

# *THE BODY'S MEMORIES*

## *Childhood, an Exercise*



Delphine Brigliano

Ipek Çankaya

Göksel Altınışik Ergur

Hitesh Gautam

Jelena Jovanovic

Vera Lohkamp

Gabriela-Mariana Luca

Mete Özel

Slobodan Dan Paich

Jérôme Thomas

**Project coordinated by Gabriela-Mariana Luca**

**Editura „Victor Babeș”**

Piața Eftimie Murgu nr. 2, cam. 316, 300041 Timișoara

Tel./Fax 0256 495 210

e-mail: evb@umft.ro

www.umft.ro/editura

**Director general: Prof. univ. emerit dr. Dan V. Poenaru**

**Colecția: BELETRISTICĂ**

**Coordonatori colecție: Prof. univ. dr. Octavian Marius Crețu**

**Prof. univ. dr. Sorin Eugen Boia**

**Referent științific: Prof. univ. emerit dr. Dan V. Poenaru**

**Coordonator: Gabriela-Mariana Luca**

**Ilustrația copertei: Slobodan Dan Paich**

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Culturale Comparate**

**Authors:**

Delphine Brigliano

Ipek Çankaya

Göksel Altınışik Ergur

Hitesh Gautam

Jelena Jovanovic

Vera Lohkamp

Gabriela-Mariana Luca

Mete Özel

Slobodan Dan Paich

Jérôme Thomas

**Coordinator:** Gabriela-Mariana Luca

**Additional edits:** Daria Luca

Centre for Applied Linguistics and Cultural Comparative  
Studies / C-CLASC

Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy from  
Timisoara

**Cover 1: Slobodan Dan Paich:** *Parenting secrets* (18.10.2022)

*To our parents,  
to the child that each of us is,  
but especially to our children*

*To Slobodan, whose life mission was  
to bring beautiful people and their ideas  
into contact, with the wisdom of a master  
and the warmth of a parent*

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## Introduction

We'll start by saying what this book is not. This is not a literary work, just as it is not a scientific one, judging by all the defining canons.

If there was only the writing genre "a challenge of honesty towards the self", surely, these pages would fit perfectly there. Without being a memoir, or any therapeutic experiment of whatever nature it may be.

And yet, here we are turning its pages.

This is a book of honest friendship and of understanding the courage of one's own vulnerability through narrative discourse.

We are nine authors challenged by the memory of the tenth. How is that?

If you have a few minutes, just long enough for the essence of a black tea bag to infuse into a cup of warm water, never hot water for a really tasty tea – connoisseur's rule, we'll try to put things together as soon as possible time.

Like any story, we could start with *once upon a time*, but unlike any story, we can pinpoint our events to a certain time.

In November 2011, The International Group for the Cultural Study of the Body and University of Medicine and Pharmacy Victor Babes Timișoara, organized an international transdisciplinary symposium, *Parents' Bodies, Children's Bodies. From Conception to Education*, a passionate research topic launched by Frederic Duhart and myself.

A multitude of ideas on the subject, coming from several fields of knowledge, would meet. Childhood remains a fascinating subject. We know almost nothing of the subtle emotional layers of our parents. That meeting proved this once again.

We learned on that occasion to look at people and listen to them through what was left *unsaid*. The literary approach slipped too much into fiction, the scientific approach, through the multitude of data and statistics, was too rigid. We were looking for a voice for a living history.

In the working group since then, Slobodan Dan Paich and Jérôme Thomas have come and stayed with us. We built many transdisciplinary and transcultural projects together.

Our approach, from the point of view of cultural anthropology, constantly warm and open, tried to shed light on the fact that, no matter how objectively they conduct research in the humanities, the researcher is, organically, a subjective filter and cannot deviate from it. They are an observer, but an observer subsidiarily influenced by the culture of their country of origin, by their mother tongue, by their own human, professional and academic experiences, even if in infinitesimal dose. All this, of course, in the academic space, is kept in check by a solid critical apparatus. But we are human and there is always something ineffable that slips through our fingers.

So, I proposed to Professor Paich an editorial project that would bring together different experiences and ages on a common topic of introspection, to see what brings us closer.

Moreover, we wanted to check how important it is to relearn to tell stories and to tell each other, in a present where people, dominated by technology, almost don't talk to each other anymore. Anyone who puts an image into the public media space (they seem to have had the solution to the 1000 words – if we were to use the proverbial phrase attributed to Frederick R. Barnard) is called a content creator. And the hundreds, thousands, even millions of followers and likes, through the displayed emoticons, are called friends. The paradoxical result of this social behaviour throws us into a sea of loneliness, troubled by real and virtual image waves. What will happen to the human being? In this fury of ubiquitous communication, will they lose his gift of storytelling?

Obviously, the newborn of the consumer society falls asleep less and less with their ear on their mother's breast under which the heart beats the tender and wise rhythm of life. Others are the sights and sounds that grow it.

So, for this exercise in honesty, we chose childhood as a reference period and, just as children play, with questions like: *have you ever seen a seagull? How many times? Have you ever had blue ice cream? How many times? And so on...* we invoked the body's memory and decided to complete the puzzle with information deposited in us by our senses. What if, instead of interviewing subjects, the researcher leaned on themselves, giving quick and honest answers to questions about themselves? What if people of different ages, from different places were around the same round table? Could we recreate moments of real history that do not appear in any textbook and fieldwork? A kind of wave or chain, in which each

link is a framework memory: another place, another time, another cultural environment, another religion, another social condition.

The idea excited Professor Paich. Childhood and motherhood were his favourite themes. Before him I had never encountered so much passion to find the unique answer formed by interweaving all the transdisciplinary answers obtained through art, anthropology, history, philosophy and medicine related to the mystery of birth and games of initiation.

We forwarded the invitation to other friends and collaborators. We both also got answers like: *I don't remember anything or I can't talk about myself publicly* and so on. And yet, we insisted, why wouldn't we have the courage to share moments from our childhood with other people? These were supposed to be shareable moments, not a lifetime under the magnifying glass.

Then came the first confirmations.

This is actually the VAL story.

Then, last November, Professor Paich passed away, shocking all of us who were close to him and thought him untouchable. He left, not before sending in a recording of his side of the story, with memories of a war-torn childhood, a life experience of encyclopaedic proportions, uniting East and West in the same fabric. His special gift was to bring people close and into the light through what they really are.

Nine of them are the authors of the personal stories that make up the puzzle imagined by the 25 questions, inspired by Graham Greene's words, according to which, for

writers, *the first 20 years of life contain the whole experience – the rest is observation* (quoted from memory).

Our honest answers will take you from India to the United States, through Turkey, Serbia, Romania, Germany and France, with the interventions placed in alphabetical order of the authors' first names.

You will easily be able to define different identity spaces, eras and equally different socio-political and cultural regimes. But just as well, you will be able to see a lot of similarities laid out in one constant: the longing for ourselves, for the child we were, the joy of sharing images, aromas, voices, segments of our growth and the fantastic surprise of finding them there, in the space of mind and heart.

Delphine, Ipek, Göksel, Hitesh, Jelena, Vera, Gabriela, Mete, Jérôme and Slobodan are the *big children* who allowed themselves to tell stories and who challenge you to do the same for yourself. You will have the opportunity to find the real treasures of becoming, you just have to answer each one and draw the picture of your own childhood with the joy of the balance of the experiences that formed you.

Dear reader, enter our game and configure the image of your own childhood. We invite you to answer with short stories. The answers can vary between 100 and 500 words, or more, each. It is very important, in our exercise, to mention your age and the year you are referring to for each answer. Make full use of the information provided by your senses: view, smell, taste, sound and touch.

*Grateful to all of you, Gabriela*

## VAL Puzzle

1. Self-introduction and a little word about the day you were born
2. My first memory of my mother
3. My first memory of my father
4. A story about my grandparents
5. A story about my siblings (if applicable)
6. The first home I remember
7. My first toy
8. The smell I like. The scent that defines me
9. Hunger, thirst, sadness, frustration, or any other distressing memory
10. My first friend
11. How did my parents meet? What have they told me about it?
12. What do I remember about illness (any illness, whether mine or that of others I know, seen through the eyes of a child)?
13. My favourite childhood food. Smell, colour, texture
14. My first day of school
15. My favourite fairy tale
16. My hero
17. My first border experience
18. The few lines from a lullaby or other song from my childhood that I remember
19. My first kiss
20. The first important concert or show that I attended.

21. The first money I earned
22. My first job
23. The first house in which I lived far, apart from my family.  
(If applicable)
24. A teacher who marked me
25. When I felt very alone, very different from others

## **Slobodan. Endless beginning**

Editor's paraphrase of the recording title  
received from the author: *Slobodan, final*

And we lived in shared apartments because they put people, they confiscated apartments and they put everyone, as much people as possible together. So, I lived with my mother in one room and our neighbours didn't talk to us. My parents divorced when I was five and my father lived in the basement. He used to come. But I lived with my mother in one room and she was working very hard. She was really holding the survivor and would be very resourceful. She was translator for machines and tractors but she always wanted to translate literature and poetry, but nobody was interested in that. But so tired she would come from work and I will be exuberant I saw people dancing together and I would get a cushion and dance with it myself. Take some of her clothes and throw it around and she would say please stop it you're making me seasick, and she would take an aspirin. But at times I suddenly wanted to tell her stories and something which preoccupied me and she would just hit me. She said, you know, stop it. So, I kind of felt isolated and sometimes angry and hurt so I would lie on the bed and look at the ceiling. And in the cracks and in all of this I would see pictures. And they were horses in the street, old horses, very few cars. I could see horses and trees and kind of ships I saw on the river and faces and that gave me a tremendous strength, tremendous like as if I had someone

to talk to. And sometimes daily I would look up there and see all kinds of things. And one day, I can't remember 7 or 8, I came back from school and suddenly all doors were open, usually they were closed, and my mother even had the lock to lock it and when we left but suddenly all doors opened, my mother and the neighbours were together and they were happy. I'd never seen them like that. And then they all pointed to the rooms and said look: they repaired it, they had a person repair it. And I looked, and they killed my friend. But after that, maybe the way how I'm structured, whenever I look to a piece of paper, I would see a picture in it and I would try to draw it as best as I can. In that way my friend never left.

# *Chapter 1.*

*Who am I?*

**Delphine:** My name is Delphine Brigliano and I was born in 1974 in the town of Alès. It's a town next to the Cévennes mountains. I spent my early years living in a small house.

My parents owned two dogs, German shepherds, and we had to part with them to live in a building on the third floor. At the time, this little building was very family-orientated. All the residents used to meet outside the door of the building to spend the evening. The children played together while their parents looked on.

**Gabriela:** My name is Gabriela-Mariana. Only Gabriela, that's what my father would have wanted, inspired by Cristian Popescu's song, *Gabi-Gabriela*, the song of the year 1967. But I also received the name of the godmother so that things would happen as they should. I was born on a Sunday in February in the most beautiful city in the heart of Romania, Brasov.

My mother says it was sunny and the snow was crunching and shining under the dry mountain frost. She also says that I had unusually long and black hair and that my face was white without pink folds and baby wrinkles. I asked her to tell me about the moment of my birth dozens of times and describe me back then. It seemed incredible that I looked so much like Snow White! This thought settled in me and would only wake up when it seemed to me that I was falling in love and that Prince Charming had finally found me there, in front of a four-story block of flats in a working-class neighbourhood.

It's very hard for me to pinpoint my first memory, but I think somehow link it to the silhouettes of my parents, next to me, in the nights I woke up crying.

**Göksel:** My name is Göksel. I was born in 1969 in the city of Ankara, Turkey. Although my family lived far from here, my mother had chosen to be with her mother during the puerperal period since my grandmother was a midwife. I am not good at recalling memories. I had a strong impression of unforgettability at the time that the event had occurred.

Ultimately, most of my memories are tentative to me. However, I like telling my past as stories. Perhaps I use what had been told to me by my parents. There are photographs and narratives starting with the day of my birth (21st April) and covering my whole childhood. This might cause me to misremember these events. In fact, the camera had been bought especially for the honour of my birth. For the last three decades, I found a solution to keep my memories vivid. I am narrating them repeatedly and writing them as stories between the fictitious parts. Now for this project, I will try to do my best in answering the questions for my first 25 years, but I can not guarantee that all I wrote would be the ones that I recalled by myself.

**Hitesh:** I am Hitesh Gautam. I was born in October 1987 in Sangam Vihar, Southern District of New Delhi, India. I have two siblings, one brother, and one sister. Being the youngest I was

the most pampered child in the family not only by my parents but also by my brother and sister as they are nine and four years older than me. I think my earliest memory is of my mother feeding me chapati (Indian flatbread) with her hands. She used to make mostly potatoes, Chapati and sometimes she used to make triangle-shaped Paratha bread and used to sprinkle Shakkar (Raw Indian sugar) on top of it before feeding me. My mother used to put Kohl on our eyes, it used to be the most uncomfortable moment for me and most of the time I ended up crying. Then my mother would tell a story to all three of us while we were already in our beds. My mother used to run a dairy farm and all the cows and buffaloes had names. Out of all, I remember one cow named Geetu who stayed with us for a very long time.

**İbrahim:** I am İbrahim Mirbağiroğlu. I was born in the year 1963, in Istanbul. My earliest memory is related to my father and it is written below.

**İpek:** I am İpek. I was born in the year 1969... in the town of Istanbul...My earliest memory is a birthday party. A sunny late April day at our house which was in a lovely neighbourhood built for a group of journalists, writers, novelists outside the city centre. It was made of houses and apartment buildings with lots of green areas, parks, and streets where children could play freely in nature and adults could enjoy the atmosphere. Most adults were friends and/or colleagues and

us, as children played together, went to primary school together, we practically grew up together. As my earliest memory I remember a birthday with balloons, cakes, and candles... a variety of food on the table and toys and games that we played. I remember us running around, there was lots of joy and sweat too. As we grew up together there was always a birthday at somebody's house or garden or at the beach facility we used to frequent. I remember usually having two birthday parties, one for friends and one for my family and close relatives and that was lucky of me.

**Jelena:** My name is Jelena. I was born on a Sunday at the end of September 1964, on the Day of the Cross, in Belgrade, capital of Serbia and of Yugoslavia of the time. In Belgrade I grew up, finished my school and I live there today. My mother told me she was happy to have me and she had always wished to have a little girl. She told me that I had dark eyes that reminded her on my father's eyes. She also told me that I was small like a small loaf of bread. She was also often telling me the beginning of the story of Snow White, as the queen wanted to have a daughter with skin as white as snow and eyes and hair dark as ebony. She repeated this story many times to me; it meant a lot to me and gave me inner strength.

**Jérôme:** My name is Jérôme Thomas and I was born on a February day in 1968 in a small town in Brittany called Saint-Brieuc. It was a very cold day and the snow covered the

horizon like a cotton wool cocoon. Saint-Brieuc is the prefecture of the Côtes d'Armor department. It was a calm and peaceful town.

My parents lived in a nearby village, where they still live today. At that time, my parents' house was in the middle of the fields. It was an old farmhouse that they had renovated. Opposite them, a farm was still in operation and the neighbours could go and fetch milk. From the garden, I could see the cows in the meadow, while from my bedroom window, on the horizon, I could see the sea where I could see boats sailing.

**Vera:** I was born in Wermelskirchen - North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) in 1971 and baptised Vera. (My father refused a second name.) The second of June was a sunny spring day. My mother was woken early in the morning by contractions. She took her time to shower and pack her bag for the hospital before waking my father. He was terribly upset about having to jump from bed into the car without time for his morning toilet and coffee.

The birth was complication-free, but my swallowing reflex needed time to get going, so I was fed through my nose for the first few weeks. At the hospital, all babies were placed in the infant ward. The nurses took the babies to their mothers according to their schedule and collected them later. My mother hid me under the blanket, so that the nurses would overlook me and we would have more time together.

I fish in a murky pond for the first memory. Fragments emerge, sink down, mix together. They come from the time, when I was three or four years old. My parents had long since separated, we lived with my mother and at times my stepfather in Alfter, a suburb of Bonn.

I remember my stepfather's house but not the terraced house, where we lived some time, with which my brother, three years older than myself, associates the happiest time of his childhood.

*Across the street from my stepfather's house runs a path between lettuce fields, stinging nettles and undergrowth, ending at the back gate of my best friend's garden. Our secret path. We creep along the path, ducking, dodging the thorns and nettles. Arriving unseen, without a scratch, is the goal.*

*Arguing with my brother along the path, he pushes me into the nettle thicket. I fight my way out of the thicket, my body is on fire, I run home. My mother puts me under the cold shower, the outer burning sub-sides, my rage does not.*

## Die erste Erinnerung

Ich finde in einem trübem Teils mehr der ersten Erinnerung. Brandstische stehen auf, sinken nieder, vermischen sich. Die Stimmen aus der Zeit als ich drei oder vier Jahre alt war, meine Eltern hatten nicht längst getrennt, wir lebten mit meiner Mutter und zeitweise meinem Stiefvater in Alfter, einem Vorort von Bonn.

Ich erinnere mich an das Haus meines Stiefvaters aber nicht an das Elternhaus in dem wir zusammenwohnten, mit dem mein drei Jahre älterer Bruder die glücklichste Zeit seiner Kindheit verbringt.

Gegenüber vom Haus meines Stiefvaters verläuft ein Jungesfeldpfad zwischen Schuttpfeld, Brennenschen und Gershepp, es endet am hinteren Gartentor meines Elternhauses, unser Geheimweg. Wir schliefen den Pfad entlang, dackel, uns, weißen Dornen und Brennenschen aus. Vongerathen, ohne Stimmungen undkommen, ist das Ziel.

Steht mit meinem Bruder am Pfad, er stoßt mich ins Brennenschenlicht. Ich kumpfe mich um dem Licht an meinem Bruder vorbei, mein Körper brennt, ich bin mehr Hause. Meine Mutter stellt mich unter die kalte Lampe, das aufsteigende Sonnenlicht macht, meine Welt mähel.

## *Chapter 2.*

*My first memory  
of my mother*

**Delphine:** My mother, a tall brunette with blue eyes. She was so thin and fragile. She knew how to show her authority when I argued with my brother, who is 18 months younger than me. She used to pick us up at lunchtime and eat with us. The school was just a few metres from our building.

When I saw photos from that period again later, her clothes were typical of the 1970s. She looked like the icons of that exciting period.

**Gabriela:** I don't know why, but the oldest memory I have of my mother is from when I was 2 or 3 years old, when I was hospitalized for asthma. I remember the ugly and cold room, with cement floor and the walls covered in white tiles, broken in places. A lounge with cots and metal bedside tables, painted white. They too, in places, had chipped paint and splashes of rust struggled to be visible.

My mother had come down in the inner courtyard to talk to the doctor. I was watching her from the window, with my forehead and palms pressed against the glass. It must have been autumn.

A few yellow-brown leaves fluttered on the ground. And there, my mother was so gorgeous! She has never seemed more beautiful to me. Delicate, supple, dressed in a burgundy overcoat and with an Audrey Hepburn hat on her head, made of the same material, she listened sadly to what the woman in white, with a stethoscope on shoulders, was telling her. A pungent smell, which I later identified as chlorine, seared into my nostrils and into my memory. In fact, the full flavour was a

mixture of chlorine, medical alcohol and canteen soup made from boiled potatoes.

All that mattered was that my mom was there, unnaturally beautiful and sad, wrapped in a bloody colour.

I thought I could hear her heart beating inside my forehead.

Sticking to the window.

**Göksel:** One of my earliest memories of my mother might be the one behind the reason my mother had for sending me to primary school at age 5 in September 1974 at a town (Ortaklar) near the city of Aydın, Turkey. My brother and I were alone at home as usual. My parents locked the door and went to work, and I was looking after my 3-year-old brother. Later, my mother said the reason was the lack of a kindergarten and the impossibility of finding a child-minder at those times. She was working full time as a teacher. None of the relatives were living nearby. On the day, it was raining constantly and somehow the rain got into the entryway first and then further from the door. I got my little brother to escape further into the house with the fear of being drowned, even though the water was only around one centimetre high. It might be possible to walk by, but to where? I knew that the main door was locked. My childish imagination drew the scariest scenes. When my mother unlocked the main door, she got into the puddle possibly unaware and shouted our names with a worried voice. We were on a sofa in the farthest room at the end of a long corridor and trembling as we held each other and cried

softly. She ran and embraced us tightly. On the same day, she took me to the nearest elementary school and insisted to the school principal to accept me to a class even though the semester had already started the previous month. I still remember her relief and my enthusiasm at the same time.

**Hitesh:** I have a bag full of memories of my mother as a child and it is difficult to say which one is the first memory. As my mother used to run a dairy farm in Delhi, she used to buy and sell cows and buffaloes. She never left me alone for long except once when she went to buy a cow from Haryana (a neighboring state) because she wanted a particular breed of cow. She left home early in the morning, she woke me up and told me that she was going to buy a cow and I should stay home with my sister and brother until she came back in the evening. I saw my father counting a bundle of money and later he gave it to my mother.

Around 5 PM I asked my brother when my mother will come back, and he said she will come back soon. I was constantly checking with my siblings and they had the same answer that she will come back in some time. After 9 PM I started saying that my mother is no more, as she has a lot of money some bad people had taken her money and had killed her. Initially, they were laughing but they became sad too and told me not to say that but I did not stop. My father came home from work and told me to go to sleep as my mother will be coming any time. I did not want to as I had a very heavy heart and kept repeating the same sentence. My mother was

back around midnight and I hugged her with full strength while crying loudly. My mother told us that the truck carrying our new cow had an accident and luckily no one got injured including the cow.

I also remember my mother making fresh butter every morning by churning yogurt. She used to take the fresh white butter from that earthen pot and feed me. The smell and taste of that fresh butter were out of the world for me. I always used to be with my mother and when she used to hold grocery bags in both her hands, I would hold her saree and walk alongside. During summers she used to put a corner of her saree on me when I used to sleep after lunch. And almost every week she used to massage my whole body with some herb oil that she made at home.

**Ibrahim:** It must have been 1967 or 1968. When I was three or four years old, in Kars, a small city in Eastern Anatolia, my mother prepared me to collect handkerchiefs from our neighbours. I think it was for Children's Festival. As far as I understood, I had to be very handsome and well behaved for this tradition. Before the 1980s, there were no paper handkerchiefs (at least not in Turkey, as far as I remember) and every morning we, the primary school students, had to show our class teacher our clean hands with our fingernails neatly trimmed on our white soap-scented and ironed cotton handkerchiefs. Therefore, the number of handkerchiefs you had was very important. At school or on the street, the more handkerchiefs you had, the better. Before I knocked on the

neighbours' door, my mother told me every detail of a long list of things I should and should not do. I had to collect the handkerchiefs with the most beautiful embroidery without embarrassing my mother.

This is a memory that makes me very nervous, but the image of my mother getting down on her knees and talking to me with a smiling face is one of the first memories that sticks in my memory.

