worth staying attentive on our way, after all, a sage may come to us in the guise of humble passer-by.

But there are also stories that do not seem to try to tell about anything else but the good life—without any intended moral, strings attached, narrative twists, double meanings, or ironic punchlines. Just plain tales. Taking things at face value is something our media saturated minds may not very well be accustomed to. And yet, the most simple things in life may reveal to us something very meaningful about being human. Wishing for an orchard, being kind to the people around us, passing on knowledge from one generation to the next, living a gentle and unobtrusive life, helping each other out in times of need.

The stories collected for this book were told in response to one or more of the following questions: »What has learning meant in your life?«, »What is your personal learning story?«, »What has been your personal call?«.

It may be worth pointing out that, as used in the context of this storybook, learning is not something that is removed from everyday life. We learn as we live, and we live as we learn. It is a token of industrialised, highly specialised modern societies that »learning« has been institutionalised and refined to institutions such as kindergartens, schools, universities, etc. But even in such institutionalised settings, some of the most important learning may happen outside and between official classes. In traditional, indigenous cultures, learning was not separate from

everyday life. In our cultural memory and, most certainly, in our stories there are to be found many traces of such informal ways of learning. Just as we cannot not communicate (Paul Watzlawick), we cannot not learn.

What do we mean by »call«? First of all, telling stories and listening to them is a form of call and response. We called for stories, and tellers of stories responded. The term »call« can also be used to describe something which is not emanating from other people but from within yourself. When does an inner voice turn into a call? And does this call really come from inside an individual? Or does it come from somewhere else altogether? We are not be able to answer these questions. Maybe you will find answers in the stories themselves. They may contain answers as yet unknown to the people who told them. There is yet another type of call that is relevant for the stories in this book: The call of a place. All the place keepers have at one point followed a call from at least one specific place, and have continued to engage in communicative acts of call and response with this unique place that once has claimed them (rather than them having claimed possession of it). Travellers visiting these places have also followed a call—maybe this was not only a call made by people but also by the land itself. Again, this is something that maybe the stories themselves will reveal.

We have now come full circle, returning to the »storied« landscapes of traditional indigenous cultures. We do not have to call ourselves animists nor do we have to perform rituals appropriated from other cultures in oder to experience that landscapes do communicate in their own unique ways. Every farmer, every forester, every gardener, and every storyteller worth its can tell you about it.

The stories in this book have been collected in the course of an EU-funded Strategic Partnership in the Erasmus-Plus programme on »learning communities in rural Europe«, consisting of the following five partner organisations (geographically, from west to east):

### ***Embercombe***

Embercombe is the name of a valley in a secluded region of county Devon in South West England. It was formerly used by a millionaire for a private airplane runway, so it includes two former hangars which today provide room for workshops, the main kitchen, meeting spaces, and offices for an unconventional social educational project. Embercombe offers various workshop-programmes that invite people to find their true purpose and meaning in life through deep experiences in nature. Only a small number of people are permanently living on site, but groups of thirty volunteers—young people from all over the world—live there for a period of three months to take care of all the practical work in the garden, the kitchen, the workshops, or setting up new and refurbishing existing infrastructure and meanwhile reflect on their future learning journey.

Embercombe also offers programmes for children in cooperation with local schools and organises public events. It is managed by a trust.

### ***Focus Eco Center***

In the valley of the river Niraj in Transylvania the members of Focus Eco Centre have established a number of pioneering projects to demonstrate that traditional small-scale agriculture

is ecologically and economically sustainable and should be the general orientation for the future development of rural regions. They show that the human-made landscape of their valley has stayed so rich in biodiversity exactly because of the farming activities that have taken place there for centuries, and that the social climate in the villages is so positive because people are used to helping each other in various areas of agricultural work. Educational activities try to promote this new paradigm for rural spaces. Focus Eco Center is based in a former school house in the village of Adrianu Mic. It mainly assists young locals in finding a job perspective in their rural area, but also connects city dwellers with local farmers as well as young people from all over Europe.

### ***Garden of Generations***

Garden of Generations is an emerging community in Lower Austria. It combines multigenerational co-housing, ecological building activities, participative organisation, ecosocial entrepreneurship, gardening as well as care for the youngest and oldest. Apartment houses, offices, and communal spaces are currently planned according to the planning principles of Christopher Alexander's pattern language. The group organises itself by the method of sociocracy, so that overlapping circles of responsible people work on decision-making in different fields.

The founder of the project has developed the innovative tool »wealth pool«: A fund for short-term and longterm loans which is only used for investments into property that equal the value of the loans. A liquidity-reserve of 10 percent is kept for back payments. This makes financial resources, which are not needed anywhere else at the moment, available for the investments of a meaningful project.

## ***Klein Jasedow***

In the community of Klein Jasedow, a hamlet belonging to the municipality of the small town Lassan in Northeast German, today 28 persons of four generations are sharing life and work in the form of commoning. They run the »European Academy of Healing Arts«—a non-for-profit educational centre for health care professionals and artists, a free Democratic School for children, and several social business—including a publishing house issuing a magazine for sustainable livelihood, and a workshop for crafting musical instruments—, are performing artists and have started a long-term hands-on research project focusing on the question of how—given the present conditions of climate, soil, and lifestyle—a life-fostering, sustainable, subsistence agriculture can be established within the the local region. Members of the community are participating in communal affairs, and the community is well connected with relevant NGOs throughout Germany and Europe.

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## ***Sluňákov***

Located in Moravia in the Czech Republic, Sluňákov is a centre for environmental education founded by the municipality of the town Olomouc and initiated by ecological activists in the years following the Velvet Revolution. The central building of Sluňákov with its organic architecture provides accommodation for groups and space for workshops, conferences, and administration, but the main educational work is done outside on excursions to the nearby Litovelské Pomoraví Protected Landscape Area or other destinations, including Sluňákov's own premises: a large area of low-lying fields close to a stream just behind the main building. Some of Czechia's most interesting and eminent land-art artists created large installations. This land-art park is

part of Sluňákov's »House of Nature« and is open to the general public, with inhabitants of the nearby village Horka nad Moravou going for walks on the grounds; visitors can also participate in guided tours.

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The stories presented in this book were contributed by place keepers of the five partner organisations as well as visitors, travelling to our projects. All of them are lifelong learners, sharing with each other stories on eye level. We decided to present them with the first names of their respective storytellers only. So, when reading them, you might not know right away whether you are reading a place keeper's or a traveller's story. If you are interested in finding out more about the teller of a specific story, you may want to look up their biography in the appendix. We believe that these stories can best speak for themselves. Therefore, they will be presented only slightly edited and without further comments.

With this book the project of sharing stories about journeys of eco-social places of learning is not finished—we regard this book as an overture and an invitation. Feel free to contact us, to tell us your thoughts about the insights and questions contained in these stories. Maybe you even want to share your own learning story with us. In case you are in doubt about your talent as a storyteller, please be assured: No story is too small, and there is no such thing as an uninteresting life story. Maybe, at some point, you will even come to visit one of our organisations.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who visited our projects and have shared their stories with us! Without them this book would not have been possible.

# The Stories

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## **Ursula: Using Your Words Wisely**

My longest learning process started when I was three. Since I could speak I was constantly talking. My grandmother told me that you had only a certain amount of words, and when you got old and had spent all your words while you were young, there wouldn't be any words left. I didn't really care back then. Just a few years ago, now that I am old, I realized that she was right. My desire to speak has minimized to a very small amount. And I wonder whether she really knew this or whether she just wanted to frighten me. But she was right and this is the way it happened.

## **Adomas: Travelling To Inner Space**

I am from Lithuania and grew up in one of these appartement building blocks common in socialist countries. I was reading a lot of science fiction books and enjoyed imagining how the future would look like. The possibility that man might be able to

explore the entire universe, to travel to other planets in our galaxy fascinated me deeply. Was there life out there in the endless widths of dark space? In the nineties when I was around ten years old, we sometimes discovered news about UFO-sightings in the newspapers. I read everything about aliens and flying saucers I could get hold of.

As a grew up I learned from an african musician that when you play music, you are able to fly to the cosmos. Today when I play improvised music with my friends I often feel like sitting in a space ship with everyone playing and exploring not outer space but an inner space much larger than the earth—and maybe this is the cosmos itself?

Our music is not written down anywhere, it is invented in the very moment we are together. We play on instruments from different countries accessible by intuition, and we explore the sounds of nature: stones, twigs or water—everything has a sound.

My dream is to set up a community in Lithuania together with friends who love intuitive music. It will be a place where you are invited to express your own feelings, be rooted in the earth and fly to the universe whenever we play music.

## **Kinga: Getting An Orchard**

I grew up in a little village in Transilvania, Máréfalva in county Harghita. My childhood was wonderful, but something was missing: There were no fruit trees in our garden. My parents were growing vegetables, but our premises were too small to have an orchard. I love orchards a lot—the flowering trees in spring, the first cherries in early summer followed by the plums, pears and apples until wintertime comes. All year long you can create wonderful food from fruit trees like jam, compote, juice, liquor or dried fruits. In this mountainous region of Transilvania there

are some traditional species of winter apples, pears, and quince which can be stored over months in the cellar for winter time. In socialist times it was essential to store fruit. Until 1990 we couldn't find any exotic fruits in the groceries, only the seasonal ones. In December we were waiting in long queues for oranges and lemons. Fruits like bananas were unknown for the Romanian kids before 1990.

When I married my husband Levi we moved to a house with some large fields, and the first thing we did was planting fruit trees and shrubs for berries like red and black currant or raspberries. When the trees and bushes started to grow we had small first harvests for our families. Today the trees are quite big already, and we prepare all kinds of different organically certified products, mainly jam, syrup and herbal tea, to sell on the local market and to people in the next city by direct trade arranged by the Focus Eco Centre in Târgu Mureş. Another way of selling our products is »Pick yourself«: The customers come to the farm, gather the fruit and then prepare it with our help. This is specially attractive for people from the city. During their excursion they have direct contact to us, they learn a lot and realise what kind of a special quality freshly picked fruit can have..

I am very happy to be in such a situation. Our children grow up experiencing that homemade local products are precious, that it is wonderful to work on your own land. They help us to gather the fruits we sell. Levi and I hope that the appreciation for small scale farming will be reborn in Romania, that the younger generation sees a good reason to work in the fields to produce organic agricultural products. We live in a small village in a hilly area with only 2000 inhabitants. Most of them want to keep their kind of small agriculture, but we fear that the EU will only support the big farms. It is very hard to work on the land, but we

help each other, share machinery and hope to keep the agricultural tradition of our village alive. It all depends on the next generation. If everyone wants to move to the cities there will be only old people left in the rural area. I am happy that young people all over Europe are interested in small scale farming again. If they want to visit our farm and help us, they are very welcome.

When I look at my life I can say that all my dreams have come true.

### **Johannes: Growth Teachings**

When I was a little boy my grandfather used to take me into the woods, teaching me about all the wonders of nature. I remember many tours we made, dragging the wooden post-war handcart behind us to bring home useful resources for the garden—dry leaves, deadwood, brushwood. On one of these exciting journeys—I was five back then—we were about to pod out rotten wood from old tree trunks, which grandpa then would mix with earth from molehills and finely sieved compost to prepare his special growing soil for his hotbeds.

I recall exactly the moment when his teaching of growth—drawing from big ones dying away and tiniest others thriving—»ignited« in me: In the gloom of the forest we could see the decaying wood phosphorescing very faintly. Although my eyes couldn't detect the mycelium bringing that shimmer about, in a sudden moment of eternity I realised that the gleaming wood, its decay and decomposing to crumbles, and becoming soil to nourish new plants, were connected to each other, and that nothing would exist were there not these delicate fungus threads invisible to my children's eyes. In this strong moment of learning a wide black translucent space swung open in front of me enlarging quickly into a deep abyss below me kneeling, and inside it

I saw myself hanging as just one of myriads of other fungus threads in the limitless network spreading out in the depth below me. The delicate mesh was dimly shining from within, and it emitted a »fragrant« sense of security into this bright black space.

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Supposedly, this and some similar experiences more which my grandfather—through his connectedness with nature and me—initiated in my adolescent mind were essential for my present vivid image of being a transmaterial entity whose physical manifestation consists of ever changing cosmic modules I share with all what exists. All elements that compose my body have been building bricks of thousands of other bodies before my lifetime, and after my body will have turned to earth again they will be integrated in innumerable future bodies. Why should my body be unconscious about the divers lifes its tiny particles have bodily supported before? And what kind of remembrance of my personality will the atoms and molecules of my body carry on to the future beings they will be part of in the millenias to come—bacterias, worms, grasses and trees, squirrels, pikes and sparrows, rocks and humans?

## **Amberit: Drawing for Life**

As a small child, three and four years old, I wanted to draw and craft little things all the time. At home I could follow this motivation undisturbed, but in kindergarten and primary school I was told what to do, and that made me more and more unhappy. When it was time to switch to highschool I visited several schools as a guest. Each one was terrible for me—I just would not understand how normal school worked. It did not feel human that the pupils had no voice there. Finally I visited a Steiner school and realised that this was a place where I could survive.

Here I wouldn't have to study books all the time, but could also work with my hands, draw and dance and do creative things. Every day we had two hours of crafting, gardening and cooking, and we could make up our own schedule in this time. But it still was a school—all students had to follow the ready made curriculum and obey to many rules. I often asked myself why all this was necessary. Why couldn't we just follow our interests in our own rhythms?

From childhood on, drawing and painting are my main ways of expressing myself. Until today I draw many hours a day, usually in the evening and at night. The drawings are a language I can constantly reflect on, colours and forms are much easier to read for me than words. The evenings are a sacred space reserved for myself, especially the period from midnight to three in the morning. This is the best time to work. I constantly draw to stay connected with my inner voice.

I studied arts at the AKV St. Joost academy in Breda in the Netherlands. It was a normal university, but at least at my fine arts department the professors did not follow any curriculum. They prepared a space for us where we could create something from our very own intrinsic values. If we needed guidance, there was somebody to ask. Finally I had the freedom I needed, I could leave everything behind what bothered me in school and start to create my own life. I felt as if I was reborn. Time after time I began to deconstruct all the patterns that in my mind were connected with school and being forced to learn things I was not interested in. Although because of the government the teachers had to take exams at the AKV St. Joost, they would say to us: Don't care about that, you don't have to listen to us, you have to listen to yourself, do what you want and not what someone else is asking you. We were encouraged to autonomy and authenticity.

Shouldn't this be at the heart of education everywhere in the world? Since my time at the arts academy I want to create my own school where people can be really passionate about something coming from themselves, from their heart. I ask myself: How can I create a school-community where people can really find out what is in their hearts and create something from this? How can we find the fire in ourselves, nourish it and even make a living by doing things we love?

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I was looking in the internet whether schools like this already existed and found three that captured my interest: the Kaos-pilots in Denmark, the Knowmads in the Netherlands, both alternative business schools, and Schumacher College in England, a place that offers programmes on sustainable living.

I spent some time at Schumacher Collage and loved to get in touch with the approach of deep ecology, but the teaching methods there were not as co-creative as I had expected. My next experiment should be to discover the Knowmads. I did not want to be there as a student, but get involved with teaching, so I mustered all my courage and wrote to Guus Wink, the main organiser. I offered my help in various fields like coaching students, offering arts- or deep-ecology-workshops, doing some marketing or arranging evening events. Guus agreed that I worked two or three days a week at Knowmads, and so I got involved with an amazingly creative learning-process. The Knowmads business school offers a six-month-programme for social entrepreneurs. The first two months are pre-structured by the staff, the rest of the time will be created by the students themselves. Each group forms a »tribe«, a kind of community designing individual and collective learning journeys. I found myself in the weird position of being at the same age as the students, but not being a participant but a learner in the field of coaching and facilitation. This

was very scary, but I understood that my way to learn is real life, I have to jump in at the deep end. First I was writing blogs for the Knowmads-website—about the group process, how it changed the students, and about alternative education in general. Later I did a bit of coaching and really enjoyed it. At the Knowmads summerschool I gave my first workshop in this setting, focused on feeling one's own creative source and expressing it through drawing, using colours and lines, and later express it through words.

Focalising a workshop as a young, unexperienced person for me is scary. I have to overcome all the voices in my mind that say: Maybe what you do is not good enough, maybe they don't want you. Sometimes I wish I had an easy, regular job, but then I know: I have to try things out all by myself in spite of all insecurities.