**Ipek:** I can't identify just one moment but a general sense of beauty, engagement, and elegance. I distinctly remember her voice, joyful laughter, the fun we had together and her unorthodox advice when some mothers made their daughters learn how to cook and clean, she used to tell me "Don't worry you'll do it when you have to do it". She was considerably young when she died, so much so that we could only have thirty-five years together. After her death I had written somewhere that she had enlightened every room she entered, and I still deeply believe in it.

**Jelena:** I remember my mother's arms as the safest place in the world.

I think the oldest memory of my mother is when she was angry with me during the nights when I disturbed her sleep. I might have been three or four years old. I remember I told her that I was afraid of her when she took her glasses off (meaning, when she woke up and angry). She was surprised

that I addressed her, in the way I described the negative feeling towards her. But I could not do anything about it.

I also remember her telling me the story about Dedalus and Icarus. I was fascinated and frightened by the story of a brave young man who paid with his life for his dignity and bravery. It awoke the awareness that the higher powers are stronger than us and that they do not adopt our wishes and beliefs. An early warning.

She also told me about the *Labyrinth and the Minotaur*, and about the thread that Theseus followed to fulfil his task. This story gave me hope and assurance that following one's own path in life has to result in achieving the goal.

**Jérôme:** I remember my mother taking me to school. She didn't have a car. The school was about three kilometres away. I used to go with her on a moped. It was light blue and didn't go very fast. I'd get on the luggage rack and off we'd go into the village. In those days, helmets weren't compulsory - it could be dangerous! But there weren't many cars. In the evening, she'd come and get me.

**Vera:** 1974, Alfter. I always admired my mother's black hair, which she wore in a loose bun. My mother seemed rather strict, due to her correct clothes, the updo and golden glasses. Good manners were very important to her.

My first memories:

I am in the garden, it is shady, overgrown with ivy and brushwood. My mother is standing in front of the cellar door, holding up a large wooden disc. She has painted the wood. Red, blue, brown, green - flowers. It's beautiful. How does she do it, the wood is so rough. Mum laughs happily.

Mum takes me to a meeting of the FDP (Liberal Democratic Party) in Alfter. The hall is decorated in blue and yellow. Mutti knows so many people, discusses, stands on the podium, speaks to everyone.

Mutti loves the opera, she takes Joachim and me with her, because no one can look after us. The departure is hectic, we hurry to dress festively.

The opera hall is splendid in gold and red, the chandelier is raised, the babble of voices falls silent, clapping, then silence, the music begins, a shiver runs through me. Break - Mum runs with us into the foyer before queues form at the glass counter. She orders vanilla ice cream with hot raspberries. Hm - sweet - sour, cold and hot, creamy in the mouth. The white mixes with the red, slowly becomes sauce. Pause and ice cream are over. I am tired, want to go home.

Mum wakes me up, loud clapping, cheers.

We leave the hall fast to be the first at the wardrobe.

## *Chapter 3.*

*My first memory  
of my father*

**Delphine:** My father, with his long hair and small moustache, and I still remember that red shirt he used to tie round his belly. We'd go round the neighbourhood on the back seat of his scooter, and we've kept that tradition alive. Today, it's his grandchildren who go round the garden with their grandfather who drives the scooter.

**Gabriela:** My dad taught me to pray. Above the bed in my parents' bedroom hung an A4 icon, painted in shades of dusty green, depicting Jesus crucified. Before going to bed, my dad would sit on the edge of the bed and watch my entire ritual carefully. I was kneeling, between their pillows and with my hands together, we were both whispering:

*Angel, my angel, that God gave you to me, I am small, You make me big, I am weak, You make me strong ...*

My dad worked as a welder in a steel plant. He was very proud of his red Communist Party membership card. Now I know it was important to him because it was proof that he belonged to a strong group. That he, the motherless and poor country boy, had a social identity.

When we finished the prayer, he would tuck the quilt under my chin and slowly leave the room.

Back then, I hadn't heard of fathers kissing their children before bed or saying "I love you" like we could see in American movies.

But I always knew that my mother and me were more important to him than life; life received from his father. Grandpa also had left him an old Bible with pictures as his only possession.

I flipped through it from time to time with great wonder.

**Göksel:** Although it might be one that I created according to the story, I remember that I was very jealous of my father. I was around three years old. There was a tray with a picture of a little girl on it. I hated this girl because I believed that she was my father's secret daughter. I am not sure whether any body said this to me, or if I made it up. But the feeling was there. And then, a real "my first memory of my father" comes. I was at the age of 9 and it was the summer holiday in 1978. We were living in one of the separate houses (dodge house) of a boarding high school where my parents already worked as teachers. Hide-and-seek was our favourite game. We were a group of friends, children of approximately the same age.

The night games were extra exciting. In one evening, my friends went home for dinner, but our dinner table was not ready yet. My mother had cooked a special Turkish dish called mantı that I loved the most for the late lunch that day. I asked to my father joining us for hide-and-seek and he accepted my invitation immediately. He was a serious man, and that answer was a real surprise to me. I remember that I felt like a princess whose wishes were fulfilled without expectations. I jumped

from the one meter high porch like I was flying to the moon, bursting with happiness.

My brother was walking in front of me, and I crashed to the ground. I saw my father's face when I opened my eyes and his eyes were terrified but relaxing at the same time, as my father's usual antinomy in those days. The fall caused brain trauma, and the next two years of struggling with medical issues led me to become the doctor I am now.

**Hitesh:** Growing up I saw my father was very strict, serious, and disciplined especially with my siblings. Once, I do not remember exactly how old I was but not more than five (1991-92), my whole family went for a trip to Vaishno Devi Temple, Jammu & Kashmir. After traveling by Train up to Jammu, we took a bus and during the journey I saw my father has bus tickets in his shirt pocket I took them out and started playing and suddenly dropped them out of the windy bus window. My father told me if a ticket checker would come and see that we do not have tickets he would put us in jail. That entire bus journey was restless for me and I kept on looking at the bus door whenever it stopped on the way and praying that the Ticket Checker would not come. After that, we rested at a pilgrim's rest house and then started walking on a switchback hiking trail toward the temple. Everyone was walking and then my father lifted me and put me on his shoulder, both my legs hanging alongside his neck. I was holding his hair and face sometimes and he was cool about it.

When we reached the temple on the entrance there was a giant brass bell hanging above our heads. My father asked me to ring the bell. I tried but could not as it was very heavy. He held my hand in his and rang the bell. Those vibrations coming out of that gigantic bell were an amazing experience for me. I felt like I had a shower of vibrations, and my father told me this is a good practice to purify our body. It was around an eight-day trip and my father was holding me everywhere and feeding me with his hands. I remember while he was walking having me on his shoulder, he broke peanut pods and gave me peanuts to eat, and threw some at the monkeys sitting nearby.

My father had muscular arms and I was very impressed with that. Sometimes I used to put both my hands around to measure them and they were too big for my small hands back then. I started sleeping next to my father and used to place my head on his biceps and I continued this as a daily schedule. Sometimes when my father used to come home late from work I used to be up and wait for him as I wanted to eat from his plate and to sleep on his arm. Also, I remember his shaving sessions because he used to make different facial expressions, especially when he used to fill one of his cheeks with air and shave. I was allowed to see him shaving his face but I was not allowed to touch a rectangle aluminum box in which he used to put his shaving kit. He told me that there are sharp objects and I might cut my finger with them, but he did not know that I checked that box multiple times after he left for work.

**Ibrahim:** I remember this memory thanks to a black-and-white photograph that I often saw on the shelf behind our dining table. It was taken in one of the villages of Karahasan. I couldn't find the original name; almost all Kurdish village names have been replaced with Turkish names, a state policy still prevalent in the region.

In 1967, it was a very small town in Eastern Anatolia, famous for its cold and snowy weather. I was two years old then and my brother was five. In the photo, my brother is sitting on a big white horse. My father was holding the horse's stirrup with one hand and my little hand with the other. This horse probably belonged to one of the rich people in the village and was used to take my father to and from sick people in nearby villages from time to time. Before the horse's owner left us, I think my father must have given him his camera and told him where to look and what button to press. Every time I looked at it, I dreamed of riding that horse. It was as if we were flying over the white hill with our white wings made of snow. I remember being angry with my father. For years, I thought he was being unfair, favouring my brother, but of course my father was right: There was no way a two-year-old could ride a horse, or even sit on its back. I have never forgotten the smell of that horse.

**Ipek:** Sense of care, kindness and dedication to my mum and me. I remember the three of us on a horse carriage in one of the Prince Islands on the Bosphorus when I was 5 or so and I was shouting 'hold tight daddy you are going to fall' and

immediately after that scream 'watermelons, watermelons!' when I noticed the street vendor on the side. Childhood psyche is so different from our adult minds.

**Jelena:** My dad used to play with me and kept me in his arms. With him I felt safe and protected. I had a wish to always feel that way. When my brother and I were small (in the late 1960s and early 1970s), he used to "attack" us and to tickle us for several minutes, which we liked it, we laughed loudly and enjoyed it.

Daddy liked to play with my brother and me; we preferred when he would make us a small house out of chairs, covers and other objects and pieces of furniture. He regularly took us to the cinema and to art exhibitions, and told us a lot about the arts, about ways of observing and listening to art works. It helped us a lot to build ourselves in professional sense.

Years after, he rarely was with us, he has always been somewhere else with his work. I missed him. Later on, when I was a young girl (from ar. 1978 to ar. 1988), we were hardly in touch; I was an introvert person and my closeness to him was manifested in my readiness to confined in him indirectly, and he answered me in the same way. I was happy to have such a relationship to him.

My father remembers Slobodan Paich from the Academy of the Beaux Arts in Belgrade from the end of the 1960s.

**Jérôme:** My first memory is of the snow-covered countryside around my parents' house. I was two or three years old and I remember my father making a snowman while I was playing outside with my older brother. I was sitting on a little chair and my father was making snowballs to make this snowman. The sky was grey, the countryside completely white. There wasn't a sound. Everything was silent. I wore a hat and a coat and from time to time I touched the icy snow.

**Vera:** My father was, still is, a handsome man, sportive and restless. In some regards the opposite of my stepfather (who was the youngest sibling (of 12 children) of my paternal grandfather). My stepfather was tall, blond with piercing light blue eyes, loved the opera and good restaurants, my father is middle-sized, brown haired, brown-green meshed eyes and prefers pubs and pop concerts. In the first years he took my brother and myself sometimes to *Phantasialand* (a fairytale theme park). My father's temper aroused easily, e.g. if we did not finish our plates or if I got hungry after only an hour on a long drive, frankly if s.th. happened he planned otherwise.

My stepfather could at times be euphoric, I loved when he took my one hand and foot and turned very fast, so I would get the feeling to fly. My mother got scared what even increased the fun.

*1975, After. First memory of my father:*

I want to roam around with my friend Anja, but Dad is coming to visit. We have to stay at the house. Finally, he arrives, we sit down around the big wooden table, inside the

room it is dark, outside the sun is shining. Dad holds a parcel in front of my nose, a present, completely without a birthday! Orange roller skates! I squeeze my right foot through the front loop, the sandal is stuck.

"Come here!" Dad takes my foot along with the roller skate, undoes the front buckle and fits the skates. He pulls me up from the chair. I'm on roller skates! We go outside.

The gravel in front of the house blocks the rolls. Dad leads me to the steep road. He pulls me down in a zigzag.

"Now try yourself. Push, one foot at a time!"

My feet tangle, I fall, clutching Papa's hands, he pulls me back up. "Push, don't walk!!"

He waits until I am back on my feet, another attempt. Carefully I push my right foot forward.

"Now the other!"

I lift my left foot, roll a little way.

## *Chapter 4.*

*A memory  
of my grandparents*

**Delphine:** My grandmother came to the house every Saturday afternoon after lunch. She would bring a box of cakes and she was always accompanied by her two sons, my father's brothers. The television was on and I was trying to keep up with the series *Little House on the Prairie*, which was very popular at the time, while the whole family chatted passionately and in an indescribable hubbub. My grandmother, a small, plump woman with a strong accent from the south of France, was trying to express herself to his sons.

**Gabriela:** I have countless memories of my maternal grandparents. I didn't know my father's parents. His mother died when he was just a little boy.

I spent a good part of the summer vacation at my maternal grandparents, in a fairytale village, hidden between two hills covered with vines, apple trees and pear trees, in the Buzau Valley.

My grandfather was tall and handsome, with blue eyes, like a Hollywood actor. He had served during Second World War in its entirety, he was against the communist regime, and he was highly respected for these two great virtues. He was called the American, and that's how the people in the village still remember him. My grandma was small and thin with blue-black hair. I remember her hardworking hands and caresses.

In the 70s, there was still no electric light in their village. The long summer evenings ended by the light of the oil lamp. The story of the six swans filled the room through the

soft voice of the grandmother and was drawn amazingly on the wall through the shadow play of her hands.

I watched their flight with bated breath. Sometimes the shadows hung in the corner of the bread card, invariably kept in the frame of the icon.

**Göksel:** I don't remember my grandfather from my mother's side. I knew he loved me very much; I heard a lot about it. He had asthma and I might have chosen to become a chest physician to save grandfathers of other kids. I liked my grandmother from my father's side. She passed away just before my daughter was born. My last visit was during the last months of my pregnancy, and I like the feeling like there might be a sort of transition. Her words might have helped me to have such an impression. My other grandparents lived longer than average. I remember that my grandmother from my mother's side told me her family's stories, especially about love and abundance, and losing both. I have dedicated my first unofficial story book to her. No? My grandfather from my father's side was a mysterious man possibly to all of his grandchildren. It is another mystery whether or not I inherited some part of his personality and which part, although I have some guesses. As a child, I knew that all my grandparents loved me in their own way. This might have helped me recognize different love languages and accept them all.

**Hitesh:** As a child during summer vacations (almost two months), we had two options: to go to the village and spend the holidays either with our paternal grandparents or go to my maternal grandmother who used to live alone in her village. As far as I remember except once we always went to my maternal grandmother's place until I was twelve (1990 -1999).

She was a tall woman and had long and thick fingers. I remember her fingers because I used to hold her hand always when we went for a walk, to buy vegetables in the evening, or when she used to go to Shiva temple in the morning. I remember she told me multiple times that she loved me more than my brother and my sister as I was always with her and did not go to the neighbors' houses, as both my siblings used to go and play with other kids in the neighborhood. I used to ask my grandmother to make potato and tomato curry as it was my favorite. During my vacations she used to make it almost every other day. I remember exactly that the curry used to be thick and smooth in consistency and full of flavor. The asafetida & tomato combination was priceless. The best time of the day used to be in the evening when everyone was done with dinner. After an hour or so we used to get a piece of raw sugar (Jaggery) with a big bronze glass of warm milk that was warmed up on a very slow wood fire in an earthen pot. After that all the children gathered in front of the grandmother's room. She would put a handmade carpet on the floor and sit in the center surrounded by eight to ten kids which included my siblings, cousins, and neighbors, ready to listen the story. I usually sat close to her, sometimes placed my head in her lap and she would massage my head gently. I used to fall asleep

and the next morning asked everyone for the part I missed last night. Like all the grandmothers in the world, she was an amazing cook and a great human being. She had some things for everyone whether it was giving water or food to passing strangers, pieces of advice to related families, or solutions to many problems in the community. She passed away at the age of one hundred and three in 2007. The last sentence she said to my mother was that she would like to see me but unfortunately, I was two thousand kilometers away and could not make it on time. I think it is my biggest regret.

**Ibrahim:** My father was an idealistic medical doctor and during his working life, he worked in small villages and cities in Eastern Anatolia. So, my small family were always hundreds of kilometres away from our grandparents. Occasionally my grandmother would come to stay with us for a few months. Her bed was in my room, on the couch opposite me. She never slept at night, carrying medicine boxes from her bed to her closet and in opposite direction all night long. I could not sleep much either because the cabinet door creaked a lot. I think I was in the sixth or seventh grade, in 1976, when we woke up one morning and saw dozens of empty liquor bottles in the kitchen, next to the sink. A pungent smell of alcohol filled the whole house. The odours of raki, gin, vodka, whiskey was mixed together. That night she woke up and wanted to drink a glass of water from the bottle in the refrigerator, but it turned out to be vodka. She burned her mouth and thought she had sinned. My grandmother got angry, opened the liquor cabinet

at home and poured all the bottles into the kitchen sink. She was muttering, "They made me sin at my age". My father was laughing, but I think it was a little neurotic.

**Ipek:** My maternal grandparents lived in our neighbourhood and our houses were very close. I used to spend lots of time at their home. My grandfather was called the grandfather of roses by the neighbourhood children because he grew a variety of roses in their garden. I have old photographs of him in that garden with fruit trees, various flower species and the roses... All sorts of roses, white, yellow, soft pink, red, crimson... I remember one type from which my grandmother used to make rose jam. It was soft pink, curly, multi-layered and had the loveliest smell.

**Jelena:** My grandmother from my mother's side used to live with us and take care of us, as children, while our parents were at work. When we were small, she nurtured us with great attention and tenderness. She sang a lot to us and in that way, she created an inner, domestic world full of tranquillity and virtue. We felt safe, loved, belonging, under the shelter of her voice and songs that she kept from her childhood and youth. She used to make our favourite cakes. Later on, when we went to the primary school, during the 1970s, in the evening before bedtime she read us books for children by Serbian writer Branko Ćopić. We enjoyed them, we loved him, from his books radiated cheerfulness and love.

My grandfather from my mother's side took my brother and me for a walk and told us a lot about events and battles from history. At home, he organized gymnastics "lessons" for us and which the other children from the neighbourhood were also invited.

We went to the seaside together; he taught us to throw stones on the surface of the sea. He loved us very much. He died while we were children, in 1975. We were not taken to the funeral; they considered it too moving for us.

Our grandmother from father's side has not lived with us. She used to come to visit us from time to time, or we travelled to her. I liked to sleep in her place, especially on the occasions of the holiday of family saint, *slava*; I liked the way that oil lamp used to shine below the icon when the light was out. When I was five or six (in 1969 or 1970), in the morning, we used to pretend I was a princess and she brought me the breakfast in bed. I remember the smell and taste of white coffee and fried eggs.

I don't know my grandfather from my father's side. He was shot by partisans at the very end of the WW II. We were not told about it as kids; my dad told me when I was 12 (1976) and I was very shaken by it.

**Jérôme:** My grandmother lived with my parents for the last few years of her life. She died when I was 14. She was a woman who always wore black. She always wore her hair in a bun. She seemed austere and severe with such an appearance. Yet she was very attentive to me and my brothers. Every evening she

would come to see each of us in turn and sing us a song before turning out the light. She sang softly. It was almost a whisper and I can still remember the sound of her voice.

**Vera:** My grandfather was killed about six weeks after his first child, my mother, was born, in the last weeks of the second World War, during which he had already lost one leg. Later my widowed grandmother married the older brother of my grandfather, who had returned after two years in Sowjet detention camps. He himself was a widow, his wife had died after the birth of their daughter. It was a very pragmatic decision. After her second husband had died my grandmother always talked about her true love, my grandfather. My Grandma was always kind and soft, but somehow elusive, my “Step” grandfather was tall, very upright (like he had swallowed a stick) and aloof. He had a fine ironic sense of humour. When my grandfather was about to die, he was haunted by nightmares of the war. His roommate in the hospital asked for a different room because this horror was unbearable for him. I wonder if the stiffness in my grandfather’s body was caused by the suppression of his Traumas.

Before my grandmother died (in 2020 a hundred years old) she asked her daughters and grandchildren to take care, that the horror of the Nazi regime would not re-occur. At that time, she often dreamed about men in black uniforms and that she was young again, would get out of the catholic church where a group of the Hitler youth waited to intimidate them.

*First memory, Dabringhausen, 1977:*

My brother stays with Kalle (our uncle) in the basement, they look at Grandpa's railway, a landscape with hills, tunnels, houses, trees and stations on a huge slab. You mustn't touch anything, otherwise grandpa gets angry. I go upstairs to the living room, an almost empty room with a parquet floor. Grandma and Grandpa are practising here for their annual golden dance pin. In the birdcage by the window, Hansi, the blue budgie, is nibbling on the grain bar. Lora's plumage glows yellow, she eyes me suspiciously with a jerking head.

Joachim calls. Relieved, I run down the stairs, out onto the grey-paved car park with the many garages all around. Grandma is waiting at the open sliding door of the beige VW bus.

I climb into the musty bus. Grandpa sits upright at the wheel, smiling mischievously at me:

"Miss de Ver!" Only grandpa calls me that. Usually he is serious, aloof, not today.

I am happy, everyone is happy, we drive to the best chip shop in the world, shall I take red and white chips or just with ketchup?

*Paternal Grandparents Carola and Herrmann*

I loved my grandmother but I was also a bit afraid of her, one had to obey her rules. She had a weekly lunch-plan, it never changed for all the years. My favourite was the Wednesday, then we had vanilla pudding with raspberry sirup for dessert. We had to eat, what was on the table, no matter if we liked it. Luckily my brother succeeded in convincing her, that we won't eat the blood-sausage.

She cooked the best blackberry jam.

My grandmother had always a perfect Hairstyle. One day I passed the half open door of the sleeping room. I saw the back of an old woman in Undershirt with little grey hair on her head. I needed a second to realize, it was my grandmother. A shock. The brown hair was a wig! I knew that my grandpa was wearing a white Toupet but not her.

My Grandpa hardly talked to me; I don't remember his voice. During the NS Regime he was a party member of the NSDAP. I can't tell if he joined the party in order to keep his job at the railway or if he got the job because he was a party member.

*Memory Groß-Reken, 1977*

The top of the white grain silo, soon we'll be at grandma and grandpas.

Dad slowly turns onto the station forecourt, the car rumbling over the cobblestones. He parks in front of the deserted station hall; a window is smashed. Behind us, a truck drives under the silo, grain rushes onto the loading area. At the end of the square is a shop "Raiffeisen" is written in green above the entrance.

Grandma and Grandpa live in the station building, right at the top, a flat with an outside toilet, the sink at the end of the corridor instead of in the kitchen. Grandpa has worked for the railway; thus, he can stay here all his life. On the last landing to the flat I hold on to the banister, there is a gap between the landing and the window, I am afraid of slipping in between or falling against the window.

Joachim and I sleep in the children's room of our three aunts, in their old bed. It is soft and wide, the blanket thick. The picture of the Virgin Mary above the headboard protects us from the ghosts that live in the attic. The small door next to the big freezer, at the foot of the bed, leads to the attic, which is dusty, full of cobwebs. Grandma hangs her washing there. I am glad that Joachim sleeps next to me.

We turn on the TV, grandma lies down with me on the sofa, I slide up as far as I can to escape the acrid smell of Pippi. I snuggle in her soft arm. Grandpa sits on the armchair, his toupee shining white, Joachim close to him on the floor. Electric fire flickering in the fireplace behind them.

Grandpa goes with Joachim into his workshop. I can only go as far as the door, the air is murky with dust, the circular saw deafening. The budgies in the shed opposite the workshop chirp excitedly, feathers sail on sawdust, there is an unpleasant sweet smell. I walk on to Maggi, Grandpa's hunting dog, she is howling. Maggi looks at me expectantly through the green wire mesh of the octagonal kennel. I would like to set her free, to chase her around the garden, but a padlock prevents us. I sit down on the lawn, stroke Maggi's brown and white fur through the bars. I get bored and walk away, Maggi howls louder with every step. I return, stroke her, leave - that's our game. Dinner, now I really have to go. Maggi's yelp penetrates up to the flat.

## *Chapter 5.*

*A story  
about my siblings*

**Delphine:** My younger brother, whom I can count on and for whom I have an unwavering love, was my worst enemy until I was a teenager. I was always taller than him and one day he overtook me. We fought and I always lost. One day I chased him with a fork in my hand to get respect. When we were teenagers, we weren't very close and he couldn't stand my friends. From the age of 15 we started to get closer. Our children, who are two months apart, grew up together and that brought us a lot closer. We have shared passions, like music, and it was he who gave me my first scooter.

**Gabriela:** I have no siblings. I missed this a lot.

**Göksel:** Although we became best friends for a long time, my little brother was always fighting with me until the end of my primary school period. We moved to a big city when I was 11 years old. He may have wanted to continue our fights, but we were not in the same school anymore and life in a big city was busier and kept us occupied. He was an extremely naughty boy, and I was a very hard-working student. We had different hobbies and tastes. Mine were mostly related to classes and exams, reading books, and writing short narratives. None of them were his concerns. In high school, I had to go to Istanbul for boarding school and we lost touch in the era without internet and social media. Fortunately, at university we reconnected. I returned to İzmir and we went to the same university. After that period, he became my accompanier, and

confidant. He still is. Although he lives in London, we keep a tight connection via communication devices and in our hearts.

**Hitesh:** I remember many incidents of my childhood. I would like to mention a few that include my siblings. As a child, I always had the advantage of being the youngest. I was around three or four years old; my sister and I were seated on a wooden bench in front of a snack shop while my brother was buying samosas for all of us. My sister started playing by sliding on the bench as we were the only ones on this long bench. I started copying her and fell off. There was gravel on the ground. I hit my forehead on it and got injured between the eyebrows. The wound started bleeding immediately. Since then both my siblings were very careful with me especially if we were outside. Usually, my brother used to take me to the preschool. One time it rained all night and the next morning when my brother and I left for school, because of the rain, the soil was waterlogged in so many places. I remember my brother picked up stones and bricks and put them in the water to step on and cross over. He put both his arms under mine to lift me and I immediately wrapped my legs around his waist. He was stepping on those stones when he encountered an unstable one. He twisted his ankle and both his feet were in the water.

The moment he started to falter I tightened my grip on him and both his hands came up to hold me too. He reminded me of this incident multiple times and how he saved me, whenever he needed something or some favor from me. Especially when I came to know about his girlfriend and he

asked me not to tell anyone. Sometimes he used to bribe me with some chocolates to keep his secrets like when he used to bunk off school and go somewhere else. Hiding the secrets of my siblings used to be a big burden back then as I used to constantly think about them and being so honest and close to my mother I eventually ended up telling her everything every time including the bribes I got from them.

At that time, we used to have a black and white television and there were only two channels. Our television was connected with a long black wire and the other end of that wire was connected to an aerial on our roof. Most of the time when the screen went blurry my brother used to run up and rotate the aerial in different directions. Every time, if there was an issue with the signal our positions were set my brother would go up to move the aerial. I would stay in the room and my sister would stand in the middle of the courtyard so she could hear both of us and communicate between us until the TV screen was better. One day my mother, brother, sister, and I were watching a Bollywood movie and in the movie three brothers were fighting with each other for property and no one wanted to take care of their parents. It was a very emotional movie and all of us had tears in our eyes. A few hours later when we were in our beds my brother reminded us about the movie and said 'always remember we would never do any of such things and we will always stay united as a family'. The last thing I would like to mention is that both my siblings used to tease me that I was not the real child of our parents and that I was adopted. According to them, I was found by my mother on the corner of our street. As proof they

used to say that everyone else has a fairer complexion than me in our family and as a counter-argument, I used to show them that my skin color is almost the same as theirs.

**Ibrahim:** I have an older brother but I cannot remember any common memory with him. The difference is just three years between us but in childhood this is a very big difference. He always preferred to be together with his friends and I always begged to be accepted by them. However, it never happened. So, I started to play with my friends, mostly with imaginary ones. Thanks to my brother and his friends, my imagination was enough to enjoy myself.

**Ipek:** Not applicable

**Jelena:** My brother is three years younger than me (born in 1967). When he came to the family, and while he was a little baby, I accepted him, looked after him and was tender towards him. However, as he started to grow, to communicate, to conquer the space around him, I became very jealous. I did not love him. Later on, we used to play together, though there were moments when we were fighting; in such cases our parents would punish us both. As the time passed, from about 1976, we got along better and better. During these years we made a theatre out of a desk with two levels, and with dolls that we moved, hidden behind the curtain. Sometimes these

were dramatizations of fairy tales (*Little Red Riding Hood*, for ex.), and sometimes our improvisations were based on situations in the family or in school. Performances were always “sounded” by music – we either sung, or played on block flute. Nowadays, I can say I love my brother very, very much.

My younger sister was born in 1973, when I already was 9 years old. I accepted her without any jealousy and with readiness to take care of her. I enjoyed it, I loved playing with her and holding her; we have always got along well, it is so nowadays as well. When she was 6, and I was 15, in 1979, I taught her to sing madrigals – I used to sing one part (Alto), she sang the other (Tenor), and I played the other two on the piano (Soprano and Basso).

**Jérôme:** I have two brothers. The older one is three years older than me and the younger one is two years younger. When we were children, each of our bedrooms opened onto a corridor. That's where we used to play in the house when the weather was bad and freezing. Each of us had little plastic soldiers and we would make up stories about battles and conquests. We imagined that we were great conquerors: Napoleon, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great! We dreamt of empires and glory, huge territories under our domination. But we only had a corridor to conquer and I often suffered bitter defeats!

**Vera:** As a child and still as a youth I admired my brother, who is three years older than me. After we moved to Munich, he was very important for me, he gave me a feeling of safety. It seemed so easy for him to get to know people, everyone knew him at the Arabella house (the 23 Storey-high Apartment block in which we lived) or at school.

*1975/76, München.*

I hate our tiny flat, the whole Arabella House. No garden, my friends far away. There are so many doors on our floor, they all look the same. In the middle of the floor, the endless row of doors is interrupted by the entrance to the eight lifts. At the ends of the corridor there are windows, little specks of light in the dark tube. The pattern of the carpet, the infinite, "A"'s with wreaths around them, blurs before my eyes. When we run and slide across the carpet, Joachim's and my hair stands on its end.

Mum goes out. She orders roast beef with remoulade sauce and fried potatoes for us. The waiter brings the food on a serving trolley. There are two silver bonnets on a white tablecloth. He lifts them with an elegant swing. The golden-yellow fried potatoes are steaming, I can hardly wait to bite into them.

I wish Mutti would stay, it doesn't reassure me, that we can call the porter if necessary. Joachim and I lie in bed, our toy guns under the pillow, in case a burglar comes.

A fortnight ago, a man broke into Mum's office next door. Joachim discovered him, when he looked in through the window from the balcony. Mum didn't believe it at first, looked

herself, then hurriedly closed the balcony door behind her, shooed us into the bathroom, called the porter. We waited anxiously in the bathroom. What if the man came over and forced open the balcony door?

When the police arrived, the burglar was gone. I didn't see him, yet his image haunts my mind. A man with piercing blue eyes, greedily rummaging through my mother's drawers.

I hope he won't come back.

Мајинто крст је та мина које најбезбедније  
место на свету.

Мисли да је моје најистиније сетање на  
мајку - током воје, кад сам јој рекао да  
сам. Може сам тога ипак није ни рекао  
тешко. Рекао сам јој да је се плашио кад је  
уз бесара (што је тај, кад је професионал и војна).  
Она је била изненађена што јој отицати та  
тако гласно ју је рекао да је. Али, да је то ипак  
може да професионал.

Јунама ми је бринуо Зерану и Анору. Распа-  
нута ме је и плашила била о хрбном мајку  
која је првог плаћања војног. Сетан о воје да  
су били силе моћније од нас и да се те прилике  
бију направили мајка и војска. Така отицати.

Јунама ми је о Лаврентију и Микоману, и  
о кћери коју је мајка сагласно да је извршила да-  
вати. Ова јунама ми је јунама тада и во-  
јске да брину о својој мајци у војну, војни-  
ма и воје.

## *Chapter 6.*

*The first home  
I remember*

**Delphine:** After living in a block of flats until I was twelve, my parents had a house built. This little house, typical of the south of France, which I saw being built little by little, became the family home where everyone gathered. It's surrounded by a small garden with a vegetable patch. Flowers and olive trees line the entrance and the crowing of the rooster wakes us up in the morning. It is situated in a small cul-de-sac and, despite being in a fairly large town, the setting is unspoilt. You can hear the birds all day long and the smell of wood in the stove warms your heart in winter.

**Gabriela:** In my early childhood, we lived in a four-room apartment with another family that had no children. In socialist Romania, housing was hard to come by. Few could be bought. And very few could do it. The apartments in the blocks built by the regime were distributed in the order of registration on the lists, and the waiting lists were long and ordered according to a lot of criteria. A family with one child, like ours, was entitled to two rooms.

Our rooms were filled with books. Books and flowers are my mother's life. Her great failure was the fact that she could not officially study horticulture at university. She did not have permission from the Party because she did not have a "healthy" file. My grandfather, returned from the front, had refused collectivization. His land was forcibly taken from him and this brought him various penalties, with consequences for the whole family.

*The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint Exupéry was and remains my favourite book. Through it I found my own planet on which to plant my own red flower. It started to grow in the two rooms on Crocus Street (*Brândeusei*). But my imagination became limitless.

When we moved into an apartment of our own, my father knelt in the middle of the living room and said: "Finally, we arrived home!" Like after an incredibly long and exhausting journey.

I was six years old and three months later, in September, I was going to start school, ready to start my own new journey.

I still keep this emotion alive. I changed many houses over time and each one was a home, a nest in the deepest sense. I love to travel, for the moment of returning home felt as the moment of connection with the source too.

A continued rebirth with added experiences.

**Göksel:** It was a dodge house located in a campus of Ortaklar Teachers' College. We lived there between 1975 and 1980. It seemed like a huge private house to me, but when I visited twenty years later, I was shocked by how small it was. There was a narrow flower garden surrounding the house. My father was gardening. Also, there was a hencoop next to the house. We had a few chickens, enough to have fresh eggs daily. The back terrace was the most useful part of the house since it was wide. We had a table and some chairs there so we could spend time outside and we also played with our friend during the

summer holidays. The neighbours were living in similar houses very close to each other. All were families of the teachers at boarding school, and the ages of their children were close to ours. We had a huge collective garden as playground including a park in the middle which consisted of swings, slides, and a seesaw. Although I don't remember our first house before then, it must be the same because of the general design of such special type of Teachers' School. Thus, my first eleven years were filled with such joy and freedom.

**Hitesh:** The home I was born and lived in during my childhood was big but there used to be only two rooms with smooth concrete flooring. We had a big courtyard and in the center of it was the Tulsi plant (Holy basil) which was planted in a big fixed planter created by my mother. She used to tend to it from time to time. In one corner there used to be a clay hearth. My mother used to cook dinner on that stove using wood. It was covered with asbestos cement roof sheets that were black in one corner because of the smoke from the wood. Our main gate was a big grilled gate. We used to watch which street vendor was passing by. Our favorite cotton candy man used to stand in front of the gate and ring a brass bell in his hand. Similarly the Kulfi (Indian ice cream) man would do the same. He had a big bell on his cart. Most of the street vendors used to stop in front of our house and all the children from the neighborhood used to come and enjoy it. In both the entrance corners of our house, we had trees which included, the Shah toot (Indian Mulberry), Neem, Ashok, Guava, Papaya, Night

Jasmine, and many small plants in pots including roses, marigolds, ferns, money plant, etc. We had a rope swing on the neem tree and a huge bamboo wind chime on the mulberry tree. My mother used to take care of all the plants but on Sundays, my father, brother, sister, and I used to help her with trees and weeds which were growing alongside the front wall. In the shaded courtyard area, we used to have a big Takhat (wooded bed) and two wooden chairs for the visitors. My family was religious. We had lots of gods pictures on the walls all over the house. We also had a huge picture of seven white horses running with a sunrise background. In the northeast corner, we had a small room we used to call puja (worship rituals) room. There were Idols, spiritual books, and the fragrance of incense sticks all over. In the southwest corner, we had a small wooden kennel for our dog "Tommy."

**Ibrahim:** All the houses in my childhood were almost identical, standard state-owned housing. What was interesting was that twenty years later I visited a dwelling where I lived for about a year in 1970 when I was only seven years old, and I was shocked by the height of the ceiling and all the other dimensions of the house. When I was six years old, the ceiling of the apartment was much higher and the rooms were much wider. Twenty years later I had doubled in height and I thought that the ceiling had lowered and the rooms had narrowed. It was a kind of disappointment for me. My big childhood home had become smaller in a way.

**Ipek:** A two storey house with gardens on both sides. The front side was facing the main street and the back was facing the children's park beyond which down the hill there was the railway and eventually one could see the seashore where the Marmara Sea meets a lake.

**Jelena:** In the first room that I remember used to live my mom, my dad and me; it was a room on the first floor of the house where we also live today, with a window on the south side, open to the green garden. The room was full of light; in it, there were my toys, our beds, a carpet on the floor where I used to play and pictures of Disney's heroes on the walls. There was also, a small gramophone with records that my parents used to listen (us kids were forbidden to touch them to avoid damaging them).

I liked spending time in the garden, going around, observing and examining leaves, flowers, colours, scents, movements. I especially liked the two small anthills on one of the stone paths through the garden. The ants were going in and out from the small holes in the soil between the stones. It was probably my first encounter with animals. I considered them my friends; I followed their ways and realised it was quite a difficult task, because they were all identical and it was impossible to know which one of them had started its move, or arrived, which are their directions. But I liked very much to observe them, especially when they were carrying findings with them. I did my best to help them, to free their way to the anthills or to remove some obstacle. I understood that their

world, unreachable to me, had its own regularities; one of them was in the way they moved. I realised that we need to be tender towards them, since they are so much smaller and weaker than us. Their touch, when they would walk on my leg, or on my hand, was extremely tender, soft, and it provoked slight tickling, by which I recognized their nature. I took a good care not to hurt them.

In the garden there is the old quince tree that grandma and grandpa from my mother's side brought from their garden in *Sombor* where they used to live before, they moved to Belgrade (in 1953). This tree bore fruit until some years ago (2021). When one would look in the morning through the upper window of the kitchen, up to the treetop, it was all translucent and full of light, the sun used mirrored on its light green leaves and reflect in flame-like flashes, sometimes sharp, but full of joy and liveliness.

The members of my family had never gone to church, so neither had I. My grandma from my father's side took me there sometimes, to lit the candles. In the house where I grew up always the bell from the church nearby was heard, at the same time each morning in the house I grew up in. Although I was not tied to the church life, it meant a lot to me to hear this bell each time anew, reminded me of something important, that would be fulfilled later on in my life.

**Jérôme:** My brothers and I have always lived in the same house that my parents bought in the early 1960s. This old renovated farmhouse is the anchor of my childhood. It's L-shaped and

dominates the landscape. You could see the sea from the first floor. It's a solid house with thick, reassuring walls. It defies the wind that blows in winter, the rain that pelts the windows and the storms that batter the landscape in autumn. It seems as indestructible and solid as the granite of Brittany.

**Vera:** 1974, Alfter, suburb of Bonn. The first home I can remember is in Alfter. A terrace was cut into the hillside for the house. The concrete wall supporting our house and parking lot is cracked. The downstairs neighbours are alarmed, they are afraid our house could slide down on theirs. Mum calls the builders back, makes sure they fix the damage.

We live on the first floor, on the ground floor there are mum's office, the cellar and garage. There are terracotta tiles on the floors, they feel cool. The living room is large and high, the view far over the valley, the fields and houses to distant hills. Joachim and I like to lie under the massive dark dining table, listening to Mutti and Ernst when we should really be in bed.

Behind the children's room, the slope rises, it is overgrown with ivy. The room is always dark and damp in summer.

The summer is unbearably hot. Mum sprays the house with the garden hose to cool it down. The hot bricks hiss when the cold water hits them.

My stepfather is transferred to Munich. Mutti, Joachim and I have to move down to the office. Our dining table is much too big for the room. There is no bathtub here, like in the bathroom upstairs. Other people live upstairs now.

Kısa biyografi: İsmim Göktel. Türkiye'nin  
Antara şehrinde, 1969 yılında doğdum. Ailem  
Pamuklu'da yazara da anneannem de  
olarak çalışması nedeniyle annem deyim direkti  
onuz farında geçirmek istemi. Antara'ya bu  
nedenle gittik. Bekleme evi geçirdik  
Söğütözü. Özellikle sokaklar anıların  
ve kollarını geçtikten beri anıların ve  
kollarını anlatılanlar nedeniyle kollarını  
güçlü etmek için. Ayrıca kollarının üzerine  
bir kolların neticesi alınmış ve ilk kollar  
İstanbul sokakları da kolları-beyaz kolların  
var. Onlar kollarında da kolları anıların ve  
kollarını kollarını kollarını. Onlar kollarında  
ve kollarını, kollarını kollarını kollarını  
bir kolları kollarında kolları kollarını  
kollarını.

## *Chapter 7.*

*My first toy*

**Delphine:** The first toy I remember is the little doll I wanted so badly. It was a little baby who peed when you squeezed her arm. She had her own little bottle that I filled with water before giving her a kiss. I had given her a name, Betrice, and I thought it would be my daughter's name. This doll had curly hair and my grandmother used to sew her dresses. I taught her at school and she slept in a little cot next to my bed.

**Gabriela:** I don't remember my first toy. But even now I can feel the slightly cool touch of the corn silk in the bridge of my palms. I spent my summers in the country, at my maternal grandparents. I already told you that. It was in the early 70s. There weren't many toys there. We made up games every day with other kids out of whatever we had at hand and laughed until our bellies hurt. My favourite dolls were made of corn on the cob. They could be blondes or brunettes. I used to braid their pigtails and sing them the same lullabies my grandmother used to try to put me to sleep: *nani, nani...*

I got my first big doll with curly blonde hair and blue eyes that closed and opened when I was ten. Such dolls were rarely found in the socialist trade in our country. Things were different in the Soviet Union. It seemed that anything we wanted could be found there. Adults who went on business trips ran various errands for colleagues and friends. That's how I got Tasha. My mom asked her boss to get me a big, real doll for my birthday. I didn't play with her for fear of breaking her. I remember the day I introduced her to my playmates. They had gathered in front of the building, and I went out with Tasha

in my arms, like a young mother from the maternity hospital, with the new-born close to her chest. That was her only outing in the world. Afterwards she took her place on the dresser next to the television.

And there she was for nearly twenty years, until my daughter treated it like a doll, with tireless play. Tasha ended up with her eyes gouged out and her sockets filled with fresh cherries. Her gaze did not brighten, instead her pale cheeks turned aubergine.

**Göksel:** There is one that although I don't remember, I heard many things about. My aunts from both my mother's and my father's sides told me that they, as teenagers, made me rag dolls from wooden twigs, cotton, cloth and wool. After the age of 6, I remember all my games and their sources well. Living in a rural place even if it was a campus for a boarding school, nature shaped my first toys. We, me and my brother and our friends, had an extremely free early childhood. A huge and completely natural field including some hills, a swamp, a dairy farm, and a little river (although not a clean one) encouraged us to use nature as a toy. The big sister of one of my friends (she was only 3 years older than us, and there were three of us girls forming an innocent gang) showed us her symbolic botanic laboratory that she organized by herself in the back terrace of their home. We picked plants from all around, either from the ground or trees and tried to outdo each other because the plants chosen were to be processed and exhibited in jars. The plants were melting and giving their colour to the

water they were stored in over time. Then the process of mixing them meticulously occupied us. All being said they may not be seem like toys but jars, tubes, glasses, small tree branches, seeds, pebbles etc. were all toys to us.

**Hitesh:** I am not sure what was my first toy. As the youngest child, I did have some toys used by my siblings before. But I remember one toy from my childhood. I was around four or five years old when my family went to a temple. Next to the temple there was a Mela (Indian Fair) going on. We went for a carousel ride and they did not allow me to ride alone as only children six and above could ride alone. I was very upset and started crying even though I had a ride with my brother. My parents told me if I stopped crying, they would allow me to choose any toy. I saw a man at the fair with a huge bamboo stick in his hand with a few small sticks horizontally attached to it and varieties of toys hanging on those horizontal sticks. I chose a monkey with had a drum set attached to his waist. He used to play it when his key was twisted. He had a red hat, yellow jacket, and black shoes with white lining. I used to call him "Buntoo Bander" This was my favorite toy ever.

**Ibrahim:** I think my first toy was my father's snow cane. Ahlat, one of the small towns in Eastern Anatolia, is famous for producing these gentle walking sticks. I think my father was gifted this elegant walking stick by a patient and it became my horse, my rifle, my sceptre and even my spaceship. Before

1980, before Turkey became an open market economy, it was very difficult to find toys in shops, especially in the small cities of Anatolia. Children would attach meanings in their imagination to simple things made of wires or cloth, and would share the images they created in their inner worlds with other children and carve them with a kind of collective hallucination. If I imagined the walking stick as a horse and rode on it, my friends would see what I was holding in my hand not as a piece of wood but as a big hairy horse. The cane smelled like a horse, not a walnut.

**Ipek:** The earliest toys that I had were two dolls both called by the same name Ayşe, one being Büyük (Big) Ayşe, the other Küçük (Young) Ayşe. I also remember my yellow plastic duck with wheels that one could pull around. It was like a car with a sitting compartment large enough to accommodate these two dolls. I also had a lovely pink panther when the cartoon series was on TV. It was a soft and funny toy with huge legs and arms. I loved its face so much; it had long white whiskers. These were before my Barbie era when every toy was simpler and maybe friendlier.

**Jelena:** In the first years of my life, in the 1960s, I had two dolls. One had blond hair and a white face, and the other had black hair and dark skin. They both had their names: the blond one was called Ita, and the other one was Gara. One day guests came, my grandmother's friend with a granddaughter my age.

This girl liked Gara very much and she was allowed to take her home, promising they would bring her back in a few days. They never brought her back. Later on, I brought Ita to the seaside with me, and my mom sewed her beautiful dresses.

I liked the smell of my dolls. And I liked to dress them nicely, in the clothes my mom sewed or knitted, according to the occasions I took part in as well. They shared my reality with me and every one of them had its own name, chosen according to her “character” or to the people who gave her to me, or to the dear persons around. When I was 10 years old (1974), there were about fifteen of them, and I liked to arrange them by height, from the tallest to the smallest one.