In fact there is no reason to be afraid. In the last time there have been many situations that made me trust more and more in the power of creative processes and collective intelligence. For example last week I attended a summerschool for artists on co-creative leadership and community organised by the Eroles Project in the pyrenees. It was an amazing place in a lonely village in the mountains called the »House of Colours«, every room had its own colours. We were cooking together and sharing workshops in bodywork, meditation, and arts with people from all over Europe. At the beginning the organisers were disappointed that there were much less participants than they had expected. They feared their concept for the summerschool would not work with only a small group. During one and a half days we talked about this situation and asked ourselves how we could create a learning space here with so few people. What could be the advantage of such a small, intimate group? This process changed the original concept—instead of given workshops we had this big

board where we made up a new schedule every day, and it was really easy to be open to everything wanting to emerge. We learned to trust each other. It takes time to get into such a process which helps you to trust that everything will be okay and will unfold. I was watching this and learned a lot about creating space for education.

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In the near future I will try to find more places to teach, to share my practice and knowledge. I will continue to work for the Knowmads and look for a room, a nice open space to give coaching sessions and maybe organise weekend workshops. It could be the beginning of my school. In reality you have to make small steps—every journey starts with the very first step.

## **Michal: Initiation**

As a boy I loved to explore the landscape of Litovelské Pomoraví, strolling on my own through the high forests, the karst gorges, or the wetlands on the banks of the river Morava. In the limestone rocks of this hilly area there are many caves to be found, some grand and wide as the famous Mladeč caves, others small and narrow. Early in the 19th century, the count of Liechtenstein had accentuated the spirit of this landscape, its genius loci, by constructing a number of romantic edifices and follies, such as an obelisk, a temple of friendship, or a u-shaped cave called Podkova (»horseshoe«), which had resulted from connecting two natural limestone caves. I now know that this kind of landscape design is much more than fanciful scurrility. Promenading through romantic parks, is like an encyclopaedical walk through centuries and continents, awakening people's feelings to a stronger, deeper connection with nature. In this way, nature and culture may become one. As a child, I did not reflect about this, at least not on a rational level. I just enjoyed being in the great outdoors.

In hindsight, exploring this landscape with its inspired mixture of organically grown and human-built elements has shaped me in ways I could not have imagined back then. For many kids from the region the fifty metre long Horseshoe Cave was an adventurous playground, which they would enter as a test of courage with or without a torch. One morning I went there all by myself without a lamp. I climbed through the entrance, pausing briefly to inhale the chilly, humid air, faintly scented with decay and the droppings of little occupants past and present. Once my eyes had accostumed to the darkness, I noticed the moths. Just a few steps into the cave, in a nether-region where the corridor was neither exposd to the direct radiation of the bright morning sun nor covered in complete darkness yet, hundreds of sepia-coloured winged creatures were sleeping on the walls, covering the stoney surface like silken tapestry. I went in deeper. I didn't mind the spiders and bats who I knew were there, spinning their webs and hanging headfirst from the ceiling. Deeper and deeper I went into the cave, until my groping fingers touched on rock—a dead end! Where I had anticipated the passageway to bend to the left and ultimately lead me to the exit my fingers could now not feel anything but rock and more rock. I was seized by a spell of anguish. Reminding myself that all I had to do was to go back exactly the opposite direction, I started to crawl back the way I had come from. Feeling my way trough the dark, I expected to see the light of day soon. But I didn't. I had lost my orientation completely. All there was, was solid rock and jet-black darkness. The some twenty metres separating me from the outside world seemed infinite and forever impenetrable to me. I paused, my body remaining as still as stone. I experienced something like timelessness. I was free from fear. After an indefinable period of time that could have lasted for seconds or hours, my body begun

to set itself into motion again. Slowly and assuredly I crawled towards the cave's exit. When I emerged into the daylight I was no longer the same person. Whatever the effects of my cave experience on me may have been, it certainly intensified my connectedness with the local landscape. Later, as an environmental activist I protested—alas, unsuccessfully—against the construction of a road through the Mladečský karst region, just below Podkova cave. Many decades later, when I told my cave story to artist Miloš Šejn, it inspired him to design a dead-end corridor in the passageway through the cave of the Solar Mountain—a piece of land art at Sluňákov—, ending with a polished basalt mirror. My moment of initiation showed me that human beings may be deeply transformed by experiencing unity with nature within and without. This is exactly what we hope to achieve at Sluňákov.

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## **Fiona: Stepping up to Responsibility**

I heard about Embercombe as »that place up on Haldon Forest Hill where people live in yurt«. Then we got an invitation through the local Steiner School and so my daughter and I went for a visit.

I remember coming through the top gate, overlooking the valley and then walking down through the woods, to the garden. When I look back I realise how it must feel to people coming here for the first time. The oven was fired up, and it was such a hot, sunny day in October, we had to sit in the shade of the apple trees to eat our pizza.

Then somebody said: »You know you can come and volunteer for five pound a night«, and I thought, »Wow!«. It needed some more dreaming time, but we did come back, for a very, very wet Open Day. It rained for a solidly 12 hours and still, 300 people

came. I thought: » There must be something special here for all these people to come on a day like this«.

From then my journey has grown beautifully. My daughter and I started coming to Embercombe for Joanna Watter's parenting group; Sustainable Families, which set a real foundation to the way I care for my daughter, and still does, every single day.

I give thanks for that groundwork about parenting and children, it has enabled me to see what children need, to grow with sound mental health and gives me an insight with every adult I meet and where they are on their journey.

And then the »Natural Learning« programme was born, a group for families that choose to home educate. Someone else set it up and at the last minute couldn't hold it, so it was handed over to me in the 11th hour. Leading this programme has just been a huge part of my journey at Embercombe and led to me volunteering here.

Then, in spring 2012 Jo slipped in the woods and broke his ankle. At that time he was the one who looked after almost everything here. We all thought »how are we going to manage«? The sheep were about the lamb and though I didn't know anything about sheep, my family have cattle, so I thought there must be some similarities, and so I started to care for the sheep. One lamb came after the other, and then we didn't want to go home, so we just stayed.

Coming to Embercombe was not the cause but maybe the catalyst to ending my marriage. It was this place that held us so beautifully during those difficult times. Being at Embercombe gave us roots something I hadn't experienced before.

And then over the past five years my role has just evolved and evolved. I feel that my role is part of the development of Embercombe's work—enabling parents to deepen in their vital

work as leaders for their children, for the children to be given the foundation to deepen through their connection to themselves and for the animals to assist in that by being part of our daily lives.

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I was invited on to the (original) Embercombe Council, a forum that had filled me with awe and inspiration when I first witnessed it. It was a beautiful day in May when I walked down the lane from the dining yurt to the Stone Circle, to step up to my stone, as a female chief for the Land. All the hawthorn bushes were in full bloom and suddenly I felt like I was getting married; to the land of Embercombe and I felt such strong commitment to the place.

Being part of Council was such a profound and beautiful thing; I started to find my voice. Previously when witnessing council, I had thought »How do all these people say these wise things?«, and then sitting in Council I came trust that the words would come. That was the first time that I realised such a thing can happen.

Then Council was dissolved. Not long after that, I was invited on to Core Team, and that year was—until now—the most fulfilling year of my life, to be involved with the decision making with this beloved place, having the flexibility to parent my daughter here while she has the rich experience of everything that happens here.

For me Embercombe starts with the land and the children. For the children it's all about connection. To grow to be healthy adults who can make a difference in our world, they need connection to their adults, themselves and the land. I love the land and want to be part of it, to know it in greater depth each day—to become »reindiginised« (a new word meaning for people to become reconnected to »their« land).

And then the senior management team came in summer 2016. The former team were no longer involved in the decision-making process. It was really a tough time, even though we knew that the new team were really doing their best. Then, this summer the Trustees made the courageous decision to make the management team redundant, which was very painful for them, but for me, for the place, for the land, for the organisation it was incredibly freeing.

And then Helen arrived—over a month ago—with heart and energy and inspiration and beautiful leadership; really responsive leadership. Now I am part of the leadership team; a very energising, focused process. It feels such a beautiful validation of who I'm growing into and what I am bringing to my role; my love of this land, my care of everyone who comes through the gates, my life experience, to be part of a place that recognises the power of connection, that cherishes the Children's Fire.

### **Lara: Can We Come Home?**

Since a few years we have the idea of turning one of our houses in the middle of the village of Klein Jasedow into an »open kitchen«: A place, where neighbours are welcome to have a tea or coffee, where we or someone from the neighbourhood can cook and offer a free meal to everyone who wants to join or where people can meet to prepare preserves and pickles like Sauerkraut etc. Another idea is to turn the kitchen step by step into a post-fossile place so that no electricity or plastic is used any more among the kitchen tools.

The building which already contains a quite professional kitchen to cook for the participants of the workshops in our Klanghaus, is called »Adele's house«, because we bought it from an elderly lady called Adele.

From the first moment I saw her I knew she was a very special person. It was a frosty, dusky afternoon in December 1996 when some members of my chosen family at that time walked the path from the village Pulow to Klein Jasedow for the first time in their life. Still living in Switzerland it was our second visit to the Northeast of Germany where we thought we could find a new home. We approached Klein Jasedow from its back-side and walked across the frozen village-lake. Adele must have been watching us, wondering who on earth this might be. She stood in front of her small house made of red bricks, wearing several skirts above each other. When she heard that we thought of moving to this region, maybe even to her little village, her eyes started to shine and she welcomed us right from the beginning on. For many years Adele was our neighbour. She suffered from the »messy syndrom« and lived there all alone without a family with her cats, a few chicken and a field of potatoes. I was always intrigued by the way she inhabited her small plot of land. It was different to the way other people were housing themselves in the village. When she worked on her field, weeding her potatoes, she sometimes simply fell asleep in the sun directly on the earth. Although she had been a refugee after World War II from Sudetenland—so not a native local—she seemed to inhabit the place in the same way the flowers, shrubs and the big walnut tree around here house. Could I live here in a similar intensity, a similar closeness to the non-human beings? I often asked myself.

The members of my community were friends with Adele, helped her when she could not make a living on her own any more and always experienced her rather as a nature spirit than a modern human being. On her gravestone we have put the words: »The Good Soul of Klein Jasedow«. So »Adele's kitchen« should honor her memory.

Our initial idea was, to run a professional Café or even a restaurant there, but we rejected it, because we didn't want the place to be a commercial one, but a place of commoning instead.

What does it mean to run a kitchen as a commons? Not necessarily that it belongs to »everyone« and is open at any time—this would just end up in a mess. It rather means, that a group of people see themselves as custodians or guardians or keepers of a place and keep it as a resource for a community. And this community develops the rules of the game how to care for the house and how to use it. This sounds quite nice in theory, but does it work in real life?

In Winter 2016 the community of Klein Jasedow dedicated several sessions of our »palavers« to the »Adelehaus«, as we say in German. During summer 2015, Astrid, a member of our community, had started to transform the kitchen and the adjacent room into a cosy space where sometimes people would sit and chat, but we had not really started to use it regularly. A café time for parents with their kids, a party and a pesto-preparation-session with neighbours already had taken place there during 2015, but there was not yet a flow of activities that could revive the house.

As we collected ideas about the future of the Adelehaus, they could not be farther apart from each other. Some people saw it mainly as a quiet place where e.g. some community-members could have a meal without the children (sometimes our main community-kitchen is quite a noisy place with 5 children or even more when friends with kids come to visit). Other saw it as a place especially suited to be there with a group of children. Some stressed the meaning of the Adelehouse as a central building in Klein Jasedow that could attract neighbours and support the integration of our community into the »normal« neighbour-

hood. Also the possibility to organize free workshops on preserving food for a local self-supply was discussed. Moreover we need more meetingrooms for worksessions of our small companies, sleepingroom for guests and volunteers, dwelling space for members of the community, and for all this the yet unrenovated attic of the Adelehaus could be useful.

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How could we cope with all these ideas? Instead of deciding for the one or the other direction, we tried to find words for the essential quality of the place - by telling us stories about our memories of Adele. The Adelehaus is like the heart of Klein Jasedow. Next to it, on the eastern side grows a huge walnut-tree which creates an almost sacred atmosphere around itself. On the western side there is a green inviting to sit in the sun. So there are two sides of the place which both want to be lived and honoured.

We decided not to decide anything, but observe ourselves carefully in the way in which we actually do use the house. Anything should be possible, but everything should happen with great care and attention, and we should all keep exchanging on how we feel with the Adelehaus.

We planted a hedge with fructiferous bushes around the green in the west of the house to make the space more cosy, and we installed a hammock under the walnut-tree. The dysfunctional fireplace was replaced with a traditional culinary stove using firewood in addition to the electric cooker. Since then, there is no clear vision for the future of Adeles house, It is not used too often and still seems to be in a deep sleep somehow. But nevertheless it has seen many scenarios in the last two years: cooking-sessions with refugees, workshops about the future of our magazine Oya, practising musicians, game nights, dance parties, cooking for professional music trainings in the Klanghaus, groups

of voluntary workers busy at the construction side for our straw-and-clay timber framed house—and during the EU-festival<sup>t</sup> as a finidhing point of the project that put forth this storybook, Michal Bartos, directer of the Czech environmental educational centre, slept there on a couch because we had by mistake forgotten to show him is comfortable guest room. He took a photo of a shelf, where a portrait of Adele in her best years stands besides bottles of oil and vinegar. I think he became friend with Adele in his first night, because he refused to change to the originally reserved guestroom in spite of having much more comfort there.

His photo of Adele's portrait was printed on the cover of our magazine Oya, because this issues subject was the phenomenon of »Heimat«, of at-homeness or »coming home«.

After this had happened I had the feeleing, that a vision for the future of Adele's kitchen can only emerge if we all are ready to connect with her as an ancestor of Klein Jasedow. She, as a refugee, tried to be at home here. Can we do the same?

## **Zoltan: Having Everything**

When I was a little child my grandfather often took me to the forest for mushrooming. He died when I was six years old, but I always remember the time with him out there in the woods. After my studies of chemistry I becam an engineer and worked here and there for ten years. I had never asked myself too much why I had chosen this profession: Of course everybody wanted to become an engineer, there are interesting jobs with a good salary. But more and more felt that this was not my nature, I shouldn't continue with what was not me. Images of my childhood came to my mind—me and my grandfather searching for mushrooms in the forest, me and my father working in the garden. I had been happy in those days because I was close to nature, close to the

cycles of growing and decaying. To live in the villages and experience life as part of these cycles evoked a feeling of peace in me, and suddenly this seemed to be much more meaningful to me than earning my salary as an engineer.

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The revolution of 1989 came to Romania as well, and for me personally this was the moment to revolutionise my life. Let's change!

Together with some colleagues and my wife Erzsebet we set up the Focus Eco Centre in the Târgu Mureş district. Today, all my work here is connected with nature. Whether I set up a water restoration project, develop alternative tourism programmes, or help small farmers to bring their products to the local market and to people living in the city—all is about nature.

A flower in a plant pot is not nature for me, I always look for wilderness. To walk in a forest where everything grows by itself in high diversity makes me feel free. I love the wild, I really need it, I think human nature is to be free and to be in wilderness. Of course on the other hand humans look for shelter and security, so there is always a double feeling—freedom and security, we long for both at the same time. I don't think that this must be a contradiction as long as there is a balance, but today we try to hide ourselves exclusively in a secure, cultural space. But if you are very secure and don't face real challenges life is not very interesting. The real challenge is to be integrated in nature. You go out and you will feel it. When I go to the riverside and listen to the water I can feel fully alive. All these complex sounds and smells offer so much. I like to share these experiences from the fantastic worlds of wild nature with other people.

Wilderness does not mean that there is no order, it has its principles and patterns, indeed it can be a rolemodel for humans. I ask myself whether we can understand culture as an

expression of human nature which does not have to harm other beings on this earth. Agriculture started as a selection of species. You decide against diversity and self-organisation, instead you prepare a field and let some singular crops grow. Thus you destroy a living system, a system which is more complex than consisting of only one crop. Today we try to understand this and find all these new ways of gardening like permaculture, and many of the traditional ways of gardening used by small farmers in rural Europe are very close to a permaculture-approach already. Our ways of gardening and farming have to embrace diversity to strengthen the ecosystems. Even the slightest reduction of diversity will weaken any system.

There is a saying: »Water which jumps across seven stones is clean.« To make this happen you have to leave the rivers and streams undisturbed. That is what I tried to do together with my wife and our son in the small village of Adrianu Mare, when we built a wooden house. We have almost a hectare of land with an orchard, a vegetable garden, and a little pond near the creek. We are restoring several other ponds and wetlands in the valley together with the villagers to make the water return. Our neighbour is the forest, and if we take a stroll there, we can pick mushrooms for dinner. We have a friend who has ten cows and chickens. We get our milk and the eggs from him, so we can produce ourselves our get from the village almost all our food. I think if you have a family and a community which makes you happy, if you are experiencing the miracle of growing your own food in a way that makes you an integral part of the natural systems, and if you are enjoying the wonders which are happening at every moment in nature, then—you have everything!

## **Teresa: Gifting in the Garden**

I confess. I still haven't read Genevieve Vaughan's »For-Giving«. Nor have I attended any of her workshops on gifting economy my father had organised over the past few years (promised, I'll make up for it soon ...). But sometimes it doesn't take all that much imput to grasp the essence of a message.

At one point, this line stuck with me: »Give what you can, take what you need.« It has accompanied me all through the past year and has become a sort of constant teacher to me, giving away its wisdom only piece by piece. In our community garden, I immediately found a field of practice for putting to the test and further exploring this basic attitude.

My first light-bulb moment came in the spring when the parsnips in the winter vegetable field were just only the most delicate sprouts, hardly detectable under the weeds. Whereas the summer vegetables had been divided into privately tended plots of land, just as in the year before, we had decided at the beginning of the season to lay out a communal field for storables winter vegetables. On regular garden days, we were going to work there together. That was the plan.

But it was only a few of us who would regularly tend the winter vegetables. Others came just to take care of »their« summer vegetables, if they managed to come at all. The few of us who tended the winter vegetables, on the other hand, were confronted with long overgrown lines, becoming disheartened just by the sight of it.

What to do? How should we react? We decided not to go the usual way this time. This would have meant to somehow get the »others« to take »their share of responsibility« to satisfy »fairness and justice«. This line of thinking is based on the old logic of exchange: Everyone should contribute the same, no one

should get out more than he or she contributed. There should be an proportionate relation between giving and receiving. And ideally at any time, but no later than the season's end, it should be possible to draw a balance between giving and taking.

The rationale underlying gifting economy—»give what you can, take what you need«—points in a different direction altogether: For »give what you can, take what you need« must be taken to also mean »do not give, what you cannot give«! Only if I feel free to not give, can I give freely. And only what has been given freely is a true gift. These two lines hold true for both those who are present at and those who are mostly absent from the winter vegetable field.

So we decided to focus on the quality of giving and on those who were giving—and I started my self-observation. When I had a lot of energy and was enjoying what I was doing (which I mostly do when gardening), my giving was a free gift from abundance. At those moments I was fine with the fact that I was there and others weren't. My giving was not tied to expectations of others giving a certain amount, too.

When, on the other hand, I was tired and—instead of taking a break or calling it a day right in the middle of an unfinished line of vegetables—I said to myself: »Come on, you'll finish that last bit, won't you?!«, then things were very different. When I had overstepped my limits and gone into overload, then I was sure to meet my grumpy self-pity (»Why me?!«) and my worries (»How should we ever get all the work done?«).

When talking about my experience another insight came to me: Giving freely is only possible when I am able to let go of preconceived goals and follow whatever really feels right for me at that particular moment. When give, what I (at that moment) can't give—because of seemingly compelling necessities from

without or because of my own slavedriver from within—, then I left that inner attitude from which I can give freely from abundance.

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On a group level, this means that each individual is responsible for ensuring that she or he remains in a healthy balance while giving; on the other hand, this becomes harder, if we as a group stick to preconceived assumptions and goals related to »what we have planned to do and what we have planted already«. It's not that easy to accept as a group that we might have simply saddled ourselves with too much or that we might all have misjudged our time resources. I personally found it very helpful to hear from the guardians of the garden: »We'll do what we can do. And what we can't do, we won't do.« Still, I remember how hard it was to witness plants »decaying« under rampant weeds.

But, come harvest time, this hardly made a difference. Our field gave us such an abundance of vegetables that we hardly managed to keep up with the cropping—and we harvested quite a few fine parsnips after all. Some cauliflowers even went to seed as we just didn't manage to harvest them on time. When reflecting upon our process at the end of the season we realised that we still had something to learn about the second part of our maxim: »... take what you need.«

When we did a talking round, we learned that some of our group had been so busy tending their summer vegetable field, getting to terms with their uneasy childhood memories of having to do gardening, or unforeseeable circumstances in their lives that they just hadn't found time to work in the winter vegetable field. Accordingly, they didn't dare to take anything from the winter field. Heidi and Bruno who had worked a lot with the winter vegetables were last in turn. Jauntily they replied: »We really had a good time on the field and never ever could we eat

up on our own all the vegetables we tended. You guys need to harvest some, too. That's also a contribution. In this way, you're honouring the work we did with the plants.«

I was really happy to realise that their response was bringing to life a few lines we had put up on a signpost standing next to the winter field:

»Everything you can do here is a gift.

A gift to the plants that will help them to grow better.

A gift to the people who will enjoy their fruits.

A gift to yourself as you may harvest nourishment for your body and soul from this field.«

## **Boti: Doing Good, Staying Home**

I started to realise the »real world« when I went to live in a city. Before that I was living—and still am living—in a village in rural Romania. It is a really traditional life. Until I was fourteen I thought that we were underdevelopped, although we had television and Internet. I was longing to become a city dweller, I was looking for vibrant city life. When I started to go to highschool in the city I thought all of my classmates would know more about life than I did. But I was shocked. It seemed to me that most of them were thinking like robots. They considered themselves superior but they were not smarter than me. I then realized that life in the village with every family having their own garden, making their own food and sticking to their traditions was a good life. When I later went to university and started to work I met a lot of people from around the world and I this feeling begun to grow much stronger. I felt that I had to take care of these traditions and this way of life. I want to keep up our traditions of growing our own vegetables, making our own wine and palinka. We are producing about eighty percent of our food ourselves. It is

important to show children that this life is a good life. That it is good to put your hands into the soil. Maybe this is my call. Most of my friends live in the city. They were often asking: »Why don't you come and live in the city? Rural life is crap!« When I used to work eight hours a day in the city I still went 40 kilometres back home every day. Coming home, smelling the village smell, saying hello to everyone I met, seeing familiar faces in the pub—this always made me feel good. We are keeping alive the tradition of multiple generations living together in one house. We don't have to build intentional communities because we still have functioning family and village communities. There are challenges, of course, and we need to uphold and protect our communities. There are city dwellers who think they are smarter than country folks. And there are villagers want to live like city people, so they lead urbanized lifestyles in the countryside. When I was a child I, too, had this idealized idea of city life. By now, I prefer village to city life. I like to spend a day in the city and have fun, but then it's enough. Most of my friends went abroad to live in Germany or England. I think I can do something good at the place where I live.

## **Eugenia: Becoming a Gardener**

When I was twenty-six I was very unhappy with my life in the town of Sevilla. One day a friend suggested to me that I shuld see a psychologist who analyses dreams according to the approach of C.G. Jung. I was interested and started to work with her. La-ter I discovered that she lived in a small community called Los Portales in the countryside near Sevilla. When I visited her for the first time I was deeply impressed: In the middle of a very dry landscape there was a green oasis with a lake, olive trees, and a large garden. The people here grew their own food, organised

their daily life together and they worked with their dreams to develop a better understanding of themselves.

The psychologist was the founder of the community. She invited me to stay for a while, to help in the garden and to continue with the reflections on my dreams. I thought that I would spend about three month there—a set period of time as my personal healing-retreat—but in fact I never left Los Portales again. I married a member of the community and had a daughter. After a few years I was sure: This is my place. I was living together with people I liked, and they encouraged me to be myself. As a young woman I was anxious to show myself in public, but in Los Portales I learned to dance and to speak in front of people. Supportive relationships are the most important thing in life, and a community can be a setting where there are many supportive friends around you. I have lived in Los Portales for twenty-five years now. Every day still is excitingly different. The long-term community members have come to know each other very well, but there is always something new we discover in our encounters.

I became the main gardener of Los Portales. We grow a lot of vegetables using permaculture approaches like raised beds and mixed crops. The most important thing in gardening for me is to talk to the spirits of the plants and animals. If I am not sure what I should plant on a certain patch I connect with the spirit of the plants to receive an intuitive answer. Sometimes I use methods of kinesiology, but they are only a way of making my body show what I feel in the unconscious parts of my mind. Communicating with plants is not very different to communicating with people. I live in a community with humans, animals and plants—they all belong to our place.

To share such experiences with other people will be my future in Los Portales.

## **Matthias: Looking Forward to Tomorrow?**

1986. My first lie coincided with my first day at school. After the morning session, a line of freshly baked first graders was standing at the gate of the schoolhouse. Then, our mistress, Ms. Ludl, asked: »Who's looking forward to coming back tomorrow?« Up went some twenty hands, including my own. I had just lied, of course! I was desperate to get out, and would have gladly never returned to that dark, musty building with its sickening sweetish tinge.

School felt to me like a mild disease. Somehow I managed to come away without too many internal and external bruises, mostly by trying to keep a low profile. Basically, I simply requested to be left alone. Having empathic, liberal minded parents whose ambitions for me were not higher than those I harboured for myself, certainly helped. They had given me the experience of being left in peace while being taken seriously.

Some of my teachers took my silent requests of being left alone as a provocation, others simply swallowed it—maybe they just wanted to be left alone, too—, and some even seemed to understand. Only every now and then could I talk to teachers on a deeper level, until pedagogic routine got the better of them again.

Almost everything that was truly meaningful to me I did not learn in school but somewhere else: in public libraries and bookshops, in cinemas, walking and cycling through town, exploring parks and forests, listening to the radio, watching telly—yes, it's true!—, by talking to intimates, and later by hanging out in Irish pubs and by travelling. Part of my wanting to be left alone expressed itself in the idea of going abroad, leaving »it all« behind. It started at fourteen, when a classmate and I were going to London on our own. In the years to come, I travelled as much as I

possibly could, and later I would live and work in Ireland, Scotland, England, and Brittany.

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2004. At twenty-four, I was hitting rock bottom. On the outskirts of Birmingham, UK, I was—lovesick, weary, and broke—labouring on my Master's thesis. Going there to study was something I had once really wanted. Now I didn't seem to know what I wanted anymore, trying to make my mind up whether I should accept a PhD bursary offered to me, pursuing an academic career.

Then, one night, I had a dream. I dreamt of a homecoming of sorts. In my dream, I found myself in a circular building, much larger than the Colosseum in Rome. Holding a golden cup filled with red wine, I was strolling down a lofty ambulatory. The scenery was filled with intense golden light that seemed to be shining from within. Left and right of the aisle, there were alcoves, bays, and chambers where artists, thinkers, researchers were lingering over their projects, conversing, writing, reading, playing music, silently immersing themselves into their craft or research. No one was in a hurry, no one appeared bored or ill-tempered, everyone delved into their interests, by themselves or in small groups. As I was strolling down, I was looking for my room. I knew with certainty that somewhere in this large building there was my own room. All I had to do, was to follow the aisle long enough. I would recognise it, once I had reached it. I wasn't pressed for time. I had all the time in the world, for I was home already.

Waking up, the dream left me with a deep sense of ease and comfort. Hardly ever have I told my dream to anyone, but the

insight that wisdom and home can be found within myself, has stayed with me.

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I decided against doing a doctorate. The campus assembled of edgy functional buildings in the centre of this industrial city had to do nothing whatsoever with the temple of wisdom I had just visited in my dream. What should I have learned there anyway?

But what to do instead? For want of a better idea, I did what people mostly do: Trading lifetime for money—ten hours a day, five days a week, forty-five weeks a year of dull, meaningless drudgery.

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2007. A few years later I found myself working as a staff translator in Sheffield in the north of England, translating financial, economic, and technical texts, not at all contributing to making the world a better place. And all that just because I had wanted to work with language and live abroad! At one point I caught myself thinking: »I wish I had a fatal disease with only one year left to live, so I would at least know exactly how not to spend it!« I knew I was playing with fire. And I knew I was hitting rock bottom again. A force of nature helped me to make up my mind.

I was returning from a dear friend's wedding in Switzerland, feeling more lost than ever. (On the airplane, an elderly couple was sitting next to me, watching me closely, doing whatever I was doing, when ordering a drink, fastening my seatbelt, adjusting my backrest, etc. At first, I was irritated, then it dawned on me: they were seeking guidance from me—»Me, of all people!«, I silently sighed.) Arriving at Manchester airport, I was taken short by the aftermath of a flood disaster in Sheffield (some

60 kilometres away). There were no trains or buses running. I heard that the city had been locked off for days, a kid had drowned in a public park, people were being evacuated by helicopters. It felt like a dressed rehearsal for the end of the world. But horror and hope were very close. People who had never met before, gave each other assistance, consolation, hugs. It felt natural to care for each other, to do whatever was needed, whatever felt right. This gave me hope and comfort. It reminded me of the essence of life and how the life I was leading was removed from this essence. I was forced to stay the night in Manchester and lucky enough to find a room for the night which I shared with three complete strangers.

The next morning, the sun was shining, trains were running again, everything seemed to go back to normal. Returning to Sheffield, I realised the extent of the calamity. Many roads were still blocked, buses were not running yet. Trailing my suitcase behind me, I took an hour's walk to the office. On empty roads cluttered with driftwood, I passed by groups of people pushing shopping trolleys and carrying plastic bags, trying to save their belongings. Once I had arrived at the office, sitting down on my desk with trembling hands, I was shell-shocked by the sheer discrepancy between the fake reality of office life and the brief spell of real life that had just scratched the surface of apparent normalcy! By the end of the week, I gave notice.

I returned to Germany, promising myself not to do anything at all until I knew what I really, really wanted to do with my life. I was twenty-seven and living from the sparse savings I had managed to make. My family and some friends put me up for a few nights or a few months, enabling me not to strike roots at the wrong place but to keep myself free and open, being able to follow the call of the real thing—whatever that may be—, if and

when it came. From the outside, it may have looked, as if I hadn't been doing much; on the inside, I was going through intense processes, trying to heal old wounds and anchor visions of a good life, without losing heart. Viewed objectively, I was hitting rock bottom again. Viewed subjectively, I was returning to myself. What could be better?

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2008. After a year of, objectively, not doing much, I had an impulse, triggered by a hitchhiker—in hindsight, I sometimes consider him a sort of guardian angel—I picked up for a little way. He told me about the scientific journal he was working for. I had always wanted to work with books, »but maybe«, I was thinking at that moment, »magazines aren't that bad either.« Shortly after, I went to bookshop at Munich central station, determined to buy the first magazine that truly caught my interest and to get into contact with editors. It happened to be a magazine, now discontinued, made in Klein Jasedow.—»I think you're writing just at the right point in time«, read the reply to my email a couple of days later.

A few weeks on, I visited Klein Jasedow for the first time. On a night in August, just after the first »summer serenade« at the Klanghaus had ended, I was sitting on a children's swing looking into the sky, deeply black and densely strewn with stars. The strange forces of attraction and intuition had brought me there. Everything felt thrillingly new and strangely familiar at the same time—in this way, it felt akin to my dream. I may never be able to fully fathom where such feelings come from, but I do know that feelings of homecoming are incorruptible. »This is a place where I could find home«, something inside me said.

And so it happened. A few months later I moved to Klein Jasedow to join the process of building up this multi-facetted learning community in the powerful landscape of a structurally weak part of rural Europe—in a self-motivated, communal, dignified way. Among other things, I was part of the group of people who founded Oya magazine, translated a number of books that are deeply meaningful to me—and hopefully to their readers, too—, and during the past two-and-a-half years, I was involved in setting up a free Democratic School in Klein Jasedow. My main ambition in joining the founding process was to create a school that is—and stays—a place where kids love to come back to »tomorrow« and where they don't have to tell lies for structural reasons. Just for my personal ease of mind, I might ask them one day: »Who's looking forward to coming back tomorrow?«

## **Valentina: Recovering Music**

In my childhood, from seven years on, I played piano very professionally. My teachers and parents were strict—I had to play every day. They controlled my practising time to ensure that my progress was as fast as possible. After nine years I quitted with so much hate against music boiling in me. The ambition to play had been imposed on me, the music I played did not come from myself—a very unhealthy situation.