**Jérôme:** The toy I remember most is a teddy bear. For a long time, it was with me at night to reassure me. He wasn't very big, brown in colour with a scarf around his neck. He slept with me in my bed, snug in my arms. Thanks to him, I fell asleep peacefully, without any apprehension. Over the years, his colour has faded a little. It has become duller. He had even lost one of his glass eyes. And yet I kept it for a long time.

**Vera:** Panther - my black panther goes everywhere with me, he's my favourite stuffed animal, all squashed flat because I always sleep on him. Mummy gave him to me for my first birthday.

## *Chapter 8.*

*What smell do I like?  
What scent defines me?*

**Delphine:** I've always been drawn to the scent of vanilla. In my doll collection, there was a very small doll that smelt incredibly of vanilla. the first time I saw this doll was at my friend's house. I wanted it so much! It wasn't any more beautiful than the others, but its perfume enchanted me. One day, this little doll ended up on my bed. My friend had given it to me. Since then, the scent of vanilla has been with me every day.

**Gabriela:** I love the smell of warm bread and muffins baking in the oven and the unique smell that filled the house while the rose jam was boiling. It is the defining scent of my childhood. A sort of virtual DNA string that was tied around the waist of all the women in the family. That's how I grew up. In memory of the palms of my grandmother and mother who kneaded bread for Sundays and other holidays throughout the year and who comforted me.

I see myself tearing off a corner of hot bread on which I would melt a drop of butter and a teaspoonful of rose or bitter cherry jam. The silence of enjoying the taste that passed from cell to cell and the universe that was about to be born fills all time and all space. Today, when I miss those days, I bake a loaf.

I always carry the smell of spring in my nostrils. The smell of cherry, apple and pear blossoms, of fresh freesias and the slightly damp one of snowdrops. And I can smell the change of seasons.

But I think the smell of fresh mint and lime peel mixed with the salty sea air is the smell that defines me.

This is what I think freedom smells like.

**Göksel:** I mostly like the smell of flowers, which have a soft and remarkable smell. For example, honeysuckle, jasmine, vervain, marigold, etc. I am keen to smell perfumes and if I like a scent, I smell it at times other than wearing it, just for pleasure. I like the acacia tree, because the smell of its flower is nice and as a child, I used to eat this flower and like it very much.

I prefer to define myself with the scent of being clean. I collect soaps with remarkable scents. It is refreshing and comforting. I hate the smell of sweat the most, either mine or others'.

**Hitesh:** My favorite smell is the citrus smell. As I was growing up in India whenever it used to rain for the first time after summer, the soil used to have a distinctive smell of its own. We have so many folk songs, stories, and proverbs around that smell. Only a few years ago I came to that, in English, it is called "Petrichor." I used to love this smell and have not experienced it in many years.

Being a chef, I have some favorite smells at work: garlic cooked with butter and thyme, freshly brewed coffee and the smell of croissants baking.

A combination of Citrus and Cedar with hints of Lavender defines me.

**Ibrahim:** Grease oil! For 14 years, starting in 1968, we went to Avşa Island to spend our vacation every summer. It is one of the small islands in the southern part of the Marmara Sea. It

used to take about six hours by boat from Istanbul. I loved the island, but I loved the time I spent on the ship we boarded to get there much more. For six hours, I would play games and dream in the dark spaces around the nose and the engine room of this medium-sized passenger ship. Sometimes I would get into the lifeboats covered with tarpaulin and eavesdrop on what was being said around, making some words and characters part of my own stories. I would try to find out who the people I heard sounded like in my mind. Then I would get out of the lifeboat and search for the owners of those voices on the ship. Most of the time, I would come across people who looked exactly like the pictures I had visualized in my mind and I would not be surprised at all. The grease on the wheels, chains and iron would sometimes get on my hands and clothes and wouldn't come off for days. I used to get scolded a lot by my mother for this, but of course I never told her I liked very much this smell. This smell still takes me to the centre of my dreams, to the secret starting points of my stories.

The smell of old ink and paper defines me. The first day I arrived at Istanbul University's Department of English Language and Literature in the autumn of 1981, I smelled the scent of books, some manuscripts, some printed a few hundred years ago, coming from the door of the department's library. I loved that smell, which I had only smell in some of Istanbul's old bookshops. When I was thinking that I had not made a very conscious choice in the university exams, this smell made me think that I was in the right place. It was in this library that we took some of our classes or seminars. It was in this library that I felt that I was at the heart of real literature,

in the library that produced this fragrance. The smell of magical words was expanding via invisible waves of this scent from this centre and I was part of this fragrance.

**Ipek:** I love the smell of freshly cut grass. I always open my car windows when I see them being cut on the sides of the road. I inhale deeply while I'm driving through. When I was working in advertising our creative director designed double-sided business cards. On one side it says 'Work' and on the other, 'Play'. On the work side mine said Media Director, on the play side it said Gardener.

I don't wear parfums. Strong smells, especially sweet, powdery, and spicy odours make me sick and dizzy. I love fresh scents like the salt of the sea, freshly brewed coffee, freshly cut grass, flowers of any trees from the citrus family (orange, tangerine, lemon...).

**Jelena:** My favourite smell is cinnamon.

**Jérôme:** I really like the scent of violets. It reminds me of a house I used to visit as a child. The house, a few kilometres from my parents', belonged to one of my uncles. It was also an old farmhouse, still fitted out and furnished as it was in the 1960s. It was like stepping back in time when I went there. But what struck me every time was the strong, powerful scent of violets in every room. I was very young and I never knew where

that scent came from. And ever since then, every time I smell a violet scent, I'm drawn back to that house and its very special atmosphere. It's this fragrance that defines me and all the memories it evokes.

**Vera:** I love the smell of vanilla. Vanilla smells festive. I could eat Spanish vanilla cake every day. The fluffy layers of pastry (sponge cake layers) with chocolate chips, and between the layers, smooth chocolate cream. On top, the chocolate cream is decorated with chocolate lattice and a dollop of cream. And then the smell of vanilla, the whole cake smells of vanilla, tastes of vanilla. When I'm sad, I long for a slice of Spanish vanilla cake.

Smells, fragrances ... Rose. I step into a hot bath with rose milk, close my eyes, immerse myself in a lush garden, overflowing with thick, heavy blossoms in bright colours, in delicate colours, in white. I get out of the bath, tired, slip into my nightgown, snuggle under the covers, still immersed in the scent of the rose.

Lemon accompanies me through everyday life, my deodorants are almost always with lemon essential oil. I love the fresh scent; the freshness gives me momentum for the day.

My favourite season is spring, so many fragrances ... I walk across a meadow, it is surrounded by elderberry bushes, the white flower umbels frame the green area. The bushes are far and yet the air is saturated with the scent of elderflowers, their special sweet scent. Shivers of happiness run through me, gratitude for this gift.

I love the scents of nature, except for wild garlic, when it is time for wild garlic, I walk past the wild garlic patch in the forest with bated breath.

I find it hard to stand artificial scents, if a heavily perfumed lady sits down next to me on the train, I change seats. I will never understand how one can voluntarily spray hairspray over one's hairstyle, as my grandmother did, *Taft* hairspray, the smell still bites my nose.

Evimiz her iki cephesinde bahçesi olan  
sift battı müstakel bir evdi. ön cephesi ana  
caddeye, arkası çocuk parkının bahçesiydi.  
Parkın ilerisinde, aşağıya tren yoluna inen  
bir tepe vardı. Tren yolu neredeyse denizin  
yanı başındaydı. Aslında evimizin bahçesi  
manzara tam olarak şöyledi: Bakış yönü  
dağırtılsunla sağdan bir göl, solda ise  
Marmara Denizi akıyordu ve biz uzaktan  
bu manzara, yeşille, gökyüzüne bakıyorduk.

## *Chapter 9.*

*Hunger, thirst, sadness,  
frustration, or any other  
distressing memory*

**Delphine:** I was at college. It had rained all morning. The sky was black and I didn't realise that the town was flooded. I heard an alarm. My brother joined me and our father came to get us. He had driven to school and we tried to get home very slowly because the roads were flooded. He parked on a high spot because the road had become impassable. We finished our journey on foot. We were up to our thighs in water. When we got home, my mother was waiting for us. The house wasn't flooded. That was the first time I was really scared, and holding my father's hand made me realise that life was very fragile.

**Gabriela:** Injustice is something I could never live with. That's why my image as a warrior princess haunted my childhood. And there are countless moments that marked me.

The day I missed getting red patent shoes like Dorothy's in the *Wizard of Oz* was a big day for me. In my childhood, we used to play outside a lot on summer days. We knew each other, all the kids from the neighbouring blocks. Our parents would go to work, but they would leave us a key to the apartment, which we wore on a lanyard around our neck, like a locket. I am part of the so-called generation "with key around the neck." At about ten in the morning, we could go out until about noon, when common sense required us to go indoors for lunch and quiet. And from four o'clock in the afternoon, until seven or eight in the evening, we would go out again, to play, behind the block. The neighbours who were housewives checked from time to time if everything was fine with us.

On the day I'm talking about, the boys from another street tore roses from the garden of my block, crushing them and scattering their petals and leaves, greatly upsetting the elderly lady downstairs who had planted them and thanks to whom our building had the most beautiful garden. I was six years old. I jumped to the defence of the roses and sat protectively in front of the lady. A corner of a brick thrown at me hit my forehead and cracked my head. It was payday and the agreement I had made with my mother in the morning was that I would wait for her, properly washed and cleanly dressed, to come home from work so that we could go together to the most beautiful store in town at the time, where, somewhere on a shelf in the children's shoe department, a pair of red patent shoes were waiting to be mine.

A few minutes later my mother came too, hurrying to pick me up before the shop closed. She found me in the arms of the old lady, who was bandaging my head and washing my bloody face. For a moment, I thought everything would end then.

But I think the little magic shoes did their job without me putting them on. Every time I saw the old lady crocheting on the green wooden bench in the middle of her gold and ruby roses, I felt over the rainbow, even though I wasn't allowed to play outside for two weeks.

**Göksel:** There are many distressing memories of any kind that come to mind. But as Gabriel García Márquez said "The heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good." It's as if

he said this for me. At least, it works well for me. However, I will tell you a soft hunger memory. I went to Ankara for a friend's wedding almost 30 years ago. We were all young, in our twenties. I travelled by bus and the groom-to-be picked me up from the bus station. It was late in the evening when we reached the house in which I would stay for the night to stay in for the night. My friend showed me around and told me that the house belonged to his family and they were about to move there after the wedding ceremony. I was so tired and fell asleep immediately. Because of it being the in-between period, the house was almost empty. I realised early in the morning that especially the refrigerator and kitchen cabinets were totally empty. I looked outside and saw that the building was one of the tower blocks of a modern gated community in a suburban area. There seem no mini market, café or restaurant within range of vision. I had to wait until someone would come and pick me up from there. I had a book with me and decided to try reading. I don't remember which book this was. I was starving and in the most recent chapter of the novel there was a war scene and coincidentally the writer was telling about how the soldiers were starving. I could feel a real sympathy for them. But when I read that they had to eat the death horses, I stopped reading. Luckily, I was rescued soon, but I had to wait longer since preparations for wedding took priority. After this experience, I decided not to be contingent of someone who I couldn't ask my needs recklessly.

**Hitesh:** This distressing memory is from 1999. My mother used to run a dairy farm and there was a person named Krishna who used to help us with cattle and milk distribution in the morning as well as in the evening. Once his mother got sick and he asked for a month's vacation and left for Nepal where his mother was living. We did not have enough time to find a person for a month so the whole family started helping as best they could. My brother started distributing milk to most of the houses. Only one house was in the opposite direction where I was supposed to deliver. I used to get a stainless-steel milk pail with a tight lid on it. This customer used to run a fresh vegetable and fruit shop in the market with his wife's help her husband. I usually dropped off the milk at their shop. One day I reached their shop and saw both husband and wife working in the shop. I gave them the milk pail. I was about to leave when his wife asked if I can drop it to their house which was hardly two hundred meters away from their shop. She told me that she left the kids sleeping around twenty minutes before and as the shop was busy she could not leave. Could I drop the milk off at her house and check if the kids are still sleeping? She handed me the key to the front door. I opened the door and went straight to the kitchen and put the milk on the counter. They had two rooms and both doors were ajar and there was no sound from the children were sleeping. I saw that there was smoke coming out of one of the door's top corners. I immediately opened the door and saw the whole room was full of smoke and three children are sleeping on the bed. They were around five, four, and two. I picked up the youngest with one hand and dragged one of them out of bed. The eldest

came out quickly and all three of them started crying in front of their house. Huge smoke and small orange flames were coming out of the TV. I quickly ran to their bathroom and there was a plastic bucket half filled with water. I came into the room and threw the water on the TV. Its glass got scattered in small pieces as there was a pumice stone in the water. I ran to them and informed them about it. They ran towards their house and saw the kids outside. The man ran into the house and many people gathered in the next few minutes and controlled the fire before the fire brigade came. The next day they came to my house to thank me and made a big deal of it. But I was disturbed for months thinking about it and wondering what would have happened if I was five minutes late. I used to think of all the odds possible.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** Since I try to remember my life until age 25 for this project, I guess I haven't experienced anything of that sort at a young age or I guess it wasn't that remarkable to keep in mind or to mention as a distressing memory. On the other hand, I have a belief that each of us has some portion of good and bad in life. For some of us the bad part comes in small portions, but it comes every once in a while. For others, it doesn't occur frequently, but it happens in larger strokes. Looking at my life in general, I consider myself in the second group and my early years were rather very lucky and blissful.

**Jelena:** I have always been unhappily in love. I platonically loved a classmate for years; in the fifth grade he went off to another school. Although he did not share my feelings, I remained “faithful” to him almost to the end of the primary school. I liked to think about him and offer him attention in my thoughts, and I was seeing him quite rarely, at the birthday parties of our school friends.

**Jérôme:** I felt an immense sadness on the day my grandmother died. She lived at home and died in her bed. I lived through her painful and difficult moments. She wasn't feeling well, she was having trouble breathing and felt very weak. The doctor came. He stayed with her to administer medication and keep an eye on her, but her condition deteriorated rapidly. She closed her eyes and went away. I experienced all this first-hand. I closed the shutters, turned off the light and got under a sheet. I'd built a sort of tent. I took refuge there and stayed there all day thinking about my grandmother. I was very sad and desperate.

**Vera:** Our move to Munich in 1975 was very distressing, to live in a small appartement on the 9th floor, my grandparents and my father far away.

*Memories:*

Still half asleep I cling to the images of my dream of Anja, we play, run through her garden, ... the image of Anja blurs ... the garden ... Mum laughing ...

I squeeze my eyes shut to stay in the vivid dream. After, I want to be there. But I lie on the brown sleeping chair in our flat, dreaming myself away from Munich.

1976 - Saturday, Mum and Ernst want to go for a mountain hike, like almost every weekend. I want to stay home! I fight for staying home, resist to go. My stepfather's face turns red, he grabs my arm, pulls me ferociously out of the door, along the floor to the lift. The carpet burns on the skin. I squeeze into the corner of the lift, scared of my stepfather, feeling betrayed by my mother.

## *Chapter 10.*

*My first friend*

**Delphine:** Her name was Carole. She lived in my block of flats. She was taller and older and I had a lot of respect for her, and being her friend was a great joy for me. She was two years older than me. We played a lot with dolls and it was she who gave me the vanilla doll. She was gentle and attentive, like a big sister. I wondered about the scars on her legs and arms, but I didn't dare talk about them. I found out later that she had a condition called "glass bones". She didn't think she'd have children of her own, so she started the process of adopting a child. A few months after the adoption, she became pregnant and now has two children.

**Gabriela:** I had many friends as a child: dogs, cats, a calf, two goats and their kids, other girls and other boys. But my first great friend was Armando from Block E. He was the real Zorro. He had a hat, a mask and a cloak. He was jumping from the first floor, from his balcony, to save me, the princess with a headdress made of the lace of my mother's nightgowns.

A little later, in the first grade, Cezărică from the 2nd floor and I became half-brothers. We had many possessions together: scrapbooks in which we kept the packaging of chocolates and other sweets that we had eaten, a book with stories by Ion Creangă, the most important classic Romanian storyteller, that we knew by heart, and three stones with fossil traces, which we were convinced came from the Jurassic.

The tinfoil, which we smoothed for a long time with our thumb nail, and that part of the packaging on which the

name of the product was written were particularly important. Some products were very rarely found in our grocery stores.

Others we had received from friends and relatives who had travelled to socialist countries or had high-ranking relations in duty-free. Foreign ones always smelled divine. As we placed them in the books, held them and sniffed them, we imagined that beyond the borders the air must smell of cocoa, vanilla and strawberries. Thus began a long journey full of adventures in our minds.

One day, talent scouts from the capital also came to our class. They made us take off our school uniforms and walk in single file around the classroom, on tiptoes and hands on hips.

In white panties and tank tops, we looked more like vanilla ice cream cones of different sizes.

After about three turns, the foreign lady, in a black suit, told Cezărică to get out of line and follow her. A rumour said that he had joined the ballet corps of the Romanian Opera. It's very possible that it was like that, we haven't seen each other since.

I learned my first great lesson about separation, about that unsettling emptiness of non-wholeness.

**Göksel:** Her name was Derya. She was one year older than me. I was five years-old when we first met. Unfortunately I don't remember that particular moment. Her family and mine were living in flats at the same apartment building in Ortaklar. We didn't have a television in our house and it was really rare to

have one in our community, but Derya's family had a new black and white TV. First, we saw the advertisements on the TV programme. I remember that I liked to play with Derya, but I was more interested in catching the advertisements shown regularly among the other TV shows. I don't know if other kids were also that passionate about television ads. We went to elementary school together. We had a lot of memories together. After leaving town with my family, I didn't see her again. I heard after many years that she became a doctor, too. I hope she is happy with her life.

**Hitesh:** It was my second day of primary school when I met him. His name was Sajid. I vaguely remember that I sat next to him and he told me not to sit there or sit there only for one day. My house was not too far from school. It was only a ten-minute walk however he used to live kilometers away. He used to go home with his elder brother who was in the same school. Slowly after school, he started walking with me up to my home then used to continue with his brother. Sajid was a year older than me and was very strong and brave. Whenever we used to play at school, we used to make sure that we were on the same team. We used to share our lunch boxes and even candy which we used to buy from the shop next to our school. One day we were playing a seven-stones game and got into a fight with a boy who was cheating and we fought as a team. After that, we were always together until the fifth standard. He moved to a different school in sixth standard and after some time I moved to the same school because of him. This school was six

kilometers far from my home. Unfortunately, after a year his family left Delhi and moved to some other city. After that I never got to meet him again or know where he was.

**Ibrahim:** Memoş was my friend whom I met when we came to Erzurum in 1969, and with whom I remember sharing the same desk in primary school. For years we were neighbours in the same state housing. Memoş survived an avalanche while skiing in the late seventies, but unfortunately, his father did not. After the incident, they moved from Erzurum to live with his mother's relatives in Izmir. That avalanche had also separated me from my best friend. That February day it was very sunny and the snow was melting fast. It was very dangerous for the mountains of Erzurum and my father wouldn't let me ski that day. I begged him, but he was adamant. If my father had given permission, we probably would have skied together like we did every weekend and I would have been buried under that avalanche. After that incident, I always trusted my father's intuition, but for years I wished my father had warned everyone. Even if my father had warned everyone, probably no one would have listened to him, but I would have felt less guilty for the rest of my life.

**Ipek:** My first friend is still like a sister. She was 11 months old when I was born. Our parents were close friends and neither of us had siblings. We practically spent our childhood together. The two families had vacations together, we used to stay at

each other's houses for dinner and sleep overs. I wouldn't say our minds match completely in all matters. We are two different people in many ways but that's ok. Unlike choosing a friend one can't choose one's sister, but sister means family and that's something one appreciates more as the years pass.

**Jelena:** I did not have a close girlfriend when I was a child. Or I did have them for a while, and after that they had betrayed me, they did not acknowledge me in future encounters. At first this was surprising me, and then really hurt me, I accepted that as a fact to which I cannot make any influence. The first friend who stayed with me is Kristina. She came to our class when we were in fifth grade, in 1975. At first, we started going home together, then we started visiting each other, and later we shared desk in the class, went for walks and talked. We are still in touch nowadays, though she lives in Italy since the wars in the 1990s (her husband is Bosnian Muslim). Since her mother died, she does not come to Belgrade any more. I miss her.

At the time of my studies, I had a good friend, Tatiana, with whom I had very nice and friendly talks (1984–1989). We were sitting in her small room, where the scented sticks of sandalwood were burning and where we drank very tasty jasmine tea that she used to prepare. The room was in half-light, and Tatiana's eyes were big and dark, and her voice was deep. She used to talk slowly, and everything we talked about had a great impact on me, as deep and full of trust and

tenderness. I liked the way my voice, talking about myself, sounds in the space of this room of hers.

**Jérôme:** Near my parents' home, a retired couple lived in a house they had built with their own hands. They regularly came to the house to talk to my parents. I remember the smell of the pipe tobacco that this neighbour smoked. Their grandchildren came to visit them regularly. They were the same age as me and my brothers and we became friends. We used to go and build cabins in the woods, pick blackberries in the summer and cycle around the neighbourhood. Then one day they went to Tahiti. Their father was in the army and was transferred to the island. They stayed there for five years. We didn't communicate much. And by the time they came back, our old complicity had faded. All that remained were memories.

**Vera:** *1974, After*

I like being with Anja. She is cheerful and has lots of toys. We play in her room, in the basement with the grey carpet and her narrow garden. We are free, romp, run, share secrets.

*1976, Munich*

Anja and her parents are visiting us. Mutti and Ernst want to show them the beautiful Bavarian countryside. We go for a walk with a view of the mountains. Fortunately, we don't

have to make a strenuous hike to a hut that is „just around the corner “and we only reach hours later. I was so looking forward to seeing Anja but she feels foreign, I feel foreign. I miss our closeness.

*1982, suburb of Bonn.*

Why are we here? Last farewell to Alfter? What for? The house has been sold now; the farewell party seems pointless. Going around again to places I have long forgotten, a meal at "Spargel Weber", the landlord recognizes me, I don't recognize him. I hate that.

Anja and her parents welcome me warmly and are happy to see me. A huge dog comes towards me, long wavy fur, big head, wild, unruly, I am afraid of him. They lock him away so I don't have to be afraid. Anja and I play in the cellar, she decides what we play. I don't feel like it, it's exhausting to play with her. Anja is just like my new friend Anja G. from Munich, only children, always have to decide everything. Or have I forgotten how to play?