I grew up in Austria, but my parents come from Croatia. I am not upset with them any more because I can understand the pressure they experienced as immigrants and how much they tried to be successful in modern society.

Today as a student of alternative economy I discovered music again. I had a beautiful talk with one of my teachers that

made me want to play something for her. I played a song for her on the piano. Afterwards she said to me: »Your song was like life. It had ups and downs, it had loud and silent, aroused and soft parts, like the days and months in life have light and dark periods. Everything in the song is beautiful as everything in life has its own beauty. There is no right or wrong, just the play, the multitude of unfolding sounds.« This deeply touched me. Maybe I will be able to reappropriate music as a language of my heart inspite of all negative experiences of my childhood. In my future life I want to support people to express themselves authentically without the fear of doing something right or wrong. We need to create spaces in our society where this freedom of expression is possible, where people are allowed to be themselves without being judged.

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## **Michal: Swords**

We had a summer camp for kids, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's »Hobbit«, before the films by Peter Jackson. So, the imagination of the children was all favorably inclined. The whole camp game lead towards a decisive big battle with the evil empire. The supervisors wanted to avoid possible bloody injuries and therefore the plot was changed so the great battle ends with a peaceful settlement. Children had been making wooden weapons for a couple of days. They carved letters, symbols, and their signatures into them. The excitement in the camp kept increasing. Head of the camp started to worry that the scenario will have its own flow and the fight with evil will culminate by a spontaneous devastating attack coming form the enthusiastic kids. However, the supervisors masterfully played their role and they managed to negotiate the peace. Perhaps pacifist tendencies have deepened the theme of final play and the game ended by burning the dange-

rous and already unnecessary wooden weapons in the final sacred fire. But they did not expect there would be so many tears for burning the masterpieces. The overall camp programme was a great success in the end. Yet when sharing memories, especially boys, recall the emotions of sadness and disappointment at the burning of weapons.

## **Tomás: Embracing Not-Knowing**

I feel like one of the luckiest persons in the world. I was born in Buenos Aires in a big family of Italian descent. All my life I received a lot of love. My family didn't struggle economically, so I had many opportunities and could travel a lot. I studied business administration and was convinced to find a good job after my studies.

One thing that really changed my life happened while I was working for the government in Buenos Aires in a program on social and urbanistic integration. Its aim was to integrate and develop »Villa 31«, the largest and most notorious informal settlement in Buenos Aires. This »villa miseria« or »slum« is located next to a thriving business district. For six years I walked along its boundaries and hoped that I don't get killed or robbed.

I started to work there by chance. In the beginning it was a three months' job. Afterwards I had planned to go Milan to study fashion design—how weird to think of it now! So I started to work on this programme that is changing so many people's lives: There are 40 000 people living in Villa 31. They live in contexts and circumstances that are very different from mine, but I discovered that, in essence, we are the same. When playing with children it was exactly the same as playing with my cousins. The differences come a bit later. I saw near-children and teenagers turned into zombies by drug abuse. I saw people vegetating in

the streets. That was shocking. I always knew I was lucky, but I hadn't known how lucky I really was. I have always been a social person but suddenly the miseries of other people had faces. This was a wake-up call! So, I decided against going to Milan and continued working on the programme for another year and a half. It was an amazing time. Although it was not my dream job, I was glad to do it.

In my time in university I thought it to be a normal thing to work for money, but in the Villa 31 I felt for the first time that I was really working for something larger than myself. This changed my view on work and economy. It is still a research trip for me to find a meaningful field to work. What are my main abilities? Can I specialise myself?

Through my uncle's recommendation I learned about the alternative business school of the Knowmads in Amsterdam. I decided to go there to find more orientation and do ask myself:

What is important to me? What are my gifts? What do I want to bring into the world? My best times were when I connected with other people. I always loved talking to people from different countries and backgrounds. I have always been awful at formal education. At school or college, I flunked every single subject except gym classes.

But now that I am on a different way of learning it feels so right, so natural. I feel safe and accepted. I never had that much difficulties in accepting who I was, but maybe that was because I had never given that much attention to who I really was. Now I am getting to know that guy better.

From what I learn these days, even more questions arise. The future is even darker than before. Not in the negative sense but in the sense of not knowing what will come. I really like that. In Buenos Aires, I went to theatre classes for five years. And I found

out that there are a lot of similarities between impro theatre and alternative education, because the art is so personal, so subjective that there is no right or wrong. Once you find something that is true—you, artistically, it is really nice. I want to improvise and listen to what is there. Even though I am having more doubts than ever before and the future is more dark and blurry than before, I am gaining confidence. Not because everything will be fine—I don't know that—but because I am being true to myself.

In the next year I will travel a lot and try to make it in big cities in all parts of the world, try to find work and get to know new people. After having been to Klein Jasedow, this small rural community in Northeast Germany, it is also an option for me to visit some communities. I love being in international communities with a lot of different people, but to spend time in the countryside together with people who are rooted at their place also has a special quality. In Klein Jasedow I could run barfeet all the time and liked to be in nature. Some things were unusual for me like compost toilets. I found it amazing how the community is organised, how many things we do in workshops like holding hands in a circle before a meal is a natural part of daily life. It seems that the people here are really connected to their feelings, to each other and to nature, that they found a way to make a living that is meaningful to them. I really felt free there, I could be myself, there was no judgement, no unspoken rules. The unspoken rule was »be yourself«. I think this is an important thing for any place of learning, may it be in the countryside or in a big city.

## **Mac: Making A Garden Flower**

I have a foot in two worlds. There have been times when those two worlds have been at war with each other. One part of me turns always to the mystery of living, pauses in mid-breath, and

stares awed, shocked at the beauty of earth, water, air and fire. Another part loves the business of business, winning through, communicating, making deals, striving to deliver results, and celebrating them. Of course, intrinsically the two worlds do not have to be in conflict, but in my case they were. Looking back, I cannot see how it might have been otherwise.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s I had worn many different cloaks, experimenting, tasting life, getting bruised, picking myself up again, walking on. I couldn't have cared less about careers or money. I just wanted freedom and the knowledge that I was walking with destiny towards some kind of deeper presence with life. The trouble was that, imbued with a fertile and hyperactive imagination, I could usually fool myself into believing anything. I had intimations of what my life could be, but I couldn't find the way, and I couldn't find the will.

Working as a trainee gardener at Plas Newydd, a National Trust estate, gave me to think. It also reminded me of how much I loved and appreciated working outdoors with trees, shrubs and flowers. When the training came to an end I took up a position as a gardener at a management training centre in North Wales, Limestone Manor.

I walked into the walled garden at Limestone Manor and knew in some sense that I found a place where I could nurture a garden that could speak to others. It was a stage waiting. That this place drew a large number of business executives for leadership, team and personal development, seemed perfect. I was angry with the devastation that big business so casually wreaked upon our environment, and upon fragile communities both at home and abroad.

Time passed and I was shocked to find that the business executives I met were often more generous, more open, more inte-

resting than the subculture with which I had chosen to identify myself. Eventually the temptation became too strong. I went over the wall, changed costume, and began doing something different. I never left the garden; it remained in my heart.

Going over the wall eventually took me to London, first as a visitor, and then to live. The garden became a memory and I almost grew to my suit.

Shortly before the winter break of 1993, my consulting company Pathways was facing the usual cash-flow tensions that accompanied December and January. As I sat at my desk and leaned back, summoning the courage to take another look into my »to do« list, the phone rang and I had a conversation that was to lead to friendships that have literally changed my life. A few days later I went along to an office located near the Lloyds building not far from Tower Bridge and provided some information on psychometric testing. We had a stimulating and humorous conversation and I walked away with a proposal to write, that if successful, would clear Pathways' monthly overheads for a year.

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Five years later they were still one of our principal clients and as a company they were spectacularly successful. DP Mann UA was sold and with a generosity unrivalled in my experience of the business world, David Mann, supported by his friend and co-founder Robert Mackenzie, gave everybody in the company, a share in their good fortune. Everybody did extremely well out of it and yet, perhaps predictably, remarkably few believed that they had received enough. I too was a beneficiary of David and Robert's generosity. As our friendship deepened I had revealed more of what lay behind my work with them, and perhaps in re-

cognition of values that they believed deserved support, and as a thank-you for my work in assisting their success, I was asked a question.

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»What do you need?« David asked. »Land«, I answered, and he wrote me a cheque of £ 250,000

»It's yours. You can blow it if you wish. Go to Vegas, whatever. But, if as we think, you choose to bring some of the ideas you've spoken of into form, then we'd like to be involved and you can consider this a down-payment.«

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About a year later, Azul—my wife then—picked up a letter that had arrived with the morning post. It was a few pages describing a property of fifty acres in Devon called Embercombe, and she called me, excited, tense, wondering. At £520,000 it was twice as much as we had, yet for some reason we pressed ahead. As I walked through Embercombe's woods with Harry, listening to his sales pitch, enjoying his hyperbole and observing how little he knew about his own back yard, I found it hard not to hug him and say, »Yes, we'll take it. It's ours.«

I drove off and called David. He had mentioned that if I found somewhere a little more expensive I should call him.

»David, I'm in Devon. Just been to a very beautiful place—woods, lake, meadows, airstrips, hangars ...«

»Hangars?«

»Yes. One of the previous owners was an ex-Second World War fighter pilot and he built himself his own airstrip.«

»How much is it?«

Pause, as I prevaricate, knowing it's hopeless and reluctant to let it all go so soon.

»£ 520,000.«

»I think it's a step too far, Mac. Sorry, but you'd be better looking. It's out there somewhere. You'll find it.«

The phone went dead and me with it. I regretted calling him so soon. I could have enjoyed the fantasy a few hours longer at least. Later that day the phone went again.

»Is it really that beautiful ... ?« And I knew we were in with a chance.

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April 6th 1999, Embercombe, my new home and my first morning. I woke with a start. Seconds later I was standing upright in front of the bathroom washbasin, staring at my reflection in the mirror. I then drew my second breath. There was a moment of suspended silence and a stillness expanded around me. No-one else in the house. Alone. Alone inside this huge gift of land. For some years I had been living in a narrowboat in Little Venice, London, and the comparison in space and reach was hard to absorb. I felt like the child who stands before their first big gift, uncomprehending, lost for words. Moving slowly now and relishing each moment I descended the stairs to the kitchen and made coffee. Then carrying it to the front door I undid the latch and stepped outside, and the full weight of this magicalcombe rushed to meet me. I was assaulted by birdsong, by the tropical intensity of late spring in Devon, by the busyness of countless millions of beings engaged with life. With each second I felt myself go deeper into the mystery of the garden's presence. The birds, and then the tress, the wild geese, the flowers, the insects, then the impact of grass growing, drinking in the soft sunlight, the earth itself, pulsing warm and fragrant, the rocks, water,

air. I have never felt so rich in all my life. For an hour or more I sat intermittently on the small wall by the open door, or walked amongst the gardens that curved around the southern and eastern aspects of the house. At one point something must have jogged my attention because I suddenly became aware of all the acres that stretched on out of sight. As I stood taking it all in I felt the responsibility that I carry for this little-big piece of earth.

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I think it was the overwhelming sense of things growing and multiplying that prompted me to return abruptly to the house searching for one of the few tools that I had brought from London. Rummaging amongst boxes and bags I found a spade and triumphantly went outside again. I had a vague sense that I had better get to work. With twenty acres of woodland, a lake, small stream, gardens, twenty-five acres of pasture, and an airstrip complete with three hangars, I advanced on Embercombe brandishing my spade and searching for my first task. It wasn't difficult to find something that needed doing, but it was extremely difficult to decide which should be undertaken first. For some unfathomable reason I started digging; fairly randomly as I recollect. For what reason I don't now, but it didn't last long. Twenty minutes of hard work saw me pause and lean on the spade handle as I took breath. My gaze shifted up from the ground and once again I was consumed by the erupting fecundity that hummed and buzzed in every nook. I could see a great deal, and at that moment I forgot about my spade and started thinking more in terms of a tractor.

From then on I have been confronted the whole way with the challenge of brining a dream into a practical working reality. I was shocked by the size of this challenge and its complexity. Before Embercombe arrived I thought I was quite clear on how I would use such a piece of land should I ever manage to secure it, but returning later in the evening to pick up the spade where I'd

dropped it some hours before, it felt daunting. People visited and almost all loved the place. They were impressed, and they would ask questions. Lots of questions, such as:

- »Who will come?«
- »Where will they stay?«
- »Where will they eat?«
- »What will they come for?«
- »How will it work financially?«
- »Is it your company, Pathways, that will run Embercombe, or a trust, or what?«
- »Who will live here?«
- »Who will look after the land?«
- »Will you have animals?«
- »What will you do if you don't get planning permission?«
- »What's it about anyway?«

I did my best to answer all of them, occasionally employing much more improvisation than I felt comfortable with. The truth was that I needed to arrive first.

When an idea finds its time, people and events will assemble to make it possible. I asked creation to bring me the people I needed to make this garden flower—a garden of exploration, questioning, listening and inspiration. I am indebted to many who answered this call.

## **Carolina: Cycles**

I have been thinking a lot about cycles—personal cycles and natural cycles. I grew up in a very alternative family in Buenos Aires, Argentina. My parents were part of a new-age community where spiritual development, yoga, rituals, vegetarianism, astrology, therapeutic work were important. I have had this kind of background all my life. I was always attracted to the arts and

creative manifestations, such as poetry or painting. I studied design. And worked a lot for companies. It seemed the easiest way to be independent and earn my own money. Although I didn't like cities very much I was always living in the city. I have always been dealing with the contradictions between society and nature, environment and social encounters.

After finishing my university studies I was looking for a 180-degree-change. I went to Indonesia on a cultural programme to learn about traditional art. I was questioning everything and wanted to start from zero. I wanted to know what is on the other side of the world. Living in Asia was a fascinating experience and a cultural shock at the same time. The end of this period was actually the beginning of the present cycle of my learning journey. Currently, I am breaking a lot of rules, doing away with concepts, trying to reformulate my own principles, questioning how things work and trying to find my own position on it. I have learned a lot and acquired a lot of tools and have the feeling I now need to bring it all down to earth. I want to do so many things but am still looking for ways to express it materially.

In Indonesia, met my future husband who is Lithuanian. We travelled together and then he moved to Argentina with me. We got married and lived there for a few years. Then we decided to move to Lithuania so I could get to know his family and his background. This was a dramatic change for me. I quit my job in the Argentinian Ministry of Economics, was reconsidering my profession completely and started to look for new ways altogether. Since I have been living in Lithuania, we have been trying to develop some community projects. I have been connected to radical political activists, but I didn't like their purely political way. I prefer the artistic way of being radical. Now I am working as a teacher and I feel very comfortable working with kids.

In a good way, the future is very uncertain for me. I have the feeling that now is the time to get involved into something bigger—working not only on a private level, but on a community level. I really appreciate the chance of developing projects together that make a social and a community impact.

## **Johannes: 0,01 Percent**

in the late 1980s, a nine-year old member of our community decided that he wanted to learn at home with us, instead of having to constantly act contrary to his feelings and intuitions at school. This was fine with us. But it was not at all compatible with Germany's strict compulsory school attendance law. According to this relict stemming from Nazi legislation of 1938, children may even be handcuffed and forced to school by the police, while their parents may be deprived of legal custody!

After exchanging dozens of letters with the authorities, we decided to go to court. Our lawyer, Hans Moller, was one of the most competent experts in school law. Meeting him for the first time, he made it very clear to us that, at present, he did not see the slightest chance of us winning a case of school refusal. But his opinion could not shake our confidence. We decided that, if nothing else, at least for the sake of humanitarian ethics, we would try to create public awareness for young Tilmann's right to self-determination. We were resolved to learn from previous cases, reviewing the arguments used so far to find out whether there really was no way at all of finding a loophole which the authorities had not yet barred. When saying goodbye to our lawyer, I once again asked him: Notwithstanding the factual hopelessness he had just stated, what was his deep inner feeling about our chance of winning this case? Pausing for five tense seconds, he replied: »Zero point zero one percent.«

At this moment, a black curtain fell before my eyes, and in the depth of the blackness, I noticed the subtlest ray of light, piercing through a tiny little hole in the black curtain right into my heart. All of a sudden, an immense power took hold of my whole body, and with every fibre of my physical existance I knew: This is a chance! He hasn't said zero! We'll make it, and we won't make the slightest mistake. And, using the future perfect, I could see us having gained freedom. I knew there was a way. All we had to do was find it. I could physically sense that even the faintest of possibilities contained a chance to actively shape the world.

In September 1989, the case ended with a verdict of not guilty—Germany's first acquittal ever in a case of school refusal (decision number »2 OWi 46 Js 32069/88«). The district judge substantiated his decision by quoting from article 126 of the Bavarian Constitution: »Healthy children are a people's most delectable good.«

## **Edith: Learning Just Happening**

I am one of those people who don't know about their calling. I am almost 50 now, and I still don't know if I do the right thing. 25 years ago I decided to leave the town and live in a village. I wanted to have a garden and grow my own vegetables. In my country agriculture does not pay well, so gardening is just a hobby, but it is nice to harvest fresh and new crops.

I had few jobs in my live: I started working at age 18, begin with a shovel and hoe in floriculture, (loved it, but not enough to keep this job forever, but it was a year and half of experience that is still useful in the garden) I was a factory worker, a teacher as well, first in school and than in an orphanage, and one year in center for children with special needs. Today I am a social worker. I like to help the poor people in our community in a wide

range of situations. Problem soving starts with identifying people who need help and to ask what kind of help they need. Then I can show clients our community resources, help them to apply for benefits and assit in any paperwork. Another part is coope-rate with different governmental institutions to get financial support—state allocation for kids, social aid, heating support, food, healthcare. We have to intervene when children are in danger of neglect, traffic, abuse or other crisis situations in collabora-tion with the representatives of the child protection agencies.

(Meanwhile I am drawing, I have a little bit of an artistic inclinations. As I'm working usually with difficult people and people who are in stressfull and difficult situations, sometimes their stress is contagiuos, so I'm looking for relaxing activities after a hard day of work. That is when I'm drawing and painting glass and porcelain, and I'm playing with polymer clay on cups or make jewelries, This is my own »art therapy«. I am not thinking any more of any problem I faced that day. When I finish a plate, a cup or a glass drawing new energy awakes within me.

Funny how life works: A started with nursing and cultivating flowers and now I'm drawing them and modeling them, often using our traditional floral motifs: tulip and the tree of life (and in time I changed shovel with pen and brush).

I think many people lose their call because of the expectations of society. To make this change we need to change education. I often think about this when I see the daily life of my fifteen year old daughter. She spends as long time in school as I spend at work, but afterwards she still has to do homework and study at home. She learns Hungarian as the native language and obliga-tory Romanian, as the country official language, and as foreign language English and German at school since many years, but when we travelled to Germany and switched on the radio she

could not understand a word. I asked her: »What do you learn five hours in school a week in your German lessons?« She said: »Vocabulary, grammar ...« This is not a meaningful way of education, she will forget most of what she is being told in school. How can we encourage people of all ages to believe in their inner motivations instead of being blocked by the expectations of society?

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I never studied English in school but I do speak the language—not perfect, but not bad. How? I listened music and watched movies. In our country movies are shown with subtitled so we can hear the original voices of the actors. English words, expressions, sentences and parts of songs stay in my mind and get memorized, because I like them. This is for me an example of how learning just happens—playfully.

## **Kurt: What Am I Doing Here?**

I want to talk about my personal learning journey. I am a nomad and I am at Knowmads. My personal learning journey started when I was ten. I was born in Romania during Communist times. Life was pretty much as here in Klein Jasedow: We had animals, multiple generations living together, very strong family ties. I was lucky to have grown up on the countryside in a very caring and protected environment. However, we were a minority of Austrian descent in the Romania region Siebenbürgen who spoke a dialect that had not evolved for 300 years. Life in Romania was hard for us. So my parents emigrated in 1988 when I was ten. I was taken out of a protected environment and taken into a rough new reality, which was called Germany. We left with two suitcases, leaving behind houses, property, possessions and started from scratch again. I just noticed a few years ago, that my parents had to navigate through a completely dif-

ferent environment. Being in puberty back then I had a pretty hard time. My parents told me you need to go to school so you will have a better life than we had. That's what I did. I went to school and university and got a well-paid job with an international company. I left my parents at twenty-one and have lived in so many countries since then. My last station was Chicago in the United States where I was working for six years in a very strategic high position as an engineer for an international corporations.

Two days ago, we did an interesting exercise: Take three sheets of paper: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. Then write stories on them and combine them. I put a few notes down without giving it much thought. The task was to find out the pivots, the points in time that mad changes to your life. I realized there had been two such points.

I had a good friend in Berlin who just got married and had his first child. He just went back to a normal job from being a freelancer. He worked from his homeoffice and the job was okay and very well paid. I thought: »Wow that's a lot of money for staying at home and spending time with your family!« Before I went back to the US, I went to two friends' weddings in France and Spain. Before that I spent a ten days' holiday in rural France. As I was sitting one night I thought: »What the fuck am I doing?! I am working seventy hours a week, am living out of suitcases, without friends, family, vacation when I could have a beautiful life in Europe!« Two weeks later I quit my job and started to make a long list: I wanted to go to Asia, to South America, I want to go back to the Alps, and so on ...

As life happens, it always turns out differently, I did not do a single thing from my list. Instead I went to Africa to work as a consultant in rural development. This was the second thing that

opened my eyes. I asked myself: »What the hack is going on in this part of the world?!« I was exposed to a lot of poverty, bribery, violence and death. And I saw how important knowledge was. Returning back from Africa I wanted to set up my own company doing knowledge transfer between industrialised and third-world countries. For several reasons it did not work out.

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So I went briefly back to the US where I volunteered in coaching. Having lunch with a colleague, she told me about Kaospilots. I was all enthusiastic. She said: »You should try Knowmads!« I checked out the website. There was a lot about entrepreneurship that resonated strongly with me. There was also a lot about self-development. I thought: »Self-delvelopment, what's that for? I don't need that!« But the opposite was true. I scrapped all my business ideas and for me the most important thing at Knowmads turned out to be self-development. That is to say, I was struggling quite hard. I came from an environment where I used to have a say, my voice counted. All of a sudden I was out with those hippies, talking about feelings and emotions. After the first month, we had a pitching event. Where companies come in and presented themselves. I was sitting in the audience thinking: »What, I should work for free?! Are these guys crazy?!« But then I realized that I had decided myself to leave my comfort zone and to look for connections and community rather than high payment and hierarchical structures.

There is a little story that illustrates the social aspect of Knowmads: Accommodation in Amsterdam is quite scarce and I am a very lazy person. So I waited until the very last day before I had to finally move out of my room. I then realized that I had to ask for help. I had never asked for anyone's help. So we started a project called »tribal coach surfing«. The rules were: one night, one person, one coach, one coaching. That was how I got

to know the sixteen persons from eleven countries of our »tribe«. Finding a family and making a home is very important for me as I haven't had a home for twenty-five years.

At Knowmads, I have embarked on a very good learning journey and gained a lot from alternative education. However, if someone told me conventional schools and universities suck, I would say, I beg to differ. I believe both have a right to exist. It is important to have conventional and alternative ways of education and to integrate alternative values into conventional settings. An important lesson from Knowmads is that the world is not black and white. One of the most impressive things ever was an exercise I did back in the US called »perspective work«: Tell me something about yourself which is not true. And once you told me that, I ask you to think twice and tell me what is true about it nonetheless. Because the closer you look you find what's true about the things you think are not true.

It is good to be in a heterogeneous pool of people because they trigger each other. And I know at Knowmads I trigger a lot of people. I learn from their feedback and at the same time I believe they are learning a lot about themselves through me.

## **Martina: Setting Off Without A Map**

I want to tell the story of my personal development. My mother is an artist and my father an engineer. I grew up in Soviet times. From childhood on my mother expected that I would lead a »normal life«. She had broken with her normal life by going to Art Academy. Somehow she expected me to stay on the normal path, by becoming something normal like a lawyer or a doctor. So I studied sociology. Something I really liked although no one understands what it is about. I then started to work with an IT company. I was working, earned money, got married, led a nor-

mal life, doing a lot of shopping, being a Catholic, as my parents had expected from me. Then my marriage fell apart and I lived with another man.

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This was the time when my kids started to go to kindergarten and I said to myself: »No matter what, I will never ever send them to a conventional school!« Then I found out about Waldorf education, the Waldorf seminars and I sent my children to Waldorf school. I realized this is how I want to live: I want to touch the earth. I want to have that feeling from my childhood again when I connected very strongly to an oak tree. This is the real me. Not sitting on a computer. I was completely fed up with my old life. When my third daughter came, I was leaving my job and I was starting to work as an educator in a Waldorf kindergarten.

Then the next crisis happened. My husband fell in love with another woman and I was left alone. I was completely down. Although it was very difficult I realized there was a door opening. All the structures I had created fell completely apart like a house of cards. I was alone with three kids. And then half a year later I met Hannes Heyne in a Waldorf education course. We shared some interesting rituals. I was excited. I discovered that it was possible to sleep outdoors on wild meadows and bathe in rivers. We went away for weeks without a plan, without a map, completely free. As it happens, I got pregnant with my now two-and-a-half year old daughter Elma. I had always been open for children. I have felt this natural calling and I remained open for this calling no matter whether it was comfortable or not. Of course, Elma was the biggest present for me and my daughters. I believe that she had chosen to come and appear as a particular person into this world. I do not regard her as my child. I treat her as everybody's child. Her father is away a lot. She calls my ex-husband also »daddy«.

This is a very personal process—it is the improvisation of my life, it is the way I am learning who I am, step by step looking beyond the boxes of stereotypes. For me this is the way to live and to create. I have always lived in international contexts. Now I am back on track of life as it has to be for myself. How I will settle, how I will live is completley open, it is no longer confined by preconceived rules. Even though I am with four kids I am completely open. Now is the phase to overcome my fears. But I just let everything happen as it comes.

## **Sabina: Memories Of A Blessed Land**

In the beginning of 2012 I woke up one night after hearing in the news that Spain has reached the highest youth unemployment rate, and I asked myself, what can I do?

Up to then, I already had a passion in education and supported the young leaders of tomorrow in schools, universities and other organisations who were dedicated to that cause.

That night I wrote a proposal for a guided reflecion time for young people—a catalyst programme. But what should I do with it? Someone suggested me to connect with Mac Macartney at Embercombe. This was supposed to be a place in Devon, initiated by a corageous visionary, where such programs were taking place. When I did, Mac immediately replied and offered a meeting—and I then got wet feet. I pulled back, thinking: what may I be able to offer to this man? They are already doing it there.

Some months later, I tried again and did go to meet Mac.

I don't know what happened there, but I knew I wanted to co-operate with that man. When he said: »I want you to work with me, but I can't offer you any other work than voluntary work«, my heart was calling »yes«, but my mind was in fear of giving up my job and my financial security.

By then I already had booked my volunteer work in Kenya, (volunteering was something I've done throughout my life), collaborating with the Summit School and working with Martine Kappel from Human Needs Project in the slums of Nairobi. This journey made me realize that my deepest values were not aligned in my, then, official work with the government and businesses. I thought—why going out to Kenya when I could support the young right there in UK?

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When I came back, I called Mac and told him, I was ready to support his vision in his »Heart of Leadership« programme. It is calling for brave leaders, since they are needed to make the shift in our world, leaders with the ability to profoundly move and inspire others, who are not only strong in their professional business skills, but they are also deeply in touch with their values, wisdom, and humanity. They are firmly grounded and able to source themselves from within and walk the Twin Trail—the path of outer and inner change.

Of course it scared me to the bones, not knowing how I would financially survive, but I felt a deep knowing and trust in my decision. Over the two years time in Embercombe, that was one of my biggest learning: trust.

First I became Mac's official personal assistant, together with another woman. We both had no experience in being such assistants but that's what we were considered. This first year gave me the honour to work closely with Mac, applying myself mostly with my International business development background: creating new partners, allies, links with universities, organisations and started venturing into the EU funding projects.

However, my true wish to come to Embercombe, has been to support the youths and I felt attracted to work more with the young woofers coming here. Together with another volunteer at

Embercombe, who was holding the volunteers work schedule, we created a volunteer programme, where I developed the »inner work« programme (or the inner trail of the »Twin Trail«), which included mentoring, coaching, curious conversations, listening partnerships, solo time, etc.

Being a global gipsy I just loved being there for the international crowd of young people, helping them in their path.

Embercombe is a charity and it is managed by a trust formed by trustees and a chair. Originally Mac created a non-hierarchical core team, which worked well for the first seven years of existence. However, the structure changed in 2013 to a management team due to the lack of accountability in the core team and the endless decision time, core team members would take.

Mac then decided to step back from the core team and—due to health issues- also from corporate work. That meant that I was working less and less with him directly and more with the new director, who did not come from an international background. I felt not heard in my ideas to make Embercombe more internationally and out of the frustration I focused more on working with the volunteers, and developing new programme ideas.

The young people who came to Embercome just loved the land, and so did I—its natural beauty and the energy of it. People were drawn to it and somehow transformed. Embercombe was acting like a metamorphosis for many, me including. I loved the feeling of freedom walking and working there, the spirit of »community« on the land, which I desperately missed in the office. It did not matter if I worked in the garden, cleaned compost toilets, helped in the kitchen, or at the new building site, called »The Linhay«.

At the end of 2014, things became more unsatisfying. Since my beginings at Embercombe, I've always wondered why the

»office people or management, would not take time to sit in morning Circle as all the volunteers did. For me it was an essential part of our working and being together. Also I felt huge masculine energy in how things were done or decided, sometimes even by the women.

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Mac created in 2007 the Embercombe Council based on the ancient Council of law, meeting four times per year. The original council were a group of people who stepped forward, knowing Embercombe well, seeking to find a way in the changes that are happening within our daily lives, with the many complex issues surrounding our Earth, whilst holding open a gateway to our future generations to come. Our Council group was founded using the sixteen stones, each place in balance with one woman and one man. The people were chosen through elected process. Council was guided by a presiding chief and seats were representative for trustees, core team, friends of Embercombe, fathers, elders, clients and partners, artisans and artists, young adults, freelancers, the nearby village residents, keepers of the mission, storytellers and rememberers, healers, representatives of the land, and mothers with small children. That mean council members were people from fifteen to eighty years old.

Mac was travelling for months and when he came back in November 2014 to the Council meeting, he made an announcement, which inspired me fully again—to take down the current Council and to create a wise female elder council who would choose and support the men on the land to manage—like the natives would do. Of course, that announcement caused huge uproar at Embercombe, fear, competition and a very unsettled period of time started then.

I felt the strong need to call in the feminine to the land. One of the Council female members, supported me hugely in making

this happen. We invited women to sit on the land in ceremony, to call in the feminine, listening what may be needed. We were holding ceremony in the stone circle, sitting at the fire all night. Many women came who had collaborated with Embercombe in the past and had brought huge energy and love to the place, but left again, many of them heart broken. Around the fire, women released anger, tears, and shared their stories. For many, it was a very healing long night.

Pat McCabe, a native American, who gave a talk at Embercombe, was coming with me to the stone circle, praying and listening and supporting the call for the feminine. As a symbol, we buried a pumpkin under the fire place in the stone circle.

Together with the female council member, we tried some other attempts to bring a wise women circle together. It was my hope that we would be able to hold the space until the New Council would be created.

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In May 2015, the energy at Embercombe started to be more and more split, small groups of people tried to push their own ideas forward. The chair of the trustees called for a meeting day to try to hear all voices in order to make a future decision.

Volunteers and staff started to raise their voice and unhappiness of current leadership, me included. Soon after, the director was made redundant and an interim director took over.

I can't remember exactly the time, but it was a moment, I was preparing for leaving to Europe and I suddenly had a huge urge to speak to Mac. I had an incredible insight during my morning meditation. So I called him to see if he would be able to meet me that very last day I was still in the UK. He only had an hour free

at 7 am. I never forget the sky that morning, the sun looked like a huge perl held in its open shell.

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I asked Mac if he set the stone at Embercombe's gate, a stone dedicated to Mary Wollstonecraft and her work »A Vindication of the Rights of Woman« (1792), in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they lack education. She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagines a social order founded on reason.

Mac denied, he told me that the native Americans who also created the stone circle, were placing that stone. I wondered why, and asked him, but he did not know. I also asked why he thinks that so many women then felt attracted to come here and felt »driven out again«.