## *Chapter 11:*

*How did my parents meet?  
What have they told me  
about it?*

**Delphine:** My mother was born in a small village near Roanne, in central France. She looked after cows in the countryside and came to work in the south of France to join her sister. My father, who lived in Alès, met my mother in the restaurant where she was working as a waitress. My father fell in love with her and never stopped courting her. Her charm caught my mother's eye and they've been together ever since. They married, had two children and six grandchildren.

**Gabriela:** There was a wedding in the village of my maternal grandparents. A cousin of my mother's worked in Brasov together with the handsome young man who would become my father. This cousin also invited dad to that wedding. It was love at first sight, both parents told me. They saw each other and liked each other. My grandfather wanted to marry my mother, against her will, to an engineer from the village, in order to repair the family's welfare state, which had been ruined by the communists. Although my mother had repeatedly refused the idea, she had not expected that at that wedding, my grandfather would make public announcements about his intentions and the family of the engineer who wanted my mother so much. Although she was very young, my mother always knew what she wanted. She told me that this man was 15 years older than her, that he sweated a lot, wore horrible ties, and they had nothing to talk about together.

It was a desperate moment, one of those moments where they say that life is something more like a movie. Mom and Dad looked at each other. My father asked my mother for

her identity card so that nothing official could happen and left. He returned two weeks later with all the necessary documents, walking 15 km through freshly fallen and deep snow from the nearest town where he had alighted at the train station.

On December 1, 1963, they got married and they are together after 60 years. I'm a lucky kid.

**Göksel:** It was a real love story. I feel privileged of being the fruit of such a fairy tale. My mother and father were classmates in secondary school. They lost touch after school, and went to different teachers' schools. My mother worked as a teacher in an elementary school when my father kept on with his education, and this gave him the advantage to start working as a teacher in a high school which was in a town near the city where my mother was still studying her advanced education two years later than my father. My father heard about his old classmate at the time that he was thinking about marriage, and settling down and decided to go for a visit and to see if she was still a nice girl. My father says that it was love at first sight, but my mother says that she needed to be persuaded. Recently, I asked my father which one was his best memory about their love story just before he had been taken for a serious operation at the hospital I worked at. He recalled one of his later visits than the first meeting, the one at which he planned to ask her hand in marriage. My father said that he was staying in a very nice hotel and waiting for the sunrise, and my mother called him just to say good morning. Then they met

near the bazaar and bought a ring with a small turquoise stone for my mother. At that time, they had been secretly engaged. Soon after, my mother lied to her family that there wouldn't be a graduation ceremony that year to let my father to accompany her freely. Again recently, I asked the two of them about those days and recorded their voices while as they told me every detail all details, finishing each other's sentences. I feel lucky to have had this opportunity.

**Hitesh:** According to my parents, their marriage was an arranged marriage. One of the elders persons in the community who was known to both families provided a reference for my father as a prospective potential match to my mother's family. My mother's village in Utter Pradesh was around fifty-four kilometers away from my father's village. In 1974 my mother's family went to meet my father's family but my father was not there. He had recently opened a business in a far eastern state. His business was very successful and he was not able to come and see his bride. However, families did exchange black and white pictures of the bride and groom and both agreed to get married. While both families were discussing the dates of the wedding they found out that my father had a brother who was a year younger than him. He also recently got a job in the police department and my mother also had a sister who was a year and a half younger than her. On 21st February 1975, my mother got married to my father, and my aunt to my uncle. My mother told me that she saw my

father on the day of the wedding for the very first time while a Hindu priest was performing the wedding rituals.

**Ibrahim:** My parents are cousins. My mother was born about six months before my father and they grew up together. I have a photo of them taken in 1930 when they were two years old in a professional photo studio in Baku. It was just the two of them sitting side by side in this photo. My father has a black bowtie matching his chubby cheeks. My mother has a white cloth hair clip of almost the same size and shape. The two children are seated on something like a coffee table or a chest and are obviously a little intimidated by the authority of the photographer. Obviously, the grandfathers and grandmothers thought of these children as mates when they were babies. In 2023, this photograph still hangs on the wall of the bedroom where my father slept alone. When my mother died in 2021 after 93 years of uninterrupted togetherness, she didn't recognize anyone other than her husband Arif, not even me.

**Ipek:** My parents met in a summer camping facility. My mother had a summer lodge by the Marmara Sea with her family in the early 1960s. She was part of a group of friends who spent their free time together. My father's older sister was also at the same place with her family. Back then my parents' families didn't know each other. My parents met when my father came to see his sister's family and met with this group of friends which my mum was part of. Then my father began to drop by

occasionally to socialise with them. That's how my parents met and started to date.

**Jelena:** My parents met at the beginning of the 1960s in the faculty library where my mom had worked, where my dad visited often. My mom loved my dad a lot, she loves him nowadays too, and he loves her. I think she especially liked that he has always good at making jokes. They got married two months before I was born, in July 1964.

**Jérôme:** My parents never told me how they met. They were always discreet about it. They say very little about their relationships, and even less about their love life. It's a subject they keep to themselves and I've never broached it with them. It's always difficult to bring up this kind of discussion. Is it modesty? Shyness? It's hard to explain. Maybe we've never learned to talk about it.

**Vera:** I only know, that they had their first date in a Chinese restaurant. My father loves Chinese food. And my mother loved the loud laughter of my father. In her family laughter was rare, she said.

## *Chapter 12.*

*What do I remember  
about illness, any illness,  
whether mine or that of  
others I know, seen through  
the eyes of a child?*

**Delphine:** I must have been 12 when I went to see my grandmother, as I did every summer, in a small village in the centre of France. That year she wasn't in the house where we usually met but in a hospital. She was in a wheelchair and we went down to the garden where there were some animals. We went for a walk and I saw in her big blue eyes that she didn't recognise me anymore. My mother acted as if everything was normal, but I could feel her distress.

**Gabriela:** I try to understand disease. As a concept and as a state. This is, somehow, the homework with which I have progressed through life.

My first seven years were dominated by a pretty severe asthma. I spent a lot of time at the doctors and sometimes I remember that terrible feeling of not being able to breathe. My grandma, very upset that the doctors could not find a suitable cure for me, decided to apply a traditional one. To sell me symbolically, out the window. The custom said that a woman with healthy children could buy a sick child. It is believed that in this way, the sick child changes his fate. So, the woman came to the window with a plate of cornmeal and a one leu coin. Grandma passed me through the window and got the payment. Only three years later, my asthma disappeared like magic.

I then remember an episode, that marked me, in which my mother had burns on her face caused by caustic soda. My mother is a very beautiful, well-groomed woman who loves that everything around her is kept clean. When I was a child, in the 70s, 80s, there was not a great variety of

detergents in our stores. At that time, white cotton linen, be it bedclothes or underwear, was boiled with grated soap and a little chlorine.

So were the pots and pans. Periodically, my mother boiled them in a caustic soda solution to make them shiny again. After boiling, they were rinsed for a long time.

In the water in which she rinsed the laundry, my mother added a few drops of lily of the valley or violet perfume to remove the smell of chlorine and for the laundry to smell fresh and delicate.

At that time, the working week was 6 days, sometimes 7, if the Party needed to exceed the quota. So, the household chores were done at night, after dinner, after the children had their homework checked, after the uniforms and school bags were prepared for the next day and the kids were sent to bed.

On such a night, my mother boiled the pots in a large aluminum cauldron, specially made for this purpose. With a large pair of wooden tongs, she grabbed them by the handle from time to time and lifted them up to check if the dirt had completely disappeared. As she did so, the pan held by the tongs slid back into the cauldron of boiling water and hot splashes splattered everywhere. Most of them on my mother's face. It was a terrifying moment. I was in fourth grade. I wasn't sleeping. I used to read for a while, by the light of the flashlight, hidden under the blanket. This way of stealing a little time for reading was one of the delights of my childhood.

I heard her smooth scream and ran to the kitchen.

My mother was devastated. I felt stuck at the moment, not knowing exactly what I should do. Dad was at work; he worked the night shift.

My mother called the emergency number, she received pain medication, antibiotics and an ointment. It looked like her face would never be as smooth again.

A few days later, I decided that I had to do something concrete. As a child, I prepared an infusion of chamomile and calendula. That's all I could do. I wiped her face night after night and put compresses on her for about three months, I think. It is a miracle how the body is so intelligent and regenerates itself.

This miracle constantly fascinates me.

In a few months, my mother's face became soft and bright again. I am so grateful!

**Göksel:** I had a brain trauma at age 9 and it took two years for us to recover from its effects. There didn't seem to be a serious health issue during these times, but the worries about it kept me and my family distressed. I crashed to the ground, but my head hit the stone walkway. I had projectile vomiting, dizziness, and somnolence. My mother checked the health encyclopedia and worried because of a potential concussion diagnosis. My father drove the car very fast to reach the emergency room in the nearest hospital while my mother tried to keep me awake. I stayed at hospital for a week and was discharged with no diagnosis. But beneath my skin, the right part of my scalp started to get soft and gradually became softer. I didn't tell my

parents about this situation, but one day I suddenly decided to reveal this situation as we were walking home. They were both shocked and crouched down by the roadside. Then the adventure at a university hospital began. Fortunately, the softness was caused just by a little hematoma under the skin and could be removed by needle aspiration easily, but there was a possibility of epilepsy. Tests, repeated EEGs, drugs, worries for two years had occupied me and my parents. When I had attended the same medical faculty as a student 8 years later, I saw the same corridors and thought that eventually it was a happy ending.

**Hitesh:** I was around eleven-year-old. I fell ill and we went to see the doctor. It was the first time I heard the word Typhoid. It had been almost a week and I was still sick. My mother took me to a renowned Ayurvedic Vaidya (Doctor). He gave me a bottle of extremely bitter syrup and herbal medicine powder that was individually wrapped in paper according to dosage. He strictly told me not to eat from street vendors; I was on a special diet where I was only allowed to eat Khichdi, yogurt, and Sapodilla fruit for a month. After that, for almost 10 years I hated Sapodilla fruit because I had eaten that so much when I was sick.

As I child I do not remember any illness of others in my family but there was a middle-aged man who used live alone as a tenant in a neighboring house for many years. He had a very thin and lanky body and very dull and dark skin color. He was originally from Kolkata, a very big and renowned city of

east India. He used to sit in one corner of our street in a plastic chair. He would always greet everyone in the community and talk to them. He used to like it when all the children used to play cricket in the evening. Sometimes he would come close and watch us play and used to smile. If any of the kids used to fight, he would come and solve the issues. He was constantly getting thinner, and after some time he hardly moved out of his chair. After a few weeks, I saw that the plastic chair was empty. I went home and asked my mother; she told me that he was sick and gave me some food in a tiffin box and buttermilk in a bottle. According to her instructions, I kept the food outside of his room and knocked. He asked who it was and I told him that I got the food for him. He thanked me and told me to leave the food there and go. My brother and I repeated this many times until one morning all the people in the community were gathered in front of his house. We came to know that he was no more, and all the people of the community decided to do his cremation as he had no family. My father and brother were not at home and I being the only male member of the family went with everyone for the cremations.

That was a soul-shaking experience for me, to watch a live cremation.

**Ibrahim:** When I was thirteen or fourteen years old, one of the games I enjoyed the most was jumping into the sea from the nose or the railing of the ships docked at the Avşa pier. The sea was clear and looked quite clean, but it was a small harbour

after all. When we returned from vacation, I had a severe attack of jaundice and had to stay at home for weeks. Alone! I couldn't leave my isolated bedroom for weeks and I didn't see any of my friends. My father's ruthless diet of sugar and fat lasted for almost a year. In my dreams I saw fried eggplants, potatoes and fatty meats that I ate with my hands, and which my friends and I ate together while playing games. I still love fatty foods and I still have doctors looking at my blood test results: "hmm, you had jaundice with a fever when you were 13-14 years old, don't drink too much alcohol and stay away from fatty foods". What a scar Avşa Pier left on my liver!

**Ipek:** I remember childhood diseases like measles or chickenpox. As there were many of us playing together, when one child got ill, we eventually all had that illness. I remember sometimes when a sibling in a family caught an illness the second child was sent to a friend's house to be protected. And sometimes on the contrary, parents thought that it would be much more difficult for a child to get a childhood disease in their adult life so they wouldn't spare the child but let the natural flow take its course.

**Jelena:** I remember that I was ill, at the end of the 1960s. I remember it as a great helplessness, being trapped in bed where I was alone, with bars around. I remember I used to cry for a long time before somebody would come for me. Another memory of illness is of my brother and I in the early 1970s; we were ill at the same time because of the same children's

illnesses, as measles, mumps, anginas. We were both laying in the same room, in parallel beds. The doctor had been coming and gave us penicillin injections.

**Jérôme:** When I was 10 or 11, I had flu. It's not unusual and it's not a serious illness. It wasn't the first time I'd had it and it wasn't the last. I was lying in bed, nice and warm. I took my medication, rested and read. It was just a matter of a few days. One afternoon, my parents were away. My father was at work and my mother may have been shopping. I can't remember. I was alone at home with my youngest brother. I was always ill and there was nothing to worry about. Suddenly, my nose started bleeding. I couldn't stop the bleeding. My brother and I panicked. What could we do? And then we remembered that some adults had said that putting a pair of keys on your back stopped the bleeding. My brother managed to find a bunch of keys and put them on my back. I don't know if it was this grandmotherly remedy or if it was a coincidence, but the result was real: the bleeding stopped.

**Vera:** *1980, Munich*

Carnival at my friend's home, we are all Smurfs, listen to the Smurf song by Father Abraham, again and again. It's funny, but I have to cough all the time, a lint itches me. I cough and cough, the lint stays. I cough for days, I'm hot, doze off, voices drone in my head, the whispering of Mutti and Joachim.

A doctor comes and diagnoses bronchitis. I have to swallow a sweet pink medicine.

„How are you? “My stepfather stands next to my mattress, looks down at me.

„Fine, “I croak, feeling weak.

Mutti worries, packs me into the car. At the hospital in Schwabing I am x-rayed. From the couch in the treatment room, I stare at the mural of „Hans in Luck“. I’m afraid, I’ll have to stay.

Pneumonia, I have to move into a yellow room with two big windows. Saying goodbye to Mum is hard, although the nurse is very nice. During the night I wake up freezing, the window is wide open, I touch for the blanket and pull it up under my nose. I feel the blanket being pulled down again. I am too tired to protest.

I feel much better. I’ve been here for a fortnight. I have the beautiful room with stucco on the ceiling still to myself. Robins fly happily back and forth between the big chestnut tree and the window. I draw them with my new pencils. I also got an animal book. Mum and I watch the robins for hours on her Visits.

In the evening, Sister Marion invites me to watch a film with the other children in the corridor. A television is set up on a small cart. Some children are already waiting impatiently. I don’t feel like it.

Three weeks in hospital, Mutti and Ernst come to fetch me. Nurse Marion says goodbye to me with a laugh:

„I hope we won’t see each other again.“

I would like to stay with her, in the yellow room.

## *Chapter 13.*

*What is my favourite  
childhood food?*

*What does it look like?*

*What does it smell like?*

**Delphine:** On Saturday mornings, we went shopping to the supermarket. My parents always bought steaks and potatoes. It was traditional for us to eat steak and chips on Saturday lunchtime. I loved the smell, even though I couldn't stand garlic at the time. As someone who ate very little, it was always a difficult time because my father wanted me to eat more. And when I became aware of animal suffering, I became a vegetarian for a few years, much to my father's despair.

Today, when I want to treat myself after exercise, for example, my go to is a steak with chips!

**Gabriela:** Homemade noodles cooked in chicken soup and apple, butter, and cinnamon pie

I really enjoyed participating in rolling out the dough. Grandma used to say that the dough had to be as thin as a wedding veil. There was the velvety warmth of the flour marks on your fingers, on the tip of your nose, in the basil-and-rosemary-scented air.

Today, the taste of the food from the 70s no longer exists anywhere. The chicken soup no longer has the smell, the colour, or the taste it had back then.

I remember my grandmother who, if my grandfather was not at home, would go out on the road with a chicken under her arm, a knife in one hand and a white enamel bowl in the other.

My grandmother could not take a life. So, she waited on the side of the road for a man to pass. She asked him to cut the bird. A fairly widespread practice in the village. Headless,

the bird danced madly in the dust and then collapsed. This dance seemed like a ritual of an impenetrable mystery.

While the soup was boiling, the two of us stretched the dough for the noodles. I was always trying to make a sheet as thin as a silk veil. I wanted my grandmother to be proud of me and, while spreading that dough, I imagined myself a bride. A perfect one, with a very long, long veil.

On holidays, a golden-coppery smell filled the house and my imaginary veil floated over the thresholds and gardens.

**Göksel:** I have always been told that I was a very problematic child when it came to food. My mother my mother had to struggle with me at every meal.

Furthermore, she said that she was worried her relatives and neighbours would blame her for not being able to properly feed a child.

I can still remember that I kept the bites in my mouth for hours. It must be a sort of stubbornness. Now I find it very annoying for my mother and also for myself. I am really sorry about it. I liked *manti* the most, but because of vomiting what I ate just before my brain trauma, I stopped eating *manti* for 6 years. In adulthood, garlic became one of my favourite flavours; the yogurt for *manti* was always flavoured with garlic paste.

**Hitesh:** As I come from a vegetarian family, my mother used to cook lentils and vegetable dishes with varieties of Indian flatbread and rice. My favorite dish was Aloo Paratha; it is

potato stuffed flat bread shallow fried on the griddle. I used to love paratha as it was such a versatile dish. Sometimes my mother used to stuff it with grated cauliflower or cottage cheese. But my personal favorite was a stuffed potato. My mother used to serve me a dollop of freshly home-churned white butter on top of hot paratha, a bowl of homemade yogurt scooped out of an earthen pot, a green mango pickle, and tomato ketchup. The smell of freshly cooked Paratha is like a croissant baked in the oven, and that fresh white butter gives an amazing creamy texture to crispy Paratha. Sometimes my mother used to make plain paratha triangles with some dry fry spiced potatoes. Every Sunday we were treated to a special dish like Rajma chawal (kidney bean stew with rice), Kadi chawal (yogurt stew with gram flour dumplings with rice), and Besan cheela (Gram flour pancake).

**Ibrahim:** In 1971, when I was eight years old, I had this dessert for the first time at the restaurant in the social facilities of Erzurum Atatürk University. Turkushka was a dessert with a yellowish vanilla cream inside puff pastry cone, covered with lightly fried sugar on the outside. It was not easy to eat; when you bit into the fragile outer dough, the cream oozed out and you were sure to get cream on your hands or on your clothes. The scent of vanilla combined with the smell of butter to create another smell that was impossible to forget. You could find this dessert only one day a week at 17:00. If you arrived half an hour late, it would be sold out. I don't know why such a popular dessert was only made on one day of the week. It

was said that a Bosnian chef could only come to the restaurant's kitchen that day to make this dessert. After I left Erzurum, I looked for this dessert in pastry shops and hotels where I thought Bosnian chefs worked in every city I visited for years. No one had even heard of it. I had a few similar desserts, but none of them were *Turkushka*. In 2023, when I was writing this memoir at the age of sixty, I searched a lot on the Internet, but unfortunately, I could not find any trace of this dessert. I began to think that maybe my memory was playing tricks on me and that this dessert was just a dream, like some of my toys and playmates.

**Ipek:** I have always been good with food; I love tasting all sorts of cuisines and styles. As a child I loved peas so much that I was sometimes exchanging the meat on my plate for peas and carrots with a childhood friend. I also have a favourite childhood dessert made with cacao, crushed biscuits, and candied fruit. In Turkey we call it *Pyramid Cake*, but it is often called *Chocolate Salami* across Europe.

**Jelena:** My favourite childhood food is *Schnee Nokle*. My grandma used to make occasionally. It is made of milk, eggs and sugar. It consists of light-yellow cream and whipped egg whites that stand like snow hills on the surface of the cream. It is served from large bowls and is very tasty. Smells of vanilla.

**Jérôme:** I've always loved the chips my dad used to make, and they're still just as delicious today. It's the only dish he makes, while my mother cooks every day. On Sundays, when we have guests, my father prepares the chips. They're unique in taste and texture. Crunchy and golden brown, they melt in your mouth. They're a real delicacy! What's the secret of his chips? Double cooking! He fries them once, removes them for a few minutes and then fries them again. That's why they're so crispy and delicious. When I come back to visit my parents, I'll be disappointed if I don't taste these wonderful chips!

**Vera:** *Munich 1982.* Grandma Else makes the best plum dumplings in the world! The dumplings are steaming. I pour butter sauce over the dumplings on my plate. Carefully I bite into them, the plum inside is hot. The sweet plum juice mixes with the salty dough, the butter sauce drips. I love the sweet and sour taste of the plum, the soft pastry and the butter. There are twelve plum pits piled up on my plate, on Joachim's plate there are already fifteen. Will I outdo him in eating dumplings today? Grandma tirelessly rolls dumplings and throws them into boiling water.

*Vienna 1990:* I want to make plum dumplings for Monika and myself. Grandma dictated her "approximate recipe" to me over the phone. She always measures the dough by eye. The dough is ready, I wrap it around the plums. But the dough is unruly, crumbly, much too thick, doesn't hold. The dumplings dissolve in the water, we choke down a few mushy-watery dumplings, the rest go in the rubbish ... Oh, if only you were here, grandma, and could show me how it's done.

Într-o zi de coră, fetele în supe de pui, procum  
cu mere, unt și scărișoră.

Mi-a plăcut mult să știu aluatul.  
Bunica mi-a spus mereu că aluatul trebuie  
să fie fin precum un vâlc de mioră. O corder  
coțelată era în proful de forță de pe degete  
de pe vârful năului, în aerul cu miroas de hamez  
și scărișoră.

Mă amintesc de bunica mea care, atun  
când bunica lipsea de acasă, <sup>la dăru</sup> era un person  
măi lăsat, cu un cutit într-o mioră și cu  
bifurcul mătăuit în cealaltă.

Bunica mi-a lăsat <sup>un</sup> vâlc și vâlc. Nu  
putut face asta mioră. Așa că oștept

la mioră dăru și tuică vâlc lăsat

Eu îl năuș și ține person. Proctoc

eu ceter de răspodito în satul ei. Fără

forță dăru năuș în prof pona ceter

se pona. Așa dăru pona în năuș

du de mioră.

## *Chapter 14.*

*My first day of school*

**Delphine:** The school was right next door to my parents' flat. I was very impressed by the teachers and cried on the first day of school. Those years were difficult because, even though I had friends, I felt alone and had difficulty learning at the same pace as the others. I am left-handed and naturally I wrote from right to left. Thanks to the patience of my teachers, I was able to learn to read and write properly.

**Gabriela:** September 15, 1973. It was the saddest day of my entire life up to that point.

It was the day I decided that I would never set foot in school again.

Before, I was looking forward to it. I did not sleep all night. My uniform was so stiff that the blue apron was standing straight on the floor, like a soldier.

At school everything was wonderful in the beginning: the welcome from the teacher, the flowers on the benches, the alphabet book and the arithmetic book. They all smelled like new. You know, the smell of a new book mixed with the soft smell of autumn flowers and fresh soap. Lots of fresh soap!