He looked at me for a long moment in silence. Then—and I will always remember his words—he said: »Oh my God, Sabina, maybe it's me blocking it.«

At this moment, I knew, my time at Embercombe had come to a conclusion.

I thanked him and I prayed that his awareness will now bring the so desired female leadership to Embercombe.

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Fast forward to October 2017: Leaving Embercombe, I kept my involvement as the EU Funding partner representing Embercombe. I started to capture Embercombe's situation in October 2015, choosing Sacha Post as the film director.

Now, two years later, I visited Embercombe and had the honour of meeting Helen, the new female leader. She has created a new leadership team: almost all women.

I sat on my old sitting spot on the land, listening to the land. I got the message, that it had waited for her to come. I then asked the land what it needed: »Nurturing love, expressed ideally with everyone on the land being a dreamer for a day, in silence.«

I bless this land Embercombe, it will stay in my heart for ever.

## **Ugnius: Becoming Yourself**

Thinking about my learning journey I have always felt a division: I live in the city but my heart belongs to the countryside. I think this is based on my childhood experience. I consider myself to be of the last generation that experienced the ongoing tradition of rural life in Lithuania. This lifestyle differed from the lifestyles of people moving from cities back to villages. My grandparents had always lived in a village, and as a child I helped them doing physical labour when other kids were playing with toys. I spent my summer holidays helping in the field and having fun afterwards. During my teenage years, life in Lithuania changed a lot. Everyone got Internet connections, and life became full of imported products. The flow of information and products increased so much that it was no longer possible to get to the roots of things. This produced a lot of confusion. In a way this kind of natural village life is one of the roots of my identity. The rural lifestyle has left a very strong impression on me. It may differ in a lot of ways from my own values. In rural Lithuania, there is, for instance, a lot of sexism and alcoholism to be found. Yet, there is something that makes me want to go back to rural life. Not mimicking my grandparents' lifestyles. My education and my background are very different from their's. In my teenage years I questioned everything and wanted to break all connections to my parents and to start my own life. I went to university, started to travel. I got involved in a horizontally structured music

project. All decisions were taken together by all the members in a circle. I think it is better to learn things together instead of being instructed by one teacher. It is good to have ideas and practices. But learning itself is more about relating to other people than gaining certain skills. This was a very different approach to learning. It is my background and very often I feel split into two. Living in a natural setting feeding yourself with what you grow with your own hands is a good thing but it is important to me to put myself in different social environments from time to time. When I was on a programme in Indonesia, I built with friends a bamboo house in a very dense Indonesian village with Muslim population. Learning how to really respect other people and their cultures was a big learning process for me. Of course, in this process, I learned more about myself than about other people. This has helped me. This has informed the way I learn things. But I am still struggling to find the true meaning of education and learning. Education has become so much institutionalized. This still narrows my understanding of eduction. The school in which I spent twelf years of my life has, for better or worse, become an important part of my personality. In a way I was built there—it is hard to overcome this imprinting.

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## **Zoltan: Organising An Autumn Fair**

I grew up in the Niraj valley and always I was attracted by the richness and high diversity of the vegetables, fruits with different tastes. One of those villages is the village of Galesti. Galesti is a village in Transylvania which is in transition from the traditional lifestyle to the modern lifestyle as most of villages from Transylvania. The people are used to say that the modernization needs sacrifices and the typical characteristics of the rural life, to be close to the nature, to have a large self-sufficiency in the

food and to have an alive community life, are slowly sacrificed. But the people slowly understand that the food which came from the supermarket don't have the same taste as the fruits and vegetables from their garden and the TV programmes can't replace the community events. In the village does still exist a large number of local receipts which are known only by the old persons and slowly are going to be lost. In the gardens the local people are still cultivating old species of vegetables and fruits which are tastier than the products purchased from the supermarket and produced in industrial way, but less and less people are cultivating this kind of vegetables, most of the people are using the hybrid seeds purchased from the shops. The people from the rural learning project were thinking how can be changed this situation, how can be motivated the people to don't give up for ever those elements of the rural life which offer diversity, specificity and stability to the local community. After several discussions of the people from the rural learning project with local people it was identified a major problem, the lack of opportunity for the member of the community to exchange information and to transfer all this knowledge to the young generation. So after many discussions came out the idea that the best would be to organize a celebration, a local fair for the villagers when they can came together and can exchange experiences and opinions. But which time would be suitable for these kind of celebration? The conclusion was that the best time would be the period when the gardens are plenty with vegetables, somewhere at the end of summer and beginning of autumn. Finally it was decided to have the local fair at the first weekend of September and the first fair was organised in 2011.

To the fair were invited all the people from the village who produce something and who want to show his produce to his vil-

lage fellows. At the beginning some people were very sceptical they said »nobody will come, everybody buying everything from the supermarkets«. The general opinion in the village it was that in the village nobody produce something interesting. Against of this sceptic approach the organization team didn't give up and the day of the fair arrived. That was amazing for everybody. The place of the fair was plenty with all kind of products, the high diversity of the vegetables and fruits surprised everybody, were exposed a lot of species of tomato, paprika, and other vegetables. There were very interesting discussions, such as: »Oh, you still have this species of tomato? My grandma cultivated and I don't have anymore can give me some seeds?« It is very difficult to describe the richness of the fair, from the vegetables to the different cakes, artisanal products, jams, products from mixtures of vegetables (»zakuska«). The fair was a kind of revelation for the local people, because most of them were thinking that if they keep cultivating old species of vegetables they are not »trendy«, so they slowly are giving up to keep these seeds even if they are sorry for that, and they were surprised that almost everybody is thinking in the same way. Finally the fair was a great opportunity for the villagers to rethink several things in their life.

I was deeply involved in the organization of the fair together with the mayor of the village and we were surprised also concerning the success of the fair and it was a great lesson concerning the importance to create opportunities for the community for a common brainstorming process, the common thinking can overwrite individual prejudices, which force the people to follow a specific way indicated by the trends. Since that the fair is organised each year.

## **Magnus: Good Things Going On**

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Thinking about a call of wanting to learn more, the first thing that comes to my mind is the desire to learn more about myself. There are two things that made me reconsider on a deep level how I was learning and why I was doing what I do. The first experience was a serious injury that forced me to rethink my life and somehow put it in perspective. The second experience was a few years later when my brother got diagnosed with mental illness. I spent a lot of time talking to him and I realised how different our thoughts were. I know we are all very different. But this made me aware of the fact that I hadn't known him as well as I thought I had. And the way that he was describing things did not relate at all to my experience. This made me realise how differently we perceive the world. This made me very interested in talking to people, getting to know other people and also getting to know myself better. By getting to know the scope of my own emotions and feelings, I was able to get to know and understand better other people. For me that is the call that made me change my ways of learning—learning not because I had to, because I had to pass a test at school, but because I want to, because it enables me to integrate into my life new things that make my life more real. Learning about your emotions and feelings is often connected to perceptions of feminine or masculine qualities and these are often related to genders. But to me it isn't. I often find myself having more feminine than masculine qualities, but this doesn't make me less of a man. At the moment, there is a sort of taboo that you have to be a »man« in the stereotypical manner that society has constructed. A beautiful thing about some intentional communities and also about Knowmads is that learning is not confined to a single one direction. Usually you get educated in a specific subject but you're not educated about how to educate

yourself. This creates a very hypocritical society. It produces a lot of clones and destroys the creative, innovative society we actually want to live in, and it keeps us from developing ourselves as humanity. In this respect, it is really a good thing to come to Klein Jasedow to get the confirmation that there are a lot of things going on in the world and that there are many people who do not let themselves be ruled by dominant societal structures and by the media that suggest there are only bad things happening.

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## **Klaus: What Men Live By**

As a small boy, around seven years old, I began to play the recorder. Soon I realised: If I play music, if I can create sound, I can bring beauty to the world and make myself and other people happy. This seemed for me the most meaningful thing to do in life. When I grew older I learned to play the flute—modern and baroque style—and finally studied to become a professional musician. Of course I wanted to have a good career and was lucky to be accepted to join the orchestra of the Munich opera house. So 1976 I moved with my wife Christine who studied viola da gamba and my two-year-old daughter from our home in Hamburg to the suburbs of Munich. We knew almost nobody down there in Bavaria, so we tried to get to know other young musicians who shared our interest in early European music. After some time of feeling rather lonely in the new city we met Beata and Johannes. She studied harpsichord, Johannes was a composer and played guitar and lute. We became friends and visited each other, while we realised that we shared much more than the interest in music—we shared a way of asking ourselves what would be the right thing to do in the world in these strange times regarding everything what was going wrong in our view—the increasing isola-

tion of people in the cities, their alienation from nature, the environmental pollution, nuclear armament and so on. It was the times when the »Limits to Growth«, first published 1972, were widely discussed, the Green party was in its very beginnings and the cold war became more and more menacing.

We went for holiday in Denmark in summer 1977, Johannes and Beata with their blue Volvo station wagon, Christine and myself with her father's old fishing boat. In Kopenhagen we met in a chinese restaurant where we started one of our typical conversations about »the world«, and at one point Johannes got up and said: »I can't bear any longer to talk by using subjunctive—one could, one should do this and that. I want us to sit here until we have decided about what we are in fact going to do!« After hours of talking we had decided to start a community—live a simple, meaningful life in the countryside, sharing our needs and abilities, develop our music and stay together on a long journey, no matter what the future would hold in store for us. It was late already, we stumbled accross the Tivoli, didn't like it there very much, and as we found no place to sleep we all crawled into the back of the blue Volvo to fall asleep.

This was the beginning of our community. Already in autumns we had found an old farmhouse in upper Bavaria. Our initial idea was to concentrate on our music there, but after a few month we realised that we had incredibly much more to do than only music—and on the other hand that doing all this, for example start a garden, a health food shop and a kindergarten—was so much connected with the core of music—with listening. The most important part of music is the pause—silence. It makes you aware of what the others are playing and this makes you realise which sound you can bring in by yourself. We tried to listen to the given situation to find a good answer.

One such example of listening and reacting is the story of my second child, my son Tilmann. He was very unhappy at school (see »Johannes: 0,01 Percent«). He came home with a headache and stomach pains. His classmates would tease him and beat him up so that his teacher encouraged him to strike back. But as he did so he was punished by the teacher. That day he refused to go to school any longer. We listened to our hearts and decided not to force him to go. This had far-reaching effects as it is illegal in Germany to educate your child at home. We started an unschooling-experiment together with other families, and the kids had a wonderful creative time learning within their own rhythm within in a network of connected families who all did interesting socio-ecological projects. But the state of Bavaria wanted to force us to send Tilmann to school. We had to go to court, and finally we won the first case in Germany school absence. The judge had realised that we only wanted the best for our son. This was a pioneering step for the movement towards a more liberal education system in Germany which still struggles today for more pluralism in our rigid system. But it had not been our aim to revolutionise education, it all came from listening to the needs of a child.

Our way has been meandering, we try to live with questions: What do I have to do in this very situation? And this meandering path finally lead us to live in the Northeast of Germany and rebuilt parts of the village of Klein Jasedow where I live today as part of a community much larger than the small one we started as four young musicians in Bavaria in the late seventies.

There have always been some beacons on our meandering paths. One is the folktale »What Men Live By« by Leo Tolstoi. It is about an angel of death who was sent to the earth by God to become human, because he had refused to take the soul of a dy-

ing woman who just had given birth to twins. The angel finally learns that not the fact that we have some bread will enable our live, but the love and care of the people around us. For me this is the essence of human culture. It can be expressed in so many ways, and I am sure that there is a way to develop »high culture« in a way that is not exploitative to others, neither to nature nor to other human beings. So many »high cultures« in European history have been based on the work of slaves as today modern consumer culture does, but this must not necessarily be so. I love the music treasures of European culture and I want to keep it alive in a way which is not at first place connected to having a career and making money, but simply trying to keep this treasure for it's beauty. To do this I walk in between different worlds. Sometimes I wear a suit and play music for the audience of a concert hall, in other times I am in the middle of the wilderness of our community life. So I can bridge different worlds. What I enjoy very much is to teach how to improvise music—this is all about the art of listening.

## **Anna-Liisa: Turning Into A Fairy**

I joined Knowmads in March 2017. I came from a very different environment. I did a very masculine study, a Master's degree in philosophy, politics and economics, followed by working as a boss of 30 men in an entrepreneurship incubator. I was pretty drained, I felt like I was having to be very competitive, pushing myself very hard, but not really succeeding.

I arrived at Knowmads, and within moments of my arrival for reasons I find hard to explain I was swept up on a magic carpet of very feminine energy. For me there is a big interplay between masculinity and femininity—I am not even sure whether these are the right terms to describe it, but at this moment these are

the words that made sense to me. We had a really intensive week of self-discovery. We had to ask ourselves questions of who we were, confront questions that we had not really welcomed into our lives. In the ceremony that we did at the end of the week, we had to let something go and allow something in. I let go my over-paranoia about cultural appropriation, which came from my studies and from my passion of running choirs and singing African-American music; and I brought in: »I embrace nakedness«. And at that moment, while one of the other girls was painting my face, I felt this white light inside my body, and heard this voice. It was a familiar voice, a voice that is my voice, the voice of my four-year-old self saying the very same wish it had been wishing on every birthday cake, on every eyelash, on every shooting star since: »I wish I was a fairy!«. At that moment I thought: »Why don't I just be a fairy then, why don't I just do it?!« This was on Friday, on the following Monday, I was announcing to my »tribe« slowly: »Just so you know, I am now a fairy!« It was kind of my fairy birthday. Everyone was super accepting and said: »Well, of course, you are a fairy. That makes so much sense!«

At that time, I did not know what the significance of being a fairy would be. In the week following the coming out of my fairyhood alter ego I started feeling lighter, more able to connect and my energetic sensitivity had gone higher. We were asked the question what did we need to heal? And I think this was the very question I had been asking myself for a long time. And the fairy became an avenue for me to transform into power physical pain that I was still feeling in my body. It was not surprising that it was feminine power that I felt rising up as the pain that was most alive in me was pain related to rape and sexual abuse that had happened to me between the age between fifteen and twenty-one.

On that physical journey that I was going on I had talked to a lot of men and women who had been physically assaulted in that way but it was also about connecting to maybe the most vulnerable part of my body, so I started dancing. I never had any dance training but it felt very natural to do this. And I set an intention to dance for my tribe after the end of my half-term presentation. A friend was taking me to this alternative lingerie shop offering beautiful lingerie, challenging the way that we perceive women's bodies. I had been modelling for them and I danced in lingerie for my tribe. I intended a bit of a spiteful, angry presentation but it really became a presentation about love, and self-love, and healing, and expression. The pain part was the minor part, it was all the transformation and growth that had been triggered from me trying to set off on this journey that became most present in the presentation.

So right now what is most alive in me in terms of learning is, firstly, that in order to step on this learning journey I needed to step into this alter ego, because it gave me a way of completely cutting myself off from survival strategies into something that gave me new insights into the potential that I had. It was also really important to me to be part of an extremely safe community where I could talk about these kind of things and was accepted a hundred percent as who I was. And finally it has also given me a little bit of insight of where I would go into the future: Trying to find my voice, which I experience—now that I feel a little bit more connected to my body—as one of the most vulnerable parts of our bodies. In terms of saying what I have to say but also in terms of singing and being sonic in the world, hoping to find my voice through dance and connection. But it's really hard and confrontative.