They were all there to celebrate us.

I started flipping through the textbook and reading the short sentences on various pages. Then, the teacher approached me and said: *Your parents did very badly to teach you to read. We do this together, here.*

I was destroyed. No one had taught me to read. I knew the storybooks by heart and spent a lot of time hiding under the velvet-covered table figuring out the words. Now, over 50

years old, I can't do the same with English out loud. I never find enough time to repeat and my lips don't listen to me at all.

When I got home, I solemnly announced that it was the first and last day I went to school.

**Göksel:** It was a month later than the official opening of the semester when I eagerly watched my friend Derya's preparation to start school. I begged my mother, and she said that it was early for me to start school and my time would come next year. I watched Derya as she wore her traditional black school apron with a white lace collar. I was disappointed not to have the same outfit. I stayed home with my brother when my parents went to work. After an incident during which our house slightly flooded, my mother took me to the school and asked the headteacher to enrol me. He refused because of my age, but my mother was so insistent he had no other option. I had been accepted to the school unofficially. I was happy at last. We started to go to school together with Derya. When I learnt reading at the same time with four students already registered, the headteacher had to enrol me like the others, although my teacher had chosen not to acknowledge me at the same time as others.

**Hitesh:** I have no recollection of the first day of preschool at all, but I remember the first day at my primary school. My mother took me to the school called Azad National Public School. We entered a big office and the Headmistress was

sitting on a big chair in front of a massive wooden table. I remember she asked me my name and a few other questions and then she started talking to my mother. Later we sat on a bench outside the principal's office. I was looking at the many children in classrooms and some out on the playground. Everyone was wearing a white and grey uniform. After some time, we went to the reception window and we received my new school bag with a uniform and a name badge which I immediately hung around my neck. Before leaving the school, we met my class teacher, MS Reshma. The next day I arrived at school at 8 Am, and my teacher Ms. Reshma took me to the assembly and asked me to stand in a queue. First, the prayers were done followed by our India's national anthem. After assembly we all went to the classroom with our teacher. Two boys were sitting next to me called Sajid and Amin. According to my mother, throughout primary school I was always very excited to go to school and never cried before going to school.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** My first day of school was traumatic because there was one teacher whom I knew and admired before I began school. I always called her my teacher, and I was 100% positive that I would be her student. In my time there was a morning section and an afternoon section for primary schools. When I was registered, I somehow ended up in another teacher's class which was in the afternoon. I was so enthusiastic to start

school but after this incident I cried the whole morning. My parents told me to go to my class for the first day while they did their best trying to swap me over to the morning class taught by my beloved teacher and they succeeded. But when I got back home, I said that I loved this teacher very much and I didn't want to switch classes anymore. Two years later when classes were redistributed, I was reunited with my beloved teacher.

**Jelena:** It was in September 1971. Shock, suffering, loneliness, solitude, sorrow, not-acceptance from which I never recovered. Fear of other kids grew into permanent fear of people. I only became aware of it in the last several years.

**Jérôme:** I don't remember my first day at school. I just remember moments, places and atmospheres. In the 1970s, it was still a village where everyone knew everyone else. There were two schools, a public secular school and a Catholic school. I went to the Catholic school. Sisters were still teaching there. They were dressed all in grey with a veil over their heads to hide their hair. In the middle of the courtyard, you could admire a superb chestnut tree, reaching for the sky. It was magnificent, with its long branches providing shade in the summer. And it's still standing. This school hasn't changed much in 50 years, except that there haven't been any nuns there for a long time.

**Vera: 1977**

School at last, I will learn to read! With a beating heart, I hold my mother's hand and walk with her towards the venerable building of the Gebeleschule. The dark green Scout satchel, brand new, bounces on my back. Other girls and boys are already standing at the stone steps with their mothers. And Matthias, we will be in the same class! A woman in a brown skirt and traditional jacket approaches, greets us. Her smile deepens the many wrinkles on her face. I like her. Our teacher leads into our classroom, the mothers have to stay outside. I sit down in the back row of desks, next to Matthias, although the shorter ones should sit in front. A crucifix hangs above the classroom door. Our teacher stands in front of the blackboard.

„My name is Mrs ...“ She turns to the blackboard, the chalk crunches. She steps aside. The blackboard is emblazoned with a pear, a village and two letters. „Mrs Birndorfer.“ (Mrs. „Pearvillage“)

Mrs Birndorfer shows us how to use the green reading boxes. The tiny letter tiles can be line them up. Words, whole sentences. I hope I learn this quickly.

The lesson is over. Before school, Mum hands me the big school bag, dark blue with yellow stars and moons, painted by herself. The bag is beautiful, filled with sweets and pens.

## *Chapter 15.*

*My favourite fairy tale.  
Why?*

**Delphine:** My favourite story is that of *Heidi*. She lived with her grandfather in the woods. I was very envious of her because I lived in a flat. I lived a bit of her life when I went to visit my grandmother in the country in the summer.

**Gabriela:** *Snow White*. There is nothing more to say. I identified with her expectation of true love.

When I started telling my daughter stories, she placed it on the 1st place in the long list of stories she knew. She loved the part with the apple stuck in the princess's throat and then the rescue with a kiss. She would have wanted to have this power!

*Mommy, please, one more time!* I had to repeat this part many times, every evening, for several years. And each time with significant updates, with thousands of possible variants: punishing the stepmother very harshly, changing the dwarves' clothes, finding an even more beautiful and brave prince, filling the meadow where Snow White lay with the most beautiful flowers ... .

**Göksel:** I know so many fairy tales, but I guess none of them had been told to me by my parents or grandparents. This may be because we lived far away from my grandparents and could only visit them for short amounts of time, and only for traditional holidays because of my parents' work. My parents were so busy at work, and I learnt to read at very early age, so I read the tales from the book. I vaguely remember a few

moments that my brother and I insisted on listening to a specific fairy tale told by our father. He told us that he learnt it from his grandmother, but unfortunately, I don't even remember the main theme of this tale. Since I had problems with fairy tales, I wrote a fairy tale as a story at the age of 21. It was about a little boy who travelled to a fairyland to find better fairy tales than the ones he had to read from books for his sister who was about to be born. I have just recognized the unconscious attempt that forced me to write this fairy tale a long time after my own lack of tales.

**Hitesh:** As a child, I heard many stories and tales from my grandparents and many elderly relatives who used to come and stay for a night or more. Storytelling is an integral part of Indian culture and has been there for thousands of years as an oral tradition cascading wisdom to the next generations. I still remember many stories from my childhood as these stories used to depict the ethics, emotion, religion, etiquette, intelligence, unity, community, and love that help a person build character.

My favorite one is *The Akbar and Birbal Story*. Birbal was so intelligent and his determination always helped him find the solution to each problem. Even though Akbar was a king and had all the power, Birbal proved multiple times that physical and financial power do not make a person great. He helped many poor farmers and villagers get justice and helped Akbar to be a better king for his people. I loved these stories since my childhood as they were not only entertaining but also

imparted some important life lessons such as morals, values, wisdom, trust, honesty, responsibility and kindness. Another reason I was able to connect with these tales was that these were the stories of real-life incidents during Akbar's Empire. Being the chief advisor of Akbar, Birbal not only had to deal with Akbar's temperament but was also one of the main people to run the empire efficiently and offered justice to everyone. Birbal would always be known and remembered for his shrewdness and wit.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I was attracted to every princess story but maybe this one caught my eye because of a book with beautiful and colourful drawings, or maybe it was the Hollywood movie or a Turkish adaptation, but Snow White stuck in my mind and became my favourite.

**Jelena:** My favourite fairy tale is a tale about *Snow White and seven dwarfs*. After she left home where she was in danger, Snow White found friends who accepted and supported her and later she met the man of her dreams who loved her enough to save her from the trouble in which she found herself.

**Jérôme:** It's not really a fairy tale that I remember, but the story of Robin Hood. My parents gave me an illustrated children's book based on the story. The animals replaced the men. Robin Hood was a fox, friendly and very cunning. His friend, the monk Little John, was portrayed as a debonair bear, a little naive, very powerful and unfailingly friendly. This story fascinated me. I looked at it and read it a lot. I still have that book.

**Vera:** *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.*

I don't remember who read fairy tales to me. Except of my first Kindergarten in Alfter. A blurry image of us children in a half circle and a grown up telling or reading a story. It was noisy around me, but I wanted to listen. I did read tales later on my own.

Why Snow White? It felt reassuring.

The stepmother orders the hunter to kill Snow White. But he does not have the heart to shoot her, leaves Snow White to her fate and to the wild animals. It's a hopeless situation. Wandering around alone, Snow White encounters the house of the dwarves, unexpectedly finds friends and a home. Snow White survives the subsequent assassination attempts of her stepmother, although she always falls on her stepmother's disguises, ignoring the warnings of the dwarves. Is Snow White saved in spite of or because of her naivety? Snow White's unshakeable faith in life moved a still moves me. She bathes confidently in the river of life, when rapids grab her, push her under water, she is saved by rushing currents. Nothing can break that connection. The steadfastness in the belief in goodness makes Snow White strong.

## *Chapter 16.*

*My hero. Why?*

**Delphine:** My brother was my hero when I was little. He was handsome and funny. He was a quick learner at school. And even though I was the big sister, he sometimes played the role of the big brother. He was the ideal man for me for a very long time. Charismatic and good with his hands, he could do anything. For me, he had all the qualities.

**Gabriela:** My parents. They encountered many difficulties, but they never gave up.

I learned in the meantime to protect them from themselves.

**Göksel:** It is so strange; I could find an answer to the previous questions, but I don't have a certain answer to this question. Perhaps I should think more about heroes and their roles in our lives. I was a teenager and later a young adult keen to observe people, ask their advice, talk to them, and learn from them. I thought that there might be something to get from anybody. So, a teacher, a peer, a wise person, a child can be a hero to me.

**Hitesh:** My mother. Since childhood she has inspired me and continues to, even today.

I have a long list of reasons why she is my Hero. To start with I was always amazed by her etiquette, humanity, manners, decision-making, helpfulness, and nature-loving attitude for a woman who never went to school. She clearly

understood the importance of education and provided the best possible education for her children and always motivated them to study. Growing up I saw she was making all the decisions in the family but always ran them by my father. When we were in financial difficulty, she did many things working day and night raising three children at the same time. She is not only a hero to me but also to many others in my community and neighborhood. Many people would come to our house and ask for advice and help from her. In 2005 our community was struggling with the fresh water supply because of some location issues. Out of around two thousand people, she was the one who lead the issue and got it resolved through the legal process. Since then we have continued having smooth water supply in the area. She had a never giving up attitude, helping nature and her social commitment made her a popular figure in our area.

In 2016 I went home to meet her and decided to walk with her in the evening. I realized almost everyone was saying *Namaste*, bowed and some of them touched her feet (the Indian tradition of giving respect). She never failed to help people and always encouraged them to preserve their traditions and culture. She is a wisdom holder who carries ancient knowledge of food, nature, humanity, and women's matters which she learned through oral traditions from her family and community. She taught my siblings and I how important nature is.

One day there was a festival of crops and after puja rituals, my mother asked me to bow in respect of mother Earth. I asked my mom do you think Earth would understand if

I bow down as Earth does not have life, she said if that is true then how does a seed become a tree when you put it in the Earth? She has been giving the same teaching to her grandchildren. On my brothers' kids' birthday, instead of asking for a birthday party, they planted ten to fifteen plants in the neighborhood and watered them. I do not have enough words to express how blessed I feel that I was born from my mother's womb.

**Ibrahim:** Grand Uncle Kasım. He was actually my father's mother's brother, but everyone called him "uncle": the baker, the butcher, the grocer, all his friends, all my relatives I knew. Even his own wife often called him "Dayı Bey (Mr. Uncle)". There was a big age difference between him and his wife, so Firuze, who was almost 18 years younger than Kasım, never called him by his first name, either Kasım bey or Dayı bey. In Turkish, when talking to or referring to people you have just met, the word "bey" is added after male names and "hanım" after female names. It is a very formal form of address and is not usually used between relatives or close friends. When introducing his acquaintances to others, Kasım would say these are my nephews. I also remember that my grand uncle Kasım often called his wife "Firuze Hanım". I think he was trying to establish equality in his own way and always tried to share his infinite joy and sense of humour. In 1930, when Kasım was 17 years old, he was a very brave man who risked his life so that his large family could escape to Anatolia. Kasım repeatedly crossed the border, searched for shelter for his

family and a job for himself in Turkey and then returned. Sometimes he was caught and imprisoned for months, but he continued to work tirelessly and without fear, and in 1933, he managed to bring a significant part of his large family to Anatolia. He was cheerful, witty, smiling and loved to talk, but he almost never talked about the family's migration to Turkey. I learned most of the family stories about Uncle Kasım and the migration in bits and pieces from other elders. I don't know whether Kasım's silence was out of humility or because he didn't want to recall the pain he suffered during those years in the jails at the borders, and I still wonder.

**Ipek:** My hero is the combination of my mother, my father, and my maternal grandmother, three people I grew up with. Of course, they had flaws but they also had amazing characteristics that I had the privilege of witnessing. Dedication, hard work, affection, positivity, and kindness is all I received from them while they raised me. I love and miss them so much and I'm grateful for their existence.

**Jelena:** My hero is my grandmother from my mother's side. Despite her hard life with many unhappy events and sorrow, she managed to hold on to her faith, hope, cheerfulness, and to multiply her talents through her love of her nearest and dearest.

She managed to transmit to me the stories about her family and ancestors and to make all their personalities alive

through stories, always with a moral. Despite hard circumstances, she kept the Orthodox Christian faith of her ancestors, without telling anyone about it. She left this trace in our family through her tenderness and through the shelter that she provided us, the tasty and healthy food she made, through her singing – the sound of her voice, tender and clear, and through her touch – we loved to sit on her lap, I fell asleep many times there, with a feeling of warmth and safety.

**Jérôme:** In the end, I don't have any real or imaginary heroes. I appreciate a multitude of characters for their charisma, their reflections and their humanity. They can be historical figures, writers, artists or fictional heroes. As I'm a big fan of comic strips, I can name one hero whose adventures I started reading when I was 11. His name is Alix and he lives in the time of Julius Caesar, whom he befriends. He is a young Gallic orphan who travels the Roman Empire to help the weak and fight injustice. This hero still exists today and I continue to read about his adventures. It's a bit like an extension of childhood.

**Vera:** When I was at primary school, *Pippi Longstocking* was my heroine. Non-conformist, strong and independent, she stood up for the weak. Pippi revealed the futility of the rigid rules of behaviour. I saw myself more as the kind Annika, timid and conformist, but dreaming of being like Pippi one day.

Later Pippi was replaced by George (Georgina) from Enid Blyton's Famous Five. I devoured all the stories of their adventures. George was unruly and got herself into trouble many times with her hot-tempered behaviour. George bravely rebelled against injustice, paying little attention to the rules of adults and their ideas of what a girl should be like. I identified more with the level-headed Anne, but longed for George's courage and for a dog like Tim as a loyal friend.

J'ai toujours été attirée par l'odeur  
de la vanille.

Dans ma collection de poupées, j'en  
possédais une toute petite qui sentait  
incroyablement la vanille.

La première fois que je l'ai vue  
c'était chez une amie.

Je la voulais absolument. Elle n'était  
pas plus belle que les autres mais son  
parfum m'envûrait.

Et puis un jour mon amie me l'offrit.  
Depuis ce jour, l'odeur de vanille m'accompagne  
au quotidien.

## *Chapter 17.*

*My first border experience  
(cigarettes, alcohol,  
damage, lost from home,  
others...)*

**Delphine:** When I was younger, I wanted to communicate with spirits. I'd heard that if I passed a sheet of paper over a candle, letters would appear. One evening I locked myself in my room with a candle and a sheet of paper. I moved the sheet of paper closer and closer to the candle to make the message appear. The sheet of paper went up in smoke and I didn't want to let it go so as not to lose contact with the spirits. In the end, my hand was burnt.

**Gabriela:** I was a good child. I did not misbehave.

But I had a terrible scare when I was 14. A classmate really liked me, and to show me this, he would pull my pigtails when he passed me. One day, I went on a field trip with the history teacher and the biology teacher to the Danube Delta. I have always been afraid of snakes. But from that day on, I didn't even want to know that these creatures still existed on the surface of the Earth.

I remember the big, bushy willows with water snakes hanging from them, spectacular water lilies, a peachy sunset, and suddenly a terrible sticky cold feeling on the back of my head. That boy had decided to put a long and live scarf on me as a token of his affection.

Tears froze on my face. I don't even know what my teachers could have said to him, but from that day on, he never touched me again.

**Göksel:** I always kept it between the ditches. I am a lifelong non-smoker, moreover I am strictly against unhealthy behaviours as smoking, drugs, excessive use of alcohol, any other cause of self-harm. I was younger than my classmates during high school, and I was an overbearing youngster. Afterwards I attended a medical faculty in Izmir, a city where people lived freely, and the sea made not only the climate but also the community gentle. Every Friday, I joined my friends at pubs by the seashore but didn't join them in drinking alcohol. I kept saying that I had euphoria naturally since I didn't need alcohol for it. When I went to Belgium for a one-month training during the summer of 1991, just after graduation, I couldn't resist to trying the famous beers of this country. And I never got drunk, except two holidays with friends. It was at the end of my first 25 years, once in a lifetime.

**Hitesh:** Before joining hotel school, I hardly had any experience with alcohol. During hotel school we got to learn a lot about alcohol and making cocktails. Pouring drinks was part of the curriculum and was my first experience with spirits. A few days later, it was one of my classmates' birthdays. He organized a big party and invited about thirty students. Around 9 PM half of them left and the rest of us started enjoying drinks and playing games. Then the birthday boy started making drinks for all of us and we had to finish those in one shot. My best friend and roommate hardly finished his first drink and said he could not drink anymore. Some boys started challenging him and making fun of him. They started insulting us and laughing at us. I was looking at this and did not like it.

Trying to be supportive, I announced that I will drink his drink. My friend told me not to do that and that we should go home but teenage hormones, ego, and defensive emotion for a friend had full control over my brain and I did not back down. After the party we slept there. Around 7 AM my friend tried to wake me up. My throat was completely dry and somehow with the help of my friend, I managed to come home. I threw up and felt very weak, drank water and electrolyte solution but nothing helped. My head was extremely heavy and aching badly. Luckily the party was on Friday evening and I had no school for the next two days. I remember drinking Chaach (Indian buttermilk), strong black coffee, and taking a few Disprins (Indian Aspirin tablets) but nothing helped much. It was not only an experience but also a lesson.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** In the 1970s smoking cigarettes was very common. Every house I knew had various types of cigarette boxes from porcelain to metal in their living rooms. And offering cigarettes to house guests was like offering coffee. In my middle school years, as children we experimented with our parents' cigarettes. We were carefully counting the amount in the box and trying not to be caught during or after taking one out of the box. Luckily, I decided that I didn't like the taste of tar in my mouth and the smoke that hurt my chest and I didn't pick up a habit.

**Jelena:** In the seventh grade of primary school, in 1978, I was in love with a boy named Zoran from the neighbouring class; he had problematic behaviour and argued with the teachers. My friend Kristina did not know that I liked him, but she told me that she meets him and one more boy during the school breaks in a yard behind the schoolyard wall, that they smoke and talk there. I wished to join them and she took me with her several times. I was very proud of myself and happy to be in their company, without thinking of being spotted by the teachers as “running away” from school. And even if they had noticed us, I had suffered no consequences, and all this is a loving memory for me.

**Jérôme:** It was an experience that left a deep impression on me, and one in which I was the unwitting protagonist. I was barely 10 years old. A hundred metres from my house lived a couple who owned two dogs, German shepherds. They were two big dogs, very impressive for a child that age. I could hear them barking. They guarded the house and, of course, never left the garden. One day, I was walking past the house and suddenly they came out onto the road. They stopped a few dozen metres from me. They were barking furiously. I felt they were very threatening. I was so scared I didn't dare move. I really thought they were going to jump on me and bite me. I didn't move and I didn't know what to do. And suddenly they went back home. I didn't think anything of it and ran home. I've been scared of big dogs ever since.

**Vera:** *1983, Kleve - on my great-aunt's estate.*

1983, Kleve - on my great-aunt's estate. We sit around the kitchen table. The kitchen is bigger than our living room at home. Next to the electric cooker is an old cast-iron oven which heats the kitchen in winter. Aunt Pauline has cooked chicken in fruit sauce. Delicious. I sit between my older cousins Gabriele and Christiane, opposite me is Pauline's brother-in-law Herrmann. Normally the food is brought up to his room (an unloved task, because it stinks unbearably in his room) but today he is sitting at the table with the other visitors. He is old, his teeth keep dropping. My cousins and I have to laugh at the flapping dentures. I try convulsively to suppress the laughter, shove a piece of the sweet chicken into my mouth. Herrman opens his mouth, the dentures fall, Christiane snorts. My suppressed laughter breaks out, the piece of chicken slides down my windpipe. I gasp, no air, heat, panic. Pauline jumps up. Drags me from the chair, bends me forward, pats my back. No air!

Pauline grabs my legs, drags my feet up, I'm dangling upside down in the air, being shaken. The piece of chicken comes loose, falls to the floor.

Air! Greedy breathing! Happiness! The paralysis of shock in the room dissolves. Shakily, I sit down on my chair. Ashamed, the laughter has gone out of me. I eat a little, very carefully. The adults are talking again

The shock sits deep in my bones.

## *Chapter 18.*

*If I remember a few lines  
from a lullaby or other song  
from my childhood*

**Delphine:** I remember a fairy tale called "Sur le pont d'Avignon". We used to sing it in the courtyard, doing rounds, and I believed my doll used to sing it too.

**Gabriela:** *On a spider's web / An elephant was swinging / And because it didn't break / Another elephant came / Two elephants were swinging / On a spider web...*

**Göksel:** I am sure that I heard the most traditional lullabies when I was a baby. But I had a very prestigious, privileged experience during my early childhood. As well as buying a camera for the honour of my birth, my parents had bought a record player and some records with children songs even though it was not common practice in our social environment. There were some records for fairy tales, too. I remember that I listened to these songs for a long time, and I was so proud of this opportunity to play them for my daughter after almost 25 years. I still can sing them by heart.

**Hitesh:** My mother and maternal grandmother both used to sing lullabies and some folk songs. I only remember a few:

*Aa ri nidiya aa ja mere kanaiya ko sula ja...* In this lullaby, the mother is calling her child lord Krishna and talks to the goddess of sleep.

*La la lori doodh ki katori, dooh me batasha lala kare tamasha...* It is a lullaby for babies being innocently dramatic.

*Chanda mama door k pue pakye boor k....* it is a classic song where the mother is describing the moon and its metaphoric relationship with the baby.

**Ibrahim:** I remember my mother was singing this lullaby's with a lot of fun and laughter. I think she sang this lullaby sometimes just to amuse herself until I was old enough to remember it.