## **Michal: Dismissal**

One day I was organizing a bike tour in the Litovelské Pomoraví Protected Landscape Area. About thirty cyclists attended. The trip included a visit to the artists who live in this internationally important wetland area. They invited us to their homes and prepared refreshments, showed us around in their beautiful gardens and introduced their work of arts. I was leaving home early in the morning, in a bit of a rush, because Lenka, my wife, has a weak sleeping so I did not want to disturb her. I lead the group together with my colleague Zdenka Štefanidesova. The unpleasant part was that I left Zdeňka with an entire group of people alone for a while, because I had to dismiss our chef, with whose work we had been dissatisfied for a long time. I expected his protests and refusal to sign the dismissal. I was surprised that he calmly agreed, although he seemed slightly irritated, giving me strange looks. After the beautiful day, I said goodbye to the cheerful attendants and continued my cycle trip to our summer cottage. Just before the town of Litovel a group of young cyclists passed me by. They stared at me a bit, which I thought was because they were surprised that I was maintaining the pace with them, dressed non-sporty and with a backpack on my back. The car with Lenka behind the steering wheel was suddenly passing me by. Míša, my daughter looked at me through an open window. I was expecting her to encourage me and cheer me up. Instead, I heard: »Mama, dad is a real dummy, he is really only wearing his underpants.« That moment, I thought about the importance of her words and after a superficial inspection I could not believe my eyes. I spent the whole day wearing just my underpants, believing I am in my cycling trousers. Lenka found my bike pants at home in the morning and she sighed aloud: »Hopefully that dummy did not leave wearing only underpants ...«

## **Sacha: Becoming And Being**

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I am now twenty-nine years old, and my first twenty-seven years were completely focused on the fact that I wanted to become something—I wanted to be a successful filmmaker, find a nice place to live and lead a normal life. Then I suddenly realised—who am I to prove myself to, if not to myself. The dream about becoming a successful director collapsed and I didn't know what was left. Then I searched for something different but I realised that searching doesn't help either. Eventually I let go the idea that I need to know what I want and who I am. So I travelled a lot, lived at many places but never found a place that felt as if I should stay. I always had the feeling that I didn't really know where I belonged to. Today, I realize that this is not that important. If I enjoy whatever is present at the very moment, everything is fine. So I stopped following my mind and started following my heart. After years in Argentina, England and Poland I returned to the place I come from, to Amsterdam, where someone had a room for me to live in. Amsterdam is a comfortable place for me to work and to live, to read books, to learn. By chance, I got a job as a tea-taster in a small company trading special ecologically grown green and black tea specialities and coffee. Chinese and Japanese green tea is one of my passions, I love the subtle flavours. There is a whole philosophy connected with enjoying tea. So my job matches my passions. I did not consciously look for such a job opportunity, it came to me as a gift from the flow of life. So I stop searching and try to be open for these gifts.

A lot of people think they need to know what their calling is and what they have to do in life. On the one hand it may be beautiful to have such a clear calling, but it can also put a lot of pressure on you. In my years of travelling I have lived in many urban and rural communities, including Embercombe in Eng-

land, this wonderful valley in Devon with its permaculture gardens, workshops and various programmes for children and adults to reconnect with nature and your inner voice. It was a wonderful experience, but I also realised how much people struggle to keep such a place going and to keep its spirit alive. The more I lived in communities the more I learned to let go any idealising expectations about these places. Wherever you go, you will face the same problems. At the end of the day, life is just for living, for enjoying, and for trying not to harm anyone. I try to live more easily and struggle less, and I hope rural communities, too, can learn to relax and be open for the gifts of life in spite of all the challenges they have to deal with.

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## **Johannes: Detoxing the Land**

One morning in early autumn 2001 I could not believe my eyes. All the leaves of the field of melissa at the back of Klein Jasedow had turned white. What a shame! This would have been the first harvest of our the newly founded cooperative Kräutergarten Pommerland for growing and producing herbal tea, and now all the plants were dying. I looked across the fields stretching out behind the patch of melissa: hundreds of hectares of intensively farmed land. No hedge would separate the enormous fields, no path would lead through them, only the roads cut lines through the desert. Yes, it was a desert according to the geological definition, only one percent of humus was left due to constant erosion, constant compaction with big machinery, artificial fertilisers and pesticides. The first tips of oilseed rape were showing on the hundred-hectar-field next to the melissa. No sign of a weed was left. With a grave suspicion I went to my computer and started to research. Soon it was clear to me what had happened: A herbicide using clomazone as active ingredient must have been

sprayed just after the sowing of oilseed rape. It evaporates and hovers as a cloud over the field for about fourteen days while performing its task—to destroy the chlorophyll in all the weeds coming up. The rape will germinate later when the competitors are already dead. The sad fact: This herbicide had obviously hovered into the village of Klein Jasedow. We found white leaves in all our gardens—and rang the office of plant protection of the federal province of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. An officer came and interdicted the consumption of any food from the garden.

Our community was upset. We had been poisoned! Now we knew why so many of us had suffered from headaches, sore throat and circulatory problems in the last two weeks, and this probably also explained the bad skin rash of our little two-year-old Carmen. Pesticides like this had to be forbidden by law—it was time for a large press campaign.

We called the press, activated some friends to help us spread the news, and after a few days Mecklenburg Vorpommern discussed the clomazone-scandal of Klein Jasedow. About 50 ecological farmers showed up and stated that they had exactly the same problem but did not know its origin. Now as they knew the reason for the white leaves they were happy to join the protest.

We asked for a date at the ministry of agriculture in Schwerin and hoped for an enlightening exchange between civil society and politics: Would there be a way to change things to the better, for the plants, for the people, for the soil? But for the Minister of Agriculture, we were nothing but tiresome troublemakers. The use of authorized pesticides was not to be debated, he made clear, and he wanted no bad press about agriculture in his country. Unambiguously he told us that he would silence the press from tomorrow on, and for us it would be wise to shut up and go home. We were stunned. It did not feel as if we were talking to a

minster from a constitutional state, it felt like being sent home by a totalitarian system. Obviously there is such a system, it is not the state but the powerful lobby of industrial agriculture and the chemical industry and their influence on politics.

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In fact the news about the case of clomazone changed from the next day on in all newspapers of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. All of a sudden the group in Klein Jasedow was no longer regarded as the victim of the scandal but as its cause—crazy eco-freaks who wanted to disparage conventional agriculture!

The local industrial farmer who tilled 5000 hectares of land seized the moment to start a mobbing campaign against our community. From the beginning on he had not liked our ambition to buy land for the herb-growing company and to reactivate historic bridleways and walking paths—properties of the municipality anyway—, so he made up various rumours, for example that the radical ecologists in Klein Jasedow wanted to erect a green dictatorship where everyone would be forced to go barefoot, eat nettles and won't be allowed to use cars. This he let spread through the families of his employees. Fearing for their jobs, they organised demonstrations and distributed pamphlets calling for the community members and all the new settlers to go back to where they came from. A large stone was thrown through a window, and we were threatened of having our houses set on fire—which in another case not far away actually had happened—and probably we wouldn't have survived this unless our projects had not been rooted so well already. We were surprised by the many supportive friends in the neighbourhood, especially among »ordinary« people who had observed us only from the distance during the first years.

The white leaves of the melissa field had thrown us into a totally different situation than before. Suddenly there was a con-

flict in our little commune which meanwhile had grown from 330 to 360 inhabitants living in four villages. Half of our neighbours regarded us as enemies of the conventional agriculture, as people trying to destroy the few remaining agricultural jobs. In fact we had been criticizing industrial farming, but we knew that the local farmer did not want to poison us with pesticides. He used what he was allowed to use in the correct way—it was not his problem, but the problem of the chemical industry creating such poisoning stuff and the EU and the state of Germany allowing its use. Their were the targets of our protest, not the local conventional farmer—but this was too complex to be understood, the enemy images already had been fixed.

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It was not possible to talk to the mobbers, they refused all ways of communication, so the only way to deal with their aggression was to remain silent. The main spokesperson of the mobbers' group, a lady from the neighbouring village Waschow called Ms. Bliese, ran for the regional elections of 2004 to become mayor of the commune. I was the opposing candidate after having been deputy mayor since 1999. The population of the commune Pulow was split into two groups who respectively supported their candidate—a situation that could evolve into a political paralysis. Realizing this, I took heart and visited Ms. Bliese on the afternoon before the elections. Of course she also knew that her chances were fifty-fifty, and because of this insecurity eventually she was ready to talk. I promised her to make her the deputy mayor in case he would win, and I convinced her of my strong will to cooperate for the good of the commune's citizens—otherwise nothing would be accomplished in the co-

ming years. At the end of their meeting Ms. Bliese promised me the same.

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The other day 97 percent of the inhabitants went to the polls, and Ms Bliese won with seven votes more. So O could visit her again, this time with a bouquet of roses to congratulate, and from this moment on the mobbing had an end. It was not easy with Ms. Bliese as a mayor as her vision was completely different from that of the progressive groups. But more and more she got aware that many of her prejudices were ill founded, and eventually she even took part in one of the conferences on regional development our community had organised in the Klanghaus.

This dramatic story of the herbicide accident was a lesson in our personal interpretation of Aikido, the Japanese martial art following the saying: Don't fight your aggressors but take them into your arms dancing, and let them go again.

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Ten years later it had a postlude. In early autumn 2011 there were white leaves all over Klein Jasedow again. This time not only the herbs but also trees and bushes were affected. Their leaves were not green any more, but looked like covered with a greyish veil, and from the stem on white specks were spreading accross them—areas where the chlorophyll already had been destroyed. Again a herbicide containing clomazone had been used, and the weather conditions - just a bit too much heat and wind—had made it drift into the village again. After the frist scandal in 2001 this had happened another time in 2004. This year we had been wiser than before and did not alarm the press but invited the members of the ministry of agriculture and the local farmer to Klein Jasedow without any public. In an intensive discussion

they promised to advocate for a reformulation of the pesticide so that it was not so disposable to drift any more. And the farmer said that he would not use it any more on the fields around Klein Jasedow. But in 2011 it was worser than any time before. I drove to Schwerin with some colleagues from ecological farms in the neighbourhood to see the minister of agriculture and his team again. His state secretary, Mr. Kreer, welcomed us and started the usual way of talking—the way politicians often talk as if all this had nothing to do with them. I got up and asked him to stop his speech. Before he continued I wanted him to look at something important: On his desk I lay down a bouquet of herbs and branches from trees one by one: I showed them the white leaves of blackberries, the white leaves of chickweed, of willows, of apple trees and elder bushes, from roses, chervil and dandelion and then I asked him what was going on in his heart in the very moment of looking at the destruction. He paused for a few moments, his voice changed its tone, and he said: This does touch me. I share your goal of inheriting a healthy planet to our children.

This was the beginning of a good relationship. It did not help to forbid the herbicide. We still campaigned for this aim in our initiative »Ackergifte? Nein Danke!« (Pesticides? No thanks!). But it helped us to have a partner in the ministry in Schwerin who listened to the small ecological farmers and producers in the northeast of the country. Our problem was that all the land available from the office that had to sell all the land still owned by the state was always bought by the large industrial farmer. No matter how high the others would bid in the tendering, he always had the highest bid. Some kind of mafia-structure would inform him in advance. State secretary Kreer did understand the situation and worked two years to lend at least about forty hectares

of land to the organic farms in our region, fifteen hectars were rented by the newly found agricultural project of Klein Jasedow. This was a start for us engage with agriculture on a larger scale than in the first twenty years of our settling in Klein Jasedow. We want to bring back biodiversity and healthy soils to at least some of the exploited land around our villages, to let it heal from the constant use of poison.

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## **Mars: Sharing Is Learning**

Coming from a very international background, I have always learned a lot about interacting with different people of different age groups who come from very diverse social backgrounds and cultures. Yet, what was missing was a big piece of knowledge about myself and about what gives me fulfilment. This only came in the Knowmads programme where we really delved deep into the question »What do I want to achieve for myself?« instead of »What is expected of me me?« or »How do I get someone else's approval?« Of course, finding out and constantly checking with yourself what you want at a given moment is an ongoing process. By that I really got to know better myself and what was important to me. And by doing so I become confronted with topics of self-love and love for others. In relationships and otherwise. When it came to relationships I was restricted. I was not myself because I was kind of pretending to be someone I was not. This dissociated me from who I actually am. Now I am experimenting with getting to know myself better, also in romantic relationship to others. In schools there should be a class where students get to discuss this. How do we see ourselves in relationships. How do we deal with cheating and jealousy? Some people are lucky enough to find space in their families to talk about these matters but many people do not have

such spaces in their lives. And I would love to facilitate that. I am far from all-knowing when it comes to relationships, but I would like to share my knowledge and experience—sharing is the way people learn. It did help to be in a group of people where I felt save and accepted and free to share share without fear of judgement or losing face whatever was there and alive at a given moment. Putting yourself in a group situation where you can learn from each other is crucial. I think it is impossible to do this kind of work on your own. All these things that I learned didn't just come out of the blue—I learned them from interating with other people.

### **Zoltan: Water Commoning**

The valley of the Dorman creek is very special for me our little farm is situated in this valley. The Dorman creek is the left side tributary of the Niraj River and it is a small valley in which there are situated the villages Adrianu Mare and Adrianu Mic. The valley was rich in water in the past, according to the legends a man with the name Adrian (Adorjan) was establishing here with his family in thirteen century. One of the reasons to be established here was the »four creeks and the seven springs« situated in this valley. According to the same legend when the family was looking to find a good place to establish a headquarter, the biggest son of Adrian came with the news that the valley is rich in water, there are good pastures and it is a good place to grow animals. During several century the people from two villages practiced a sustainable use of resources and the valley remained rich in water, with large forests and pastures. During the intensification of the agriculture in the twenties century the wetlands were drained and the size of the arable lands increased. The area covered by forest was reduced also and the structure of the fo-

rest was changed, the big trees were cut mainly for their economic values.

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Due to all these processes the valley which was rich in water once became very poor in water. The local people from the village use individual wells for their need and also for the animals. After several dry summers the water almost disappeared from the valley, the creek remained without water and in several wells the quantity of the water wasn't enough to satisfy the needs of the villagers. That was the period when the association Focus Eco Center started his rural community project in Adri-anu Mare, and I as the president of the association I was the initiator of this project. It was clear that one of the first problems which has to be handled is the problem of the water. The sources which caused the problem were understood by the local people and as well the consequences, the changing of the microclimate, the reduction of the water sources for the animals. We with our team from the Focus Eco Center, we were interested in the biodiversity and nature protection and for us the reduction of the biodiversity it was also an important problem, which was also a direct consequences of the reduction of the water.

The mayor of the village was also interested to solve the problem, so I invited a specialist in hydrology and were consulted people from the Geography Faculty at the University of Cluj. After a lot of site visits when we identified the former wetlands, springs, with the support of the old local people it was created a map with the former situation concerning the water in the valley and a plan for rehabilitation. The most suitable places where to start the reconstruction works were identified, and were started discussions with the owners of that territories. Most of the owners of the suitable land for wetland rehabilitation agreed the idea but they didn't want to scarify their land, and to offer for

free to the benefits of the community. After several discussions one person decided to scarify his land and the work started. Because for the action we didn't have any money all the works were based on voluntary work. Finally one sponsor offered to support the costs of hiring an excavator, so not all the works has to be done in voluntary way. So when the dates of the work was fixed the volunteers came and it was organised a team of volunteers (Kalaka) and in one week the work was finished. The volunteers were from the village but also other people interested in water management. That happened in late autumn and in the winter was big snow and everybody was expecting the results of our work, to see in spring how will work our idea. During the winter some people spread rumours that the restoration work will cause flood in spring when the snow will be melt. In the village were a lot of debates about the usefulness of the wetland restoration project and some people were contesting the usefulness of the wetland restoration strategy, they were saying »the water will not come back, whatever what we will do«. One person invited in early spring a regional television and he complained that in the spring will be floods because what we were doing. After the spring was coming everybody was convinced that the wetland restoration project didn't cause flood and the wetland created became a nice tourism destination also. In the next summer the implementation of the restoration project was continued and in summer time we organised an international summer camp for continue the restoration works. This time we built bottom weirs in the creek from different materials. The more than thirty volunteers during the ten day summer camp built five different type of bottom weirs from natural materials (wood, stone). The all wetland restoration model was used as demonstration site for the Geography Faculty from the University from Cluj, who or-

ganized an international seminar with the theme »Community water management«. After one year, during the summer time (it was also a dry summer), in the creek still was water and one old man (one of the opponents of the project) came to me once and he told to me: »You did a good job, now we have water in creek for wetting our vegetables and for our animals«. It was a clear indication for us that the local people accepted us and our ideas. Since then, in several places in the Niraj valley, the local people are doing the same work, and I have been invited to give advice on how to do this work.

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## **Heidi: Looking For Meaning**

Since the last four weeks I experience a serious existential crisis. I have now clue why I am living here in the city of Amsterdam. I have no idea what to do with my live. Maybe this is not a problem, I am still young, twenty-seven years old, but still it feels strange not to know where to go. My hometown is Hongkong. I have been bucking around for a few years doing different jobs. What I like, is exploring different worlds, living in different communities, exploring different kinds of people. I like to be with snobbish ones who think about their next step on the career ladder, I hang out with intellectuals who have no money but try to be as smart as they can—I want to understand all their dreams and motivations to better understand the world. This is what I really like, exploring all the different ways of being and understanding.

But what does this mean for my next steps in life, for a meaningful way to go? You can't look in your computer, open some books and say: »I'm going to find the meaning of my life in one week!« This doesn't work. The process of introspection, of looking at yourself is not something you can plan or make happen,

just as you can have a plan to clean all the dishes after a meal. It's a process a lot less well-defined. Maybe you have to talk a lot, maybe you have to be alone. I don't know what I have to do, I feel I don't have the right set of tools yet.

## **Michal: Thank You For Accepting**

I have always dreamed of creating a place to strengthen the bonds between people, nature, and the environments they live in. This is important because people are natural beings, too, rooted in the living world and connected to all of nature by a fragile, endlessly variable web of relationships. This intricate and ever changing web of interdependencies may be understood best, when we, as human beings, enter a state of silent and humble awe.

Conveying this sense of awe to other people has been a central motivation for me in building up Litovelské Pomoraví House of Nature at Sluňákov. It is an experiential outdoor gallery and an open-air playground with walk-in sculptures and installations designed to make visitors experience nature with all their senses. The premises feature installations by eminent Czech land-art artists František Skála, Miloš Šejn, Miloslav Fekar, and Marcel Hubáček and serve as a natural gateway to the Litovelské Pomoraví Protected Landscape Area.

We have created a learning environment by connecting art, pedagogy, and natural philosophy, focusing not primarily on factual knowledge but rather on the experiential physicality of being in nature. This also includes gifts of nature as well as cultural traditions, such as lore and legend, folk and fairy tales, mythologies, etc. On the one hand, this unique approach attracts many visitors. On the other hand, it defies categorisation and cannot be easily pigeonholed into preconceived patterns of perceptions. Environmentalists consider us a cultural project, peo-

ple from cultural fields consider us environmentalists, etc. This has resulted in considerable irritation and several attempts to cancel our projects. Our land-art sculptures are so unconventional and diverse that it was well-nigh impossible to get a building permission. Unable to categorise our projects, the authorities were seriously puzzled: Playground equipment? Buildings? Works of art? Educational aids? A bit of all? And which set of safety regulations should then apply for users?!

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Our application stirred a good many controversies: a central statue of Adam and Eve had to be removed from František Skála's project »Garden of Eden«. I argued that they were this garden's central protagonists and that they had been the first to name all the plants and animals, being sort of the very first taxonomers ... No way. Officially, »Garden of Eden« had to be renamed »Garden of Litovelské Pomoraví Animals and Plants« in order to be approvable for the authorities. We had to remove the »swing for flies« from the application. Giving us money to build a trapeze swing for common house flies, horseflies, or something worse seemed inappropriate to the funding authorities. Miloš Šejn's »Solar Mountain« aroused suspicion of having occult roots. I gave lengthy explanations why this piece of land art did not have occult roots. I elaborated on its meaning. I told my cave experience as a boy that had partly inspired it (see »Initiation«). I pointed out that Miloš Šejn was a respected artist. No chance. The funding authorities just didn't get the idea. But finally they accepted the application. »If anyone asks, just deny that it has occult roots!«, I was urgently advised. »You know, the EU cannot fund occultism.«—»It's not ...«, I was going to object for the umpteenth time, but instead bit my tongue, replying meekly: »Thank you for accepting my application.«

## Saskia: Thinking About Blossoming

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A functioning society is where everybody blossoms in her or his own way like the trees and flowers in a wild forest. Modern society seems to be multioptional, but in fact it blocks off a lot what does not fit into given schemes. Society is not about hearing all voices, a lot is excluded, and can't find a way to blossom.

I have to think of a conversation with my mother when we were driving in a car last week: She told me that she just lost her job and feels so tired of looking for a new one. She is fifty-five, physically tired, she would love to be on a pension, but this is not possible yet. »I have to look for a job immediately, otherwise the people around me will judge me as lazy or as a loser«, she was convinced. So I asked her: »But who is it in fact who will judge you, can you give a name?« She started thinking, and only when we went name by name she realised, that there was nobody who would care if she would take a few weeks off before starting to work again. Nobody was judging her but herself. This is how the norms of society work, you apply them by yourself in an unconscious fear. But who is »society«? If you ever think that society expects this or that from you it may be only yourself.

It is a big subject to ask for the calling—is it only one thing that calls me? People tend to think that If you don't have something like this in your life—this one thing you really feel called to do—your life is not meaningful. I don't think that it works like this—that suddenly you have this one insight about the meaning of your life and then there is confetti and a great applause.

At Knowmads we think about what we want to bring to the world, but today I am not closer to that question than at the beginning of my Knowmads-time. but I am closer to the feeling of who I am, how I am happy, how I can react in certain situations. This seems to me much more important than a specific goal for

my life like »I have to open a candy shop in Amsterdam and there is the businessplan.« There still can be a hole in the roof of the candy shop and then I have to fix it, I have to know how to cope with strange situations or with emotional challenges whatever my plan in life is.

It seems important not to think too much about life. I went to a nature quest recently, and the person guiding us gave us this metaphor: There is this flower striving towards the sun. If you ask the flower to think about how it is growing, it will bend and scratch its head and forget about to look at the sun. So, the flower has a problem. People think too much instead of letting things happen how they are supposed to go.

Maybe the essence of my call is to bridge different ways of seeing things. I see a great value to create settings where people understand the value of more than one voice being heard or the importance of people seeing things differently. It is so precious to listen to what everybody has to say and to connect to nature, so that there will be a planet left, where we can have a society on.

## **Johannes: Friends**

When I went to a local supermarket to buy some special food items for a major meeting in the context our Erasmus-Plus project, I met the mayor of a neighbouring commune. He is an unpretentious, down-to-earth villager. Having lived all his life in our rural region, he is shrewed and good-hearted, but not very learned in terms of formal education. Glancing at my full shopping trolley, he said »Gosh! What are you buying all this food for?« »We're expecting many people from all over Europe and want to cook for them«, I replied. »What kind of people?«, he asked back. »Well«, I said, pausing briefly to think of the visitors—some known, some as yet unknown to me—who would soon ar-

rive in Klein Jasedow, »they are friends.« »Friends, that's good! It's good to have friends from abroad. After all, you never know when you're gonna need them in the times to come.« »Yes, the times to come«, I said pensively, thinking of all the many challenges that lay ahead of us. »You know, they may come sooner than we think, the times to come«, he added musingly. I could have never explained to this local all the details and parametres of our project, but intuitively he was perfectly attuned with what was going on. At the end of the day, this is the essence of international networking: Making friends who will stick together in the times to come when the going gets tough.

# The Storytellers

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**Adomas Lapinskas**, born 1983, is an undercover poet, living slightly above planet Earth. He plays drums and teaches his son Sirius how to tame dragons. *adomosiel@ yahoo.com*

**Amber Grothe**, born 1991 in the Netherlands, has studied Fine Arts at art school AKV St. Joost. She earned her masters degree in Holistic Science at Schumacher College in Devon. Currently she is working at Knowmads Business School Amsterdam and started up her own academy in self development through creativity. Her biggest passion is helping others to light their fire inside and putting this into life changing action and new directions.  
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**Anna-Liisa »Ali« Donatella Springham**, born 1993 in the UK, studied political science and economy. Before becoming a student at Knowmads Business School in Amsterdam, she

worked as a CEO for a startup in the field of digital technology. Her mission is political-vocal emancipation. She wants to build a solid foundation for the OneVoice choir project and VoiceLab business. *anna-liisa@knowmads.nl*

**Botond Nagy**, born 1993 in Targu Mures, Romania, was studying natural sciences in high school in Targu Mures and finished Communication and PR at Sapientia University. Today he lives in the village Glodeni and works as a project assistant at the Focus Eco Center. He is mainly focussed on international projects about climate problems and ecological education.

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**Carolina Itzel Pailhe**, born in Buenos Aires in 1984. After finishing studies in Industrial Design traveled to Indonesia in an arts and culture program where she met her husband from Lithuania. Thereafter they spent a few years in Argentina and now are currently installed in Kaunas involved in local community actions and co-creating two cooperative alternative kitchen projects. This year she has joined, as a cultural practitioner, »Žemųjų Šančių Bendruomene«, a local association focusing on community culture and development as well as in new forms of interdisciplinary, alternative pedagogy. *ci.pailhe@gmail.com*

**Edith Német** was born in 1967 in the city of Marosvásárhely, Maros megye, Erdély, Románia. She studied social pedagogy at the university in Cluj Napoca. For ten years she worked as a social worker at the mayors's office of Nyárádszereda, and the last three years at the mayors office of the commune Nyárádgál falva in the village Gălești in the Niraj valley where she lives today.

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**Eugenia Roldan** was born in Seville in Spain in 1963. She lived in the community Los Portales in the south of Spain for 25 years, where she is responsible for the vegetable garden. Her aim is to turn it more and more into a permaculture garden and to further raise the level of subsistence of the community. She loves to talk with plants and to dance. *eugenia.roldan@yahoo.es*

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**Fiona Barnes**, born 1964 in the UK, lives in Embercombe, where she runs the program »Natural Learning« that aims to give both children and adults a safe space to meet themselves and each other. She also cares for the farm animals at Embercombe. *fiona@embercombe.org*

**Heidi Law** born 1990 in Hong Kong, attended Knowmads business school in Amsterdam and now lives in this city. Currently she is busy with making a documentary on emigration.  
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**Johannes Heimrath**, born 1953 in Germany, composer, musician, regional developer, writer, editor, coach, gong creator, policy maker, farmer, human ... *jh@landwende.de*

**Kinga Pál** was born 1975 in Székelyudvarhely, Romania. She runs a small shop with her family in the village Satul Mare in Transylvania. They grow all the vegetables the family needs in the garden. From the fruits of their red and black-currant bushes and their fruit trees she prepares syrup and other forms of preserved fruits for sale.

**Klaus Holsten**, born 1951 in Northern Germany, studied modern and baroque flute in Hamburg and Zurich and is one of the

founders of the community in Klein Jasedow, Germany. There he is responsible for the educational programme of the European Academy of healing arts. *kh@eaha.org*

**Kurt Klusch**, born in Romania in 1978, today lives in Amsterdam. He holds a Diploma in Industrial Engineering and worked in the Telecommunications industry for 12 years in the area of supply chain management. He just graduated Knowmads in Amsterdam, an alternative Business School focusing on entrepreneurship, creativity and sustainability. His main areas of interests are helping companies to be more sustainable by using the methods studied at Knowmads and his coaching skills.

**Lara Mallien**, born 1975 in Hamburg, Germany, is a performance artist and writer. She lives in the community of Klein Jasedow where she is editor in chief of the bimonthly magazine »Oya« about encouraging ecosocial projects, is part of the management board of the European Academy of Healing Arts and cares for the vegetable garden. *lara.mallien@oya-online.de*

»**Mac**« **Tim Macartney**, born 1950 in the UK, started his career as a gardener but became a consultant and found the educational centre Embercombe in Devon as a »valley to grow people«. While most of his work is focused towards inspiring and integrating values-led leadership within the core business activity of large organisations, he also works extensively with young people, the socially excluded, and many local community groups. For twenty years Mac was mentored by a group of Native Americans. This has profoundly influenced his worldview and continues to inform all aspects of his work.

*www.macmacartney.com*

**Magnus Norup Thomsen** was born 1994 and raised in Birkerød, Denmark. He still lives in Denmark and studies E-Design on Copenhagen School of Design and Technology. Presently he is trying to figure out the opportunities of using the remaining wood that carpenters, cabinet workers and other wood required professions leaves behind. *magnus@knowmads.nl*

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**Marciano »Mars« San A Jong** was born 1990 in Surinam. His family moved to the Netherlands 18 years ago. He graduated Knowmads Business School in Amsterdam. For many years he has been working in hospitality and he would love to own an establishment like a café or a hotel ran by himself and a few close friends. *marciano@knowmads.nl*

**Martina Strazdauskienė** was born on 1978 in Kaunas, Lithuania, and is still living there. After finishing her master studies in sociology she was working nearly 10 years in an international IT company, in between giving birth to three kids. With the third child she decided to become educator in a Waldorf kindergarten. The fourth child inspired her to become a Doula. She is interested in intuitive pedagogy, free expression through movement, music and voice and nature experiences. Together with friends she organises the programme »Cycle« - live improvisation of movement, music, drawing, and voice. *strazde@gmail.com*

**Matthias Fersterer**, born 1980 in Innsbruck, Austria, studied »Translation in a European Context« in Munich and Birmingham, UK. He lives with his family in the community of Klein Jasedow in the northeast of Germany, where he is a baker of sourdough bread, the manager of the publishing house Drachen Verlag, and one of the editors of Oya magazine. He is one of the

founders of »Kleine Dorfschule Lassaner Winkel«, a free Democratic School in Klein Jasedow. *mf@drachenverlag.de*

**Michal Bartoš** is the director of the Czech environmental educational centre Sluňákov. He was born in 1964 in Olomouc. As a lecturer and orator, organizer of the Olomouc Ecology Days festival and an author of the Litovelske Pomoravi House of Nature conception, he is one of the leading persons of contemporary environmental education in the Czech Republic - with a unique vision that emphasises one's freedom to tune in with the landscape that surrounds us and get an essential sense of values, have the eyes wide open and feel the diversity.

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**Sabina Rademacher**, born 1963 in Hamburg, Germany, studied business management and holds a master in business administration and international business from the university of Ohio, USA. She works as a coach and facilitator. In her three years volunteering at the educational centre Embercombe in England from 2013 to 2015, she developed Embercombes volunteer programme. *sabinarademacher@googlemail.com*

»**Sacha**« **Alexander Post**, born 1988 in the Netherlands, studied film sciences and cultural analysis at the University of Amsterdam. During his studies and travels, he started making films and continued to work as a documentary filmmaker after graduating. He also currently works as a tea buyer for a Dutch coffee roaster. *sachapost@icloud.com*

**Saskia Liselotte van Kampen** born in the Netherlands in 1989 is a fresh Knowmads alumna, currently enrolled at the »Orien-

tation Year« of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. Exploring her way as a visual poet, storyteller, coach and changemaker by focussing on what emerges around her in the moment, she moves around between different cities meeting with like minded people.

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**Teresa Distelberger** was born in Vienna 1981 and grew up in Herzogenburg in Lower Austria. She finished her studies of linguistics and film in her 20ies and is currently doing an Master of Arts in »Arts in Practice« at the roaming Dutch Arts Institute while living in Vienna where she is working as a documentary filmmaker and facilitator. [www.artofco.com](http://www.artofco.com)

**Tomás Fernández de Benedetti**, born 1992 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, earned a Business administration degree (UCEMA) and studied 5 years at a theatre school. He is currently part of Leap into Life Foundation, a foundation based in the Netherlands that has projects in Tamale (north Ghana) and lives in Amsterdam. Tomás as a nimprovisation workshop facilitator. His main interest are social innovation and acting. He likes to be involved in projects that contribute to a better future.

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**Ugnius Narauskas** was born 1989 in Kaunas, Lithuania, where he still lives today. He studied educology in Kaunas and gamelan music in Indonesia. Currently he is mainly involved in local food cooperatives and as a musician in different music projects of free improvisation. *emoklumpes@yahoo.com*

**Ursula Häuslerin**, born 1947 in Germany, was part of many projects to strengthen the selfdetermination of women. At the Akademie Hagia in Winzer she got involved with modern mat-

riarchal studies with Heide Göttner-Abendroth. Today she lives in Klotzwo in Northeast Germany where she sets up a communal home for women in the last stage of life. She is interested in re-integrating the concept of eldership into modern society.  
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**Valentina Buljan**, born 1993 in Graz, Austria, to Croatian parents. As a child she prepared for a career as a pianist, but stopped playing music. Her passion is encouraging people to grow and bring about change. She graduated from Knowmads Business School in Amsterdam. *valentina@knowmads.nl*

**Zoltan Hajdu** was born in 1956 in the town of Lupeni, later he moved with his family to the Niraj valley, Romania. He became Chemistry Engineer at the University from Timisoara, Romania. After 1990 his interest turned to the environmental problems and he obtained the Master degree in Environmental Management and Analysis at the University ENSAIS from Strasbourg, France. After that he continued his studies and he obtained the title of PhD in Environmental Sciences at the University SzIE from Godollo, Hungary. Actually he is the president of the Focus Eco Center, an organisation which implements sustainable development projects mainly in the field of rural development and water management in Transylvania, Romania.

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