*Dandini dandini dastana* (just absurd words to catch the baby's attention I think)

*The calves have entered the orchard / Chase the calf away / Don't let it eat the cabbage / Eeee eee eee eee eee*

I only remember this first stanza and I think my mother sometimes changed the second stanza's and the rest of the lullaby words. When I searched for this lullaby on the internet, I found the same lyrics for the first stanza but for the rest there are hundreds may be thousands of varieties.

*Nenni to a good horse / Nenni on the roadside / Tell his uncle nenni / Let her buy some candy / Eee eee eee eee eee*

I am sure that every mother modifies these words, changing them to suit her own feelings and needs.

**Ipek:** There is a nostalgic children's song about a village far away and the lines say: *There is a village out there far away / That village is our village / Even if we don't go and don't see it /It is our village.*

And the following stanzas say that there is a house, a voice, a mountain, a path far away and they are ours even if we haven't experienced them yet.

This song is a call to appreciate poor and simple distant places of our country and the country life. In the spirit of the 1970s it was a very famous song taught in primary schools.

**Jelena:** *Our little Jelena has made a garland, / and when she was making it, she was happy. / If she would only be willing to give the little garland to me, / and moreover if she would be willing to call me her friend.*

This is the way our grandmother from mother's side, grandma Olga, used to sing.

*Swing, swing, swing, / on the Morava River there are some pears, / that is where some boys are sitting / and they are asking for you. / The first one says – she is here; / the second one says – she is there; the one third says – there she is, / in her grandma's lap she is!*

This is the way our grandmother from our father's side, grandma Ljuba, used to sing, while she held us on her lap.

**Jérôme:** Alas, I have no memory of a lullaby from when I was younger.

**Vera:** I don't remember a lullaby but my mother used to sing with me, if I got tired during our mountain hikes:

*“Mit jedem kleinen Schrittchen, ja Schrittchen, ja Schrittchen/  
schneiden wir ein Stückchen/  
vom dicken Berge ab.”*

*(With every little step, yes step, yes step/  
let's cut a piece/  
from the thick mountains)*

## *Chapter 19.*

### *My first kiss*

**Delphine:** When I was 10, some girls would meet their boyfriends behind the playground to kiss each other, and I wasn't one of them. I'd watch them with envy. And it was much later that I got my first kiss.

**Gabriela:** Oh, not necessarily a kiss. Much later this happened.

But, as a child, I played a game with the other children from the block: *squeaking and meow*. We were all sitting in a circle and one of us, blindfolded, was in the middle. Someone was directing the game and pointing at the players. *Squeaking* meant no. *Meow* meant yes.

The one in the middle would point to someone in the circle at random. Then followed a suite of indicated anatomical segments, subject to the same questions: *squeal* or *meow*. It could be the cheek, the forehead, the hand, the elbow... and so on. The masterful success of the game came from matching the person you wanted with the place you wanted to kiss.

I was six years old and Armando kissed me once on the mouth.

I was so excited! I didn't sleep for days. In our sublime innocence, I thought I was pregnant.

**Göksel:** In high school, my first two years were hard and lonely. I was younger than my classmates because of starting earlier in elementary school. Additionally some of them came from special schools with one or two extra preparation classes in foreign language education. Our school was a science high

school which required passing a hard exam. In my last year, I found a friend. He was always so kind to me. I saw him as a friend not a lover, but after a while I started to hear insinuating words in the girls' dorm. I cried in the face of injustice, and my friend asked me the reason behind my sadness. I explained what was said, and he told me that he was hoping we would be lovers instead of just friends. Although surprised I accepted his proposal and for our last few months, we were so-called lovers. He couldn't hold my hand or kiss me on the lips. It was last day of school; he came with me to bus station for the last time and everyone went their own way. Afterwards, I was feeling remorse because of behaving in that way. It was one year later when I saw him once more (and for last time). He kissed me softly as a goodbye.

**Hitesh:** It was during the hotel school that I met my girlfriend. I was about seventeen years old. For the very first time, it was a new, strange, and unique feeling for both of us as it was her first kiss too. I felt a sensation throughout my body like a current was traveling through my veins. My heartbeat was faster than usual and I could feel her heartbeat too. I was excited and a little nervous too and I was bumping my nose into her and we laughed about it and then after a while, it was a smooth first kiss. It was a very special moment for me as after our first kiss we were looking at each other for a while without speaking a single word.

**Ibrahim:** In 1982, on my first day at Istanbul University, I saw her and immediately fell in love with her. Her leg was in a cast and she was cheerfully telling things to her friends. It was as if breaking her leg was a lot of fun. I didn't know any of my classmates as I was studied at a different university in my first year. This girl's tone of voice and accent were a bit different; I couldn't tell which region or city she was from. In fact, I could distinguish many accents common in Anatolia, but this accent was unique, as if it was influenced by a native language that only she could speak. When she laughed, she also laughed with her eyes. When she spoke, she used her hands as if she were speaking in sign language. For three years we sat next to each other in the class, talked for a long time, played backgammon in student cafes, studied together, visited all the beautiful places in Istanbul together, but I could never tell her that I was in love with her. I had spent my entire youth in small villages or cities in Anatolia and I had never had a lover before. Years passed with the fear that if I told her I was in love with her, I would lose her completely. Finally, in the winter of 1984, a few months before we were due to graduate, I took her to a bar I loved, Papyrus, a place frequented by poets, and I finally told her that I was in love with her. I was finally able to say what everyone knew. She told me that she liked me, but that she was not in love with me. I wanted our friendship to last but it was no longer possible, it was as if the innocence of our friendship was gone. In the evening, not too late, we walked together to her house. It was very cold and her cheek was like a frozen apple. I kissed her on the cheek as we said goodbye.

**Ipek:** I had my first kiss at fourteen with my childhood sweetheart. Obviously as we grew older our paths diverted.

**Jelena:** I was at my classmate Biljana's birthday party. It was the fifth grade of primary school (1975). We played *masne fote* – it is a kind of game of luck and placing specific tasks in front of the participants. I was tasked to kiss a friend from my class, Vladimir. He was a dear and nice boy, loved in the class as a good and faithful friend. Then, according to the task we kissed, surrounded by the others. It was not pleasant or unpleasant, but mostly uncomfortable because of the sudden moisture of the lips' touch.

**Jérôme:** I have no specific memories of a first kiss when I was younger.

**Vera:** *1988, Munich.* The first kiss - when I was nine, I imagined what a kiss from Matthias, my dearest friend, would feel like. We spent a lot of time together, living in our fantasy world. The longing for a kiss remained my secret.

With sixteen, I accompany Violeta to a dance evening at the Steuer dance school, her boyfriend works there. The hall is full, couples cavort on the large dance floor, disco balls throw flashes of light around the room. A good-humoured DJ sets the mood. I wish Seymour, Victor or Moni were here, we had a lot of fun together in our dance classes. Without them, the

familiar dance hall feels foreign. I sit at a small round table, watching the hustle and bustle. A young man, not much taller than me, brown short hair, approaches me, sits down with me. He talks, I don't listen, I'm just happy not to be alone. He wants to go outside, it's such a beautiful evening. I follow him, we sit down on concrete blocks, he spreads out his soul life, he is depressed, sad. I listen, nod sympathetically. It is exhausting to listen for so long. It's time to go home. He thanks me, says I'm a great listener. He leans towards me, gives me a kiss. Tender, his lips feel warm and firm. My heart speeds up, I kiss, am kissed. It is not a sensation, as in my dreams. Disillusionment and excitement spill over into each other. I give him my phone number.

In the night my mother wakes me up sourly, a phone call. Drowsy, I go into my parents' bedroom and press the receiver to my ear. My stepfather grumbles badly into his pillow. HE is on the phone, talking about longing. I tell him not to call again and hang up. My mother expects an explanation. "That was an acquaintance of Violeta's, he won't call again."

## *Chapter 20.*

*The first important  
concert / show I attended*

**Delphine:** It was a party organised by the Communist Party in a small village near my home. There was a stage and I heard a singer I really liked called Nilda Fernandez. I was right in the front of the stage. I was able to enjoy every moment of the concert.

**Gabriela:** I went to many theatre and opera performances, to folk concerts and, of course, to many tribute shows dedicated to the “beloved leaders”. But the concert at the Philharmonic, when I was in eight grade, was almost like an epiphany. It was a Sunday and I was with the class led by the history teacher. The elegance of the concert hall, dressed in its red velvet and ennobled with chandeliers took my breath away. The ladies were in evening dresses and the gentlemen in dark suits. The instruments shone; the sounds seemed to support the walls by themselves.

Ravel's Bolero and Gershwin's Symphony in Blue became, from that day on, a kind of cosmic DNA for all my imaginative play. I understood then what he meant by catharsis.

From our boxes, we upset the balance of the room, dressed in our pioneer uniforms, with white shirts and red neck ties.

I had forgotten to blink, but I could hear my blood rushing through my veins.

**Göksel:** I was 8. We went to Ankara for a family visit. Actually, that's what we were told, but afterwards I learnt that my aunt had a risky operation of an aneurism in a brain vessel. My mother was supposed to accompany her during her hospital stay. My mother and my aunt went to hospital, and we stayed at my grandmother's house. I was worried because my mother had left us behind for the first time. My father said that he organized a nice day out. I was interested in this and asked for more details, but my father said that it was a surprise and I had to wait for every step. First, we went to a children's theatre. I still remember the name of the play: *Forest Television*. Interestingly, I can visualize some scenes right now, while writing this. Then, we went to a movie in the cinema near the theatre. The movie was about the friendship between a little girl and a naïve young man. The child headliner was very famous and my mother was telling me these days that she must have born a few days after me cause when my mother was still at the hospital after delivery, she heard that a famous actress gave birth to this little girl. After she grew up, the daughter didn't continue acting but her mother was one of the most famous actresses of her time.

**Hitesh:** I was at hotel school; we were invited by IIT Guwahati (Indian Institutes of Technology) to a band concert. At that time a very popular young singer, Shan, and his band were playing. We got ready with our best clothes and shoes, and we booked a bus to go to the IIT campus. We waited for hours to get in and it was extremely crowded with multiple food and

drink stalls at the entrance. At the entrance, they put a band around our wrists. I could hear many loud announcements being made. I was extremely excited to see something like that for the very first time. We were in the big group and were behind. We split into multiple small groups and walked through the crowd and stood around fifteen meters from the stage. It was a high stage and still, we could see everything. Everything was normal until Shan and his band came on the stage, and the entire crowd started screaming and went on for a few minutes. Shan sang many songs and felt like all six thousand people are singing with him. It was an amazing experience to see Shan live and listen to his music at that high intensity.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** Maybe not the first but I was so excited that I was able to watch Bob Dylan in 1989 and Sting in 1993 in Istanbul. Also, I remember another thrilling coincidence much later when in Venice I came across Leonard Cohen's sound check. He was so wonderfully kind that as people cheered, he sang many of his songs from the beginning till the end. That was unforgettable.

**Jelena:** In fourth grade of primary school (1974), the chosen pupils from each class were taken to the concert of the *House of Pioneers*. At that concert the *Children's Choir of the House*

*of the Pioneers*, renowned children's songs' singers of the time (very good performers), with an excellent orchestra and in good arrangements. The concert was dedicated to milk and to fruit juices – a kind of commercials, with a well-prepared musical program for school children. I was given a single disc with songs from the concert and I listened to it gladly. I was proud as it was my own present from that nice musical event

**Jérôme:** I saw my first concert when I was 13. I remember it very well. It was in a concert hall in Saint-Brieuc called "Robien". I was with an older cousin of mine. She was over 18. I was really impressed by the immensity of the venue, the stage with all the musical instruments, the lighting effects and all the people waiting for their favourite band. When the lights went down, there was an outcry from the audience and I felt chills. Then suddenly the stage lit up and the musicians took to the stage. The first guitar chords were heard and the singer started the show. At last, I could see the band I'd been waiting for: *Moon Martin*!

**Vera:** 1987, Olympic Hall Munich, Tina Turner

We are early, it is still an eternity before the concert starts, yet the parking lot is almost full and people are flocking to the Olympic Hall from all directions. The Olympic Hall is huge, a steel structure with a corrugated plexiglass roof, the futuristic contrast to the opera house and theatre I have visited so far.

Steffi and her parents invited me to the Tina Turner concert. We sit close to the stage, see everything on the right side. The other end of the stage is far away. I feel lucky, we're not among the crowd in front of the stage.

Tina Turner - Her voice makes the hall tremble. She's a primal force, unleashed on stage. Tina Turner sings, dances with every cell, vibrating, her sweat soaking the air around her.

Light effects, dancers, videos – secondary. Tina electrifies us all.

Intoxicated, we leave the Olympic Hall, too euphoric to go straight home.

## *Chapter 21.*

*The first money I earned*

**Delphine:** I was 17 and looking for a job over the summer. I didn't have a car and I couldn't go very far to work. So, I distributed newspapers. We'd meet in a shed to collect the papers and then I'd set off on foot to distribute them near Alès. I walked a lot all day and earned very little. I did this job for a whole summer.

**Gabriela:** I earned my first pocket money in primary school, washing and selling the jars and bottles from my parents' pantry. The glass could be recycled. There were small recycling units where they could be stored and which paid a few pennies (fixed prices) for each item. Bottles for sparkling wines, like champagne, were the best paid. On such a bottle you received 3 lei. In the 70s, for 3 lei you could buy many good things: 100 g of chicken salami or a large Chinese chocolate, or two packages of *Edelweiss* (*Floare de colț*) biscuits with a layer of fragrant and fine vanilla of 3 mm, which made them unforgettable.

Unfortunately, we rarely had bottles of champagne. Most of them were 400 g jars, were valued at 0.50 *bani*, with the labels firmly attached. I had a lot of work to do to make them perfect. Otherwise, I could risk them being refused at the reception office.

My parents allowed me to wash and sell the jars that were gathering in the pantry every 2 weeks and to use the money as I wanted, on the condition that I showed them what I had bought.

Most often I bought colouring books and embossed paper for origami, coloured chalk for hopscotch from the bookstore, and, of course, the famous biscuits with their enticing vanilla from the corner shop.

**Göksel:** Unbelievably, there is a photograph taken at that moment. I was sitting at a table made of a huge parcel box which I used as a desk for writing. I was counting the money with a wicked facial expression. It must be in October 1991, just months after my graduation from the medical school. In one of my writing mentors (Zeliha Teyze), mentioned that moment with pride in one of their letters of my achievement. I mostly saved up a large amount of my salary cause I lived in a small city where there were not many opportunities to spend money. My mother insisted on putting the money for a house deposit, and I accepted suggestion as a way to secure someone's future.

**Hitesh:** This is about September 2002. I was fifteen years old and just passed the high school exam with good grades. There was a woman named Devi. One fine day she came to meet my mother. After she left my mother asked me if I can tutor her daughter and son, they were eight and six years old respectively. Initially, I told my mother that I did not want to do that but she insisted and I said yes. After a couple of days, I took my bike and reached their house in around fifteen minutes. She was very excited to see me and offered Indian

chai with some snacks too and the kids were well behaved but not very excited to study. However, I started with two children and within fifteen days I had nine children to teach as Devi told her brothers-in-law and neighbors too. At the beginning of October the parents of these students started paying fees. I was paid one thousand three hundred rupees which was a good amount for me. It was a great feeling and I thought I have accomplished something. I was so excited to share this moment with my family. On my way back home on my bike I kept on checking my pocket regularly and ensuring the money was still there. I reached home and gave this money to my mother. She was very happy and had tears in her eyes. After getting so much appreciation from my mother, I shared this news with my brother and sister and honestly, I bragged a bit about it to them as I was the youngest, and already started achievement money before them. Deep down in my heart, I was very happy that I was able to help my parents as they have been working so hard to fulfill all our needs. This first experience not only gave me a great feeling of earning but also an important lesson in life about spending money.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** A family friend who had a publishing house in Germany offered me a freelance job. I adapted a German teaching book into French for Turkish speaking people when I was nineteen.

The book was called *Practical French Teaching*. That was the first money I earned.

**Jelena:** When I was eleven (in 1976), my brother and I were at the seaside with our parents; in the neighbourhood there was a boy named Saša, from Sarajevo, and we used to spend a lot of time with him. One day we agreed to make a small improvised stall below a tree in our street, near the entrance to Saša's home. We found a big old cardboard box and we put small bouquets of flowers on it. We addressed the people who were passing by telling them: "Here you are, buy!" We were selling these flowers for several hours. Someone would stop to see, and most of them just passed by. That day we earned a bit of money selling these flowers.

**Jérôme:** My first salary was from my first job when I was 16. To earn some pocket money and not get bored during my summer holidays, I decided to train as a children's entertainer. I was recruited by my village council working at the day-care centre, supervising young children. There were around ten of us working and supervising around a hundred children. I was so proud to earn my first salary! I continued working in the centre while I was a student. It was very enjoyable and rewarding to look after young children. Their spontaneity, their laughter, their joy brought a lot of bliss.

**Vera:** *NY, 1993.*

“I need to make money but how? “

Dave looks at me with a raised eyebrow. “Teach in health clubs like I do. Stretching, yoga... “

“But I didn’t learn that... “

Dave laughs. “You’ve taken yoga classes for years, you have good body awareness, you dance.... Come on, we’ll write a CV, then you apply. “

“I don’t have any work experience.“

“Write anything, no one will check it. In the audition, you show what you can do. You’re in America, you have to exaggerate! “

Nervous as hell, I get through a few tryouts. The NY Health and Racquet Club offers me an hour of jazz dance. I’m proud, but relieved each week when the Wednesday class is over. With time, the nervousness subsides, but I still prepare meticulously for each lesson, which gives me some confidence.

I get an additional yoga class and substitute classes at other branches. I like the studio in the World Trade Center the least, it is easy to get lost in the building and the studio the Room has no daylight. The participants there want me to take over their class. I advise them to write a letter to the office.

My boss is angry, I should have asked him instead of causing trouble among the participants.

I never taught again in the World Trade Center Studio.

## *Chapter 22.*

*My first job*

**Delphine:** I answered previously.

**Gabriela:** I gave Romanian language and literature lessons when I was in high school. I was studying for admission to university, and found that best way to learn was by teaching others. The first payment was a vase. I tutored the son of one of my mother's colleagues. I practically saved his school year. After 20 lessons, I received a 20 cm white ceramic vase. I took it home as a trophy.

The first real salary came a year later.

**Göksel:** Just after I graduated from Medical School which was located in the western part of the country, I had to go and work in the eastern part of it. The name of the city is Van. I was 22 years old. I wrote a diary about my long travel to Van with my father on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1991 and my departure from Van after 21 months on the 1st of July 1993. These two years shaped me perfectly. I went there as a young girl who lived in a glass bell with her family, and I left the city as a self-aware grown-up woman. Being a newly graduated doctor in this place taught me a lot about both my limitations and capabilities as a physician. I was alone as an adult and a professional. It improved my people skills and administrative responsibilities, planning and implementation. If I could go back and live there once more, I would live everything again and in the same order.

**Hitesh:** My first full-time job was in a hotel which I got through the campus selection in my culinary college. During campus recruitment, I got offers for five jobs from different hotel chains. After careful research and advice from my seniors and family, I decided to join Ananda in the Himalayas. It is one of the best destination spa hotels, known for its world-class spa, yoga treatments, Ayurved-based cuisine, and outstanding location in the foothills of the Himalayas. This hundred-acre property is gorgeous, surrounded by many trees and breathtaking landscape. I was very excited and happy to join this hotel. The first week was amazing as it was our induction of the property and heads of the departments in the hotel. After a week we were allocated to our respective area. I was in the kitchen and met my culinary mentor for the very first time, Chef Ashis. He allocated me to the bakery and pastry section of the kitchen. After a week there was a party in one of the event spaces. I went with them to learn the setup and assist them. We were about to finish and our chef in charge of that event started talking to the guest. Meanwhile, a waiter came and asked for more Tandoori bread. I saw that there was no one around, so I started making Tandoori naan as I did learn it during my culinary school and industrial training. While I was working on Tandoor my Executive Chef Ashis saw me and asked me to meet him the following day. I was scared and nervous that he might give me a warning for working on Tandoor which was not the section I was assigned. However, the next day in his office he praised me for stepping up and making bread for the guests. He was surprised to see that I

already knew Tandoor, and changed my section from bakery & pastry to Tandoor.

And then, my culinary journey started. There was a set pattern for work and we used to have an hour break between lunch and dinner. One of the senior chefs always used to teach culinary theory and sometimes practical too. I never expected that from the workplace, but those classes are the foundation of my culinary success. My Executive Chef was very strict and was always extremely motivating in his conversation. Initially, I wondered why everyone was so strict and wanted to teach us so much even after we just finished school. But the kitchen's extremely disciplined, professional, and enthusiastic atmosphere filled the abundance of courage and motivation in all the young chefs' hearts. In short, I can say that it was no less than an army. After a year and a half, we participated in a written exam for the company's special course for internal candidates in which they were trained for two years as future leaders. And finally, my best friend Tarun and I got selected for the Management trainee program. The day I was leaving the Ananda in the Himalayas to continue the management Trainee program in other locations I saw tears in the eyes of my chef who was so strict throughout. The warmth and grip of his hug said it all.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** After graduating from university, I worked in advertising for ten years. My first job was as an assistant in the media planning department.

**Jelena:** My first engagement in which I regularly earned money were private lessons in solfeggio and musical theory, while I was of secondary music school. It began with a proposal from my professor of solfeggio that I could help my school friend in doing melodic dictates; since it turned out to be successful, he recommended me to a lady who was looking for help in solfeggio for her daughter, pupil in the primary music school. I accepted that; later on, several more pupils called me, so at that time and a bit later, while I was a student, I had a permanent income from solfeggio and musical theory lessons. Before the end of my studies (1988) I also started helping pupils of the secondary school in the field of musical harmony. It was like that until I got my first real job (at the age of 27).

**Jérôme:** I answered previously.

**Vera:** No answer

## *Chapter 23.*

*The first house in which I  
lived far / apart from my  
family. (If applicable).*

**Delphine:** The first time I lived away from home was when I went to Montpellier to study. I was with another student who was with me in high school and whom I didn't know very well. She studied sports and I studied computer science, but our schools were close to the apartment. The apartment was in a quiet area, on the second floor and had a small balcony. I stayed in this apartment for a year before moving.

**Gabriela:** 1987, in the student dormitory at the faculty. It was still in the communist period. There were 4 of us in the room. There was only one bathroom for the whole floor and I was always cold. It was a horrible start.

A year later I moved into the house of Ioan Petru Culianu, the famous student of Mircea Eliade, the historian of religions. This was destiny. There I discovered the master's anthropology library and I felt that I had reached the core of my heart.

It was very cold there too. I had no money to buy wood or coal. My colleague and I collected twigs and bought, from time to time, scraps from a furniture factory to burn them in the stove. I was so happy that I lived in a small house, full of books with a quince tree in front of the porch, that it seemed perfectly normal for me to have some difficulties to face.

In autumn, when the academic year began, the quince tree was waiting for us there, in a honey light, offering itself, through its heavy fruits – some lanterns. I have imprinted that light on my retina for eternity.

**Göksel:** To work as a family practitioner in a primary health care unit, I went to city of Van. On my first day there, I spend the night at a hotel with my father, and I cried a lot because I was in the farthest place from home. The city was very different from the one I used to live in. The houses, the streets, the people all seemed different. The next day, we met a family whose daughter was supposed to work there like me. They said that they found a flat for this young female doctor to rent and they were looking for a roommate. It sounded like a perfect match. I had my personal belongings (really a few) with me and went directly to the house to settle down. It worked well for a while and after almost a year I had to leave that house with a big disappointment in my heart which I prefer not to remember.

**Hitesh:** The first house I lived in away from my family was a small room that I rented during hotel school. My hotel management institute is in Guwahati, Assam which is around two thousand kilometers far from my house. On the first day I stayed at a hostel which was on the campus of my catering institute. After staying a night, I decided to move and look for a room nearby. I did not want to live in the hostel because of the food they served in the cafeteria and the strict schedule to return to the hostel. Around a kilometer away there was an elderly couple. I saw a board in front of their house stating a room available for rent. They gave me some student discounts but it was still expensive for me. Finally one of my classmates from Goa who eventually became one of my best friends asked

to share the room. We moved in the very next day. It was a very nice and cozy studio with a small kitchen and attached bathroom. As the room was in the backyard, we had a separate entrance from the landlord. My landlord was very reserved in the beginning but slowly we started talking. He informed me that they were retired teachers and their son was a doctor and lived in the United States. His daughter was a doctor too and lived with her husband and visits them from time to time. Their house was beautiful. As it was in the valley one could see small mountains in the surrounding area. This house was surrounded by a small pond and they had a small path to reach both the entrances. There were many ducks in the pond. They belonged to the people who lived in huts nearby. Everything was green including the pond as it was covered with some creeper-looking plants with dark green leaves. Every year at the beginning of summer, the pond would be covered with lotus flowers all over. On the way to my college, the house was full of different types of trees but most of them were huge groups of bamboo trees. This was a different feeling and atmosphere than Delhi; for me everything was so calm and relaxed. One day I had a fever and my whole body was ached and shivered. That was the day I missed my home the most. I thought that if my mother had been there, I would never have had this feeling or experience.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** After living for twenty-seven years outside the city centre I moved to an apartment in the city (in Istanbul). It was my first experience living in an apartment building. I was on the third floor of a moderately high building. It was a big change for me after our family home which was an independent duplex house with gardens in the front and back. It was difficult at first. I thought we were so close to the neighbours because we were seeing each other's windows and balconies. Yet it was a nice feeling of independence and taking care of oneself.

**Jelena:** I liked visiting my grandmother from my father's side, in a small town close to Belgrade (around 1970). Her room was large and bright, on the first floor, in the main street. I liked the intense light from the windows, and when they were open, I used to run to them hear the sound of horse hooves approaching, to see the horse drawn carriage. Grandma used to take me to neighbourhood to buy eggs, milk and cheese; the yards were all covered in green grass, and I loved seeing the chickens all around and having the chance to feed them. I loved very much a small turquoise purse she bought me, with beads of all colours on it.

**Jérôme:** At the age of 18 I went to university in the city of Rennes located 100 kilometres from my parents. For the first time I left my village for a very big city where I was going to stay for 6 years. I was not alone in the apartment. There were two of us. This person was a classmate I had met the previous

year in high school. The apartment was not big. It consisted of a large room with a kitchen on one side and a bed on the other in which I slept. My classmate slept on the mezzanine. We were close enough to the university to walk there. It was a new life that was beginning. I stayed in this accommodation for a year before moving to another part of the city.

**Vera:** Behind a small garden gate, a short path leads through bushes to my flat on the ground floor. In the darkness I run the short distance, am relieved when I have locked the door behind me.

My flat consists of a room with a kitchenette and bathroom, the vaulted ceiling is a reminder of its past as a horse stable. The view from my windows is of the courtyard and the mansion, where my landlords live. During the war, according to them, Russian soldiers rode up the veranda stairs into the living room. What a lot these walls have seen!

## *Chapter 24.*

*A teacher who impressed me*

**Delphine:** He was my math teacher. He scared the students very much. He couldn't stand the noise, the whispers and more so the mistakes. He walked around the classroom with his big wooden ruler and sometimes to restore calm he tapped the fingers of disorderly pupils. But his learning method suited me perfectly and since then I have kept this method. He also taught computer science and I really enjoyed his lessons which made me want to continue my studies in this field.

**Gabriela:** There are several teachers who marked my development. I had the extraordinary chance to find them there, at the beginning of the level, as it were.

The old bookseller at the book stand of the factory where my mother worked and where we bought books weekly was my first master. He wrote down our purchases, my mother's and mine, in a notebook. On payday, my mother paid for all the books bought that month. He and his wife told me stories about fascinating events and places, and they taught me German. Unfortunately, I haven't used this language for a long time, but I still know some words and pronounce them quite well.

Then there was the French teacher at university. He was extremely knowledgeable and with so much elegance of spirit and phrase that he opened a whole world to me. Everything happened in French for me for a long period of time. In France I was able to do my first research in anthropology and I met wonderful people, in France I met my husband and I have been teaching medical language in French since 1995.

In 2010, I met Professor Paich, whose gentleness, talent and wisdom deeply marked me. A man gifted with a lot of knowledge who had the gift of listening even to silence and bringing to light the deepest meanings. He was meant to put wonderful people in touch. We worked together on many projects of art and medicine, anthropology and medicine, narrative medicine for health professionals.

I am grateful to all the people I meet. I learn something from each of them.

**Göksel:** If I had to start from the beginning, I would like to mention one special teacher. She was my teacher for the last 3 years of elementary school. I was not aware of her effect on me until we found each other decades later. It is approximately 10 years since we became friends and classmates in our secondary university education. We share a mutual pride in this and find it an exceptional feeling. On the other hand, I always say that “life presented me very special teachers on a gold platter.” It is true. And I continue my saying to my students as “Now I try to be the one sitting on this platter for others.” I learnt from my teachers and now I try to guarantee their and subsequently my immortality by teaching my students.

**Hitesh:** I was inspired by a few teachers in my school days but I had a tuition teacher during my high school. He was very strict and serious. Initially, I was not very happy to go to him but all my friends were there so I had a reason to. He used to teach

thirty to forty students at one time and used to use a big whiteboard and microphone. Four months before the final board exam he started a session late in the evening which used to start at 10 PM. He also provided a bed to sleep if someone stayed over and studied. Eight boys including me decided to stay over and learn more from him. Those late evening sessions were free but very useful to all of us. And after some time, he was friendly and nice to us. He taught us different ways to solve Pythagoras' theorem and remember the periodic table by singing a song and many innovative and efficient ways to learn mathematic formulas. Now studying was not so boring as he made it fun for us. Sometimes he used to share his personal life and how difficult a childhood he had had. But now all of us knew that he had plenty of money as he had one of the biggest coaching centers in the area. Sometimes he used to take us out with him for a walk and treat us to some delicious street food. One day I was going home from school. On the way there was a mosque and many people were coming out after the prayer. I saw my teacher coming out wearing a Pathani suit and a thick shawl on the shoulder. A few people sat outside and asked for help. He gave a shawl to one of them, then he opened the trunk of his car and started distributing small packets of sweet yellow rice. After some time, he was surrounded by many and finished all the boxes. The next day I told him that I saw him in front of the mosque. He told me that he goes there every Friday and does this after prayer. He said I have got more than I need so I just give it to the people who need it. These lines got imprinted on my heart and I was speechless as I had not seen anyone like him before. In the end, he asked me not to tell any of the students about it.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** Slobodan Dan Paich. Slobodan came to *Halka Art Project* as an artist-in-residence in September 2012. It was a year later that Halka started to work as an art initiative that we founded in Istanbul. In the beginning, I thought his residency was for one time only, but very soon after our first project together, he told me that he considered coming back again for the second year. Eventually, İstanbul became a routine destination in his yearly work calendar. Each year he came to Halka as a guest artist and curator and conceived and curated numerous exhibitions, storytelling performances, and lectures. Our personal connection deepened through the years. He reshaped my approach to exhibition making from curatorial aesthetics to graphic design, my priorities in the art world and working with art professionals. He encouraged my artistic side and my writings both academic and poetic. We sat together and he told me that having this PhD. literally changed my world and that I took a metaphorical leap. He said, "Today you passed a threshold, from now on you are part of a smaller universally acknowledged group". I never forget that moment.

He has been a wonderful advisor in all matters concerning various aspects of my life so much so that I sometimes thought that he was thinking about my next steps even before I did. Until his death there hasn't been a day that we either talked on the phone, saw each other face to face or sent each other emails. I'm so grateful for his mentorship, friendship and for his life's work and the legacy he left behind.

**Jelena:** our Serbian language teacher, Zorica Milošević, had a great influence on me during primary school (1975–1979). She encouraged us to develop our sense of aesthetic and ethics through reading and writing; through the texts we read and analyzed we observed and understood the phenomena in life, different human characters and destinies and we discussed them lively, tending to understand that the world and reality must not be observed as “black and white”. She also helped us to understand we needed to develop the ability to comprehend human characteristics also when they are not positive. The geography teacher, Ana Vesić, also had an important influence on me. I loved geography, with many colours on the maps that open up the whole world to us, with data of seas, mountains, plains, deserts, climates, and about ways of human life in all these conditions.

In secondary music school (1979–1983), the two professors had the decisive influence on me. The first one was Vladimir Jovanović, our main professor on the Department for Music Theory, professor of solfeggio, a great pedagogue and also a composer. He noticed my musical talent, as well as my passion for understanding of phenomena from the world of sound which I heard and reproduced myself, i.e. which I sang. We admired each other very much; he encouraged me to develop, to listen and sing and get to know the world of musical theory, rhythm, harmony, and the beauty of musical expressions, and for me it was a joy to progress with his support and (platonic) love. Years after, he keeps saying that I was “his best pupil”, which he also says nowadays, each time we meet.

The other professor from the secondary music school that influenced me very much was my piano professor, Aleksandar Bauer. Although I had no wish to pay a special attention to my piano playing, he spotted my musicality and ability and he managed to convince me to apply also for the Department for Piano and hence to get more complex and more demanding program and have the greater obligation to practice regularly and enough. I was not happy about it, I was very angry with him, I had an impression it was imposed to me without my will. Despite this, in the third-grade secondary school (1982), a year before the final exam, I began to understand the importance of my practice of piano theory – important also for the development of my character – of perseverance, patience, self-criticism, accomplishing an important task and my own limits, accomplishments, motivation, battle with myself.

Although I did not go any further in my piano playing after passing the diploma exam (having a solo one-hour concert with a serious program) – I realised it definitely was not my field – the experience gained during this period was extremely important for me.

**Jérôme:** I had a rather special history teacher in high school. It was my first year of high school. I was 16 years old. The history program was extensive. We had to study the history of humanity from the Greek era until the French revolution. This professor was very lively, very interesting. He involved the students in the discussions. A few months after the start of the

school year, he had organized a school field trip to explain to us the geology of the town of Saint-Brieuc. He had great knowledge and great pedagogy. He was also a very active far-left political activist in his party. This was reflected in the way he explained the history of the world. According to him, since the appearance of human societies, the evolution of these societies could be explained according to an immutable pattern, that of the class struggle according to a Marxist interpretation. This professor was convinced that all historical events could be explained from a communist vision with the exploited on one side and the exploiters on the other.

**Vera:** *Graz 1991, ballet school*

The ballet lesson is over, frustrated I climb down the stairs from the ballet hall, hastening to slip behind the red velvet curtain of the dressing room. Mr. Reinisch, my ballet teacher, is stopping me. He looks at me seriously.

“You mustn’t be so hard on yourself. You have to treat yourself kindly.”

His words strike me. I know deep down he’s right. Still, I can’t stop being unhappy with myself.

Some sentences, encounters, pictures and dreams resonate so strongly that they have become life companions. They shape me, they are part of me, some are still dormant waiting to be awakened.

## *Chapter 25.*

*When I felt very alone,  
very different from others*

**Delphine:** When I felt lonely, I locked myself in my room and played with my dolls. The stories I invented allowed me to escape and be surrounded by imaginary friends. I had created an imaginary friend who I talked to all the time. She knew my fears, my anxieties, my joys.

**Gabriela:** Loneliness is something I have learned to live with over time. Although sometimes it hurts a lot, it can be a good friend.

But, being a child, I was looking for it. My solution depended on the weather. If it happened to be cold and wet, I would hide under a round table covered with a mint green velvet tablecloth. I felt like I was in a magical castle. I read or imagined stories myself.

If it was nice outside, I would run to a nearby walnut tree, my best friend. I was crouched down at his feet and telling him all my frustrations.

I would also like to tell you something about butterflies. They are the metaphor of my fears stuck with a needle like in a display case.

In a way that I don't know how to explain, when Professor Paich left this world, I felt like a frail and helpless child. Back then, I was in the process of recovery after a hard medical treatment and I was clinging to the ideas that came to me while working, trying to focus only on them.

On a Friday in November 2022, I spoke with the Professor in a virtual meeting about what the VAL editorial project is about. An idea from last spring, but I was much too

exhausted by my own experiences to start it. He gave me courage, as usual. He was the only one with whom I did not feel self-conscious about my English. Then I saw something that is still following me. The Professor's face changed while we were talking. His cheeks disappeared under the space of his eyes, as if the iris disappeared and the pupils was getting bigger, like a dime, round and matte. At one point, his whole face was composed of this round look above the lips.

I pinned this image in my mind and could not tear myself away from it. I realized that I was watching him leave. And this was an extremely strong emotion. It was the first time I had felt this, an immense pain and a kind of regression in my own age. I was becoming a fragile child again. A child I had completely forgotten. A child whom I do not know and who troubled me extremely deeply. It was a fear that I had not experienced until then, although I had gone through many difficulties.

4 days later, on November 22, returning from university, on the alley crossing the park between the bus stop and my block, I almost stepped on a red admiral butterfly crashed on the asphalt. It has a very beautiful name: *Vanessa Atalanta*. And it is a migratory butterfly. It lives in Europe, North America and Asia. Just like the Professor, I said to myself. I placed it safely, on a leaf and walked towards the house very tensely. I unlocked the door and threw the purse and the overcoat beside. I stopped in front of the desk, sat down. I opened my diary and noted: *the admiral of our souls has passed away*. Fact confirmed by Ipek's email from the same day.

For months I couldn't do anything outside my daily routine.

**Göksel:** There are many times I felt this. I was a lonely child because of my preference of reading books and dreaming, also writing, secretly. I was always a child and youngster who knew what she wanted, and what she could achieve. It may easily cause one to feel lonely and isolated, especially at a young age. If I had to choose one moment in particular, it was the first two years in high school. It was a boarding school, and I left home for the first time at age of 13. I remember looking through the window at the end of a long corridor and watching for the light of airplanes across the night sky to keep from crying about going back home. The feeling of loneliness was so deep and almost concrete at those times. Afterwards, I noticed that even only one person could be a remedy for loneliness and I tried to find this mate instead of feeling lonely in crowds.

**Hitesh:** For me, this feeling was different until last year. There were many moments in my life when I felt alone, like when I left my house for the first time for further studies, when my grandmother passed away, and especially when I had my first breakup. But this feeling completely changed, when in November 2022 my mentor physically departed from this world. We had known each other for only four years. But since I met him, I felt I knew him for a long time. Lately, he used to live in San Francisco for six to eight months and the rest of the

year in Istanbul. He was not my mentor only for academic work but also for every other aspect of my personal and professional life. We used to talk and work almost every day as if he used to come to my restaurant every day for lunch and if he was in Istanbul, we used to have virtual calls almost four to five days a week. I never felt this way before, what I felt when he left; like there is some void deep down inside me. For some time after he passed away I continued sending links for our virtual meetings, knowing the fact that no one would answer or accept the request. Still I would sit in front of my screen and wait and expect that he will appear on the screen. The first three months after he passed away were very difficult for me as everything used to remind me of him. I know that with time things get better and my soul has accepted the reality. I only miss him physically otherwise he is always with me.

**Ibrahim:** No answer

**Ipek:** When my mum got sick and died. There were a lot of people around me, but the loneliness was deep. None of my friends had experienced anything like this at the time so despite their best intentions how I felt was beyond their grasp.

Also, I had many responsibilities to keep, family urgencies, and huge decisions and moves to make. The entire process was very hard to swallow.

**Jelena:** When I started going to school (in 1971), I noticed that my speech, accent and sentence intonation were different from those of my classmates. It was because my mother's family moved from the North part of Serbia, where speech was slightly different than in Belgrade. Whenever I spoke, this was somehow again confirmed and heard, and I felt it very strongly in the class. That is why I avoided to speak, I was afraid of my voice. Still, when the teacher would call me to read out loud, I enjoyed it, I read fluently, clearly and expressively, with natural nice accents, and I had a feeling that the class liked to listen to me reading. I also liked to sing in the class, during music lessons. These were the situations when I was calm, "on my own", free, with the feeling that they listened to me, heard me and understood me well.

**Jérôme:** Sometimes I felt alone, isolated, without friends. I felt this deep loneliness especially during the school holidays, during the long summer months. I especially had this feeling when I was a teenager. So, to make up for this feeling of solitude, I read and listened to music. I'd sit comfortably in an armchair and choose a record with calm, slow, melancholy music. Since I was a teenager, I've been buying records and choosing according to my mood at the time and my state of mind. So, I would take a book, most of the time history, and read for hours without worrying about the time passing, except when it was necessary to change records!

I also felt lonely when I entered the Faculty of Music Arts, Department for Ethnomusicology, when I was 19 years old (in 1983). I was surrounded by colleagues, students who despised the subject that they were supposed to deal with. It was a very bad feeling to be in a setting like that. It lasted almost throughout the duration of my studies, until an ethno-camp was organized on the seaside for ethnomusicology students from all of Yugoslavia, when I was 24 years old (in 1988). This event encouraged me and helped me gain a feeling that I and my interests were recognised in social terms.

**Vera:** *Munich, 1994.*

What's my path? I love dancing, but I'm not good enough, every audition is a failure. Despair, self-doubt, I can't fight it. During Auditions I compare myself instead of concentrating on myself. I make mistakes, screw up the pirouettes, the fear of failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I wish I'd taken my chances, accepted the scholarship in Italy or auditioned for the Palucca School in Dresden? Why did I let myself be so unsettled by the well-meaning advice of others?

It's hard to get up in the morning, show up in time for training. I'm stuck. I'm back in Munich, sleeping in the basement of Mommy's apartment. Our flat, we lived in from 1980 to 1992 has long been disbanded, Ernst, my stepfather, moved back to Bonn after the divorce.

My friends are about to finish University. What have I achieved? Nothing. I have to leave. But where to?

## Authors

**Delphine:** **Delphine Brigliano**, after studying computer science, she joined Paul Valéry University, Montpellier, and then the University of Nimes, where she works in the research department. She has a passion for literature and is interested in the confinement and internment of women, and in stories related to madness and psychiatry.

**Gabriela:** **Gabriela-Mariana Luca** is Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Languages and Romanian Language at Victor Babeş University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timisoara, Romania, founding member of the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies. She is the author of several volumes and studies of cultural anthropology and literature. She is a passionate storyteller and cultivates knowledge through narrative discourse in her activities.

**Göksel:** **Göksel Altınışık Ergur** is a physician, a writer, and a sociologist. She works at Pamukkale University hospital as a Professor at Pulmonology Department. She has published storybooks and poetry books in Turkish, and her storybook in English is currently in the publishing process. She completed a master's degree in Sociology and has published or co-authored books in this field.

**Hitesh:** **Hitesh Gautam** is a born storyteller, a master of taste and a deep connoisseur of food as a cultural and philosophical concept. Executive Chef at Amber India Restaurant, San Francisco, USA, he is member of *Artship* Foundation Associate Scholars Core Group, San Francisco, USA.

**Ibrahim:** Mete Özel's first book *İlgım Düş Esrar* was published in 2008. Since 2014 he has been working on aspects of Anatolian oral traditions as a researcher and storyteller in collaboration with the San Francisco-based *Artship* and the *Halka* art project in Istanbul. In addition to having poems published in numerous well-known Turkish journals, he is an accomplished critic, having published essays about Elitis, Pavese, Cavalcanti, and Goethe. Metin Altıok, Artem Harutyunyan, Rutger Kopland, Donnie Smith, and Elena Liliana Popescu are a few of the poets he has translated. He is a founding partner of an international translation company called Mirora.

**Ipek:** **İpek Çankaya** is an educator both formal at university level and informally coaching and nurturing numerous interns and co-workers at *Halka* art project, an independent art initiative in Istanbul since 2011 and has helped emerging and established artists find their way in the maze of the contemporary art world.

Çankaya worked as an academic in arts and culture management between 2008 and 2016 and in strategic media planning and advertising agency management in the earlier stages of her career in Istanbul. She writes poetry and

develops visual narratives based on her poetic work. She creates conceptual frameworks for contemporary art exhibitions. In 2019 she co-initiated Art Halicarnassus ([www.arthalicarnassus.com](http://www.arthalicarnassus.com)), an art practice and research space in Bodrum, Turkey which is engaged with idiosyncratic creative processes.

Çankaya is a member of San Francisco based Artship Foundation Associate Scholars Core Group. She contributes to *Comparative Historic Paradigms and Future of Learning Research and Personal and Organizational Managing Paradigms Research* sections.

**Jelena:** **Jelena Jovanović** is ethnomusicologist, Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade, Serbia. She did ethnomusicological fieldwork in Serbia and Romania, published and edited several monographs, wrote and presented numerous articles and published several paper and audio collections of Serbian traditional music. She is active singer of Serbian and Balkan traditional rural and urban songs.

**Jérôme:** **Jérôme Thomas**, Lecturer in Anthropology, PhD, Paul Valéry University, Montpellier, France, Associate researcher IRIEC (*Institut de Recherche Intersite en Etudes Culturelles*), founding external member of Centre for Applied Linguistics and Cultural Comparative Studies, VBUMFT, Visiting Professor, Anthropology-Cultural Studies Section, Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Timisoara, he is author of

several volumes and studies on historical and cultural anthropology.

**Vera: Vera Lohkamp**, an endless source of stories in itself, Clown in hospital (Berlin), dancer, MA in Social Anthropology & Economics, writer and mother of three.

**Slobodan Dan Paich**, Director and Principal Researcher, *Artship Foundation*, San Francisco, USA, Visiting Professor, Anthropology-Cultural Studies Section, *Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Timisoara*, Romania, founding external member of *Centre for Applied Linguistics and Cultural Comparative Studies, VBUMFT*, through experience, knowledge, voice, writing and attitude, he was the storyteller by excellence, the mentor of the generations of creators.