

BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEW – LIFE STORY

Project: E-MOTION - potential of hypersensitivity (2018-1-PL01-KA201-051033)

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Interview Transcript:

My Life in Chapters:

Chapter 1 - My Childhood: Give Me Paper and Pencil...and I Shall Rise in the World!

When I was 3, I was already drawing the world with all its details, with good accuracy and proportion. As a child, I spent hours drawing without ever getting tired. My artistic sense has always been my main form of expression, it makes me feel happy and fulfilled.

Chapter 2 - School: One Swallow Doesn't Make a Summer! was the sentence my teacher would write when I could read out loud without making mistakes; instead, whenever I made a mistake, she would laugh at me; I didn't like it, it was really aggravating. But this taught me to love swallows and summer. Perhaps this was my lowest point.

Chapter 3 - Adolescence: What a Good Kid!

Everyone used to tell me so...and I felt gratified: it made me feel like an adult and reinforced my sense of responsibility. Ever since I was a child, I have loved order and had a great..., I had complex and deep thoughts, people noticed that, it was probably quite clear.

Chapter 4 – Young Adulthood: The Gift of Empathy

I have always taken action to help others, always been there to help a friend or anyone in trouble. I listen to their words and always have words of comfort to make them feel better. But I rarely open myself up to other people.

Chapter 4 - Halfway through My Life ... Fortunate Encounters!

In college, I was 23 years old by then, a wonderful Professor noticed my observation and deduction skills and said to me: "You shouldn't be afraid of other people's judgement!" and he pushed me so much - almost forced me - to give a lecture in public. This was a turning point. Since then, I have never stopped facing difficult situations in public.

Chapter 5 - Adulthood: There Is Always Something We Can Learn!

I look back, I see the time that has passed and enjoy the present...after all, I have come to realize you don't need wings to fly, but a big heart, powerful imagination and a strong drive to discover new things.

There have been many "high" points in my life, that have involved my creativity, loved ones, friends, work. But the story I decided to share is special to me, because it has changed my life forever. It was the day I met my friend "Kyros: a German shepherd who has been by my side for 15 years. It was the afternoon of March 20, 2003 when I visited some dear friends whose dog had a litter. They decided to give me a wonderful gift, knowing their puppy would be in good hands. I picked the most bashful and introverted puppy: I was immediately drawn by the fact that he felt vulnerable and was trying to hide. He seemed to like me, and from that moment on, he became part of my life for years. The reason why this experience has been extremely positive is that, with Kyros, I have become more aware of the simple things in life like nature, and the people I hold dear. I lived with him, I took care of him and educated him. I shared my sensitivity with Kyros and, in return, he showed me attention and an equally extraordinary sensitivity. It was a beautiful life lesson.

The lowest point was during my childhood.

In elementary school, the teacher would scold or mock anyone who made a mistake, especially when reading out loud. Since I tend to be sensitive, sometimes almost to the point

of being thin-skinned, whenever I was reprimanded, especially in public, it was a moment of great humiliation and mortification.

When I was in class, I used to feel scared and inhibited, and I would express my discomfort through somatic symptoms: almost every morning I suffered from abdominal cramps, to express my refusal to go to school but, above all, during the endless hours of class, I avoided expressing myself because I was afraid to make mistakes and, when I did, I felt very insecure. However, this situation did not discourage me from having an excellent relationship with my classmates and, above all, from working hard, since I knew I was good at doing things that I could not do well in public. This was a limit I suffered from for a long time and always struggled to overcome; it gave me an inner motivation to always do better.

I have chosen my experience in college as a turning point because, indeed, it was.

I was in college: I was enrolled in the School of Economics, which had not been my first choice. I did not even like it, on the contrary I found economic subjects boring and not at all stimulating: the mere thought of having to spend my life talking about money and making other people understand the crazy mechanisms of taxation, being locked up in an office, was stressful. My true vocation was communications or art; but I would have been happy with any school where creative subjects were taught. At that time, in 1994, there was no communications course in Rome; given my family's pressures and the impossibility of moving to a different city, I was forced to pick what I thought would be the lesser evil.

For the economic policy exam, which was very tough, I had to attend a study group, in which the Professor, an internationally-renowned and highly respected faculty member, would meet with us and had us engage in economic logic and political thinking exercises. Once, during one of these exercises, I came to the same conclusion as my Professor, but through a diametrically opposed and opposite reasoning. When I pointed this out, the Professor noticed something interesting; he told me he greatly appreciated my reasoning and asked me to present it the next day in class during his lecture, in front of two hundred people.

Being aware of my strong limits when reading in public, I declined his invitation, mentioning a thousand reasons that clearly sounded like a bunch of excuses. My professor realized and

understood my discomfort and said: "Don't be afraid of what other students think; the only opinion you should care about is my opinion! If you do not give that presentation tomorrow, as I have asked you, you will not get a good grade on your exam! If, instead, you give a good presentation, I will give you a nice book as a gift". What could I do? I accepted, all the while hating that man. I spent a hellish night, obsessively preparing my speech, imagining the audience erupting in laughter once I became too emotional to speak.

The next day I went to class it was like walking to the gallows, my emotions are still vividly seared into my memory. The professor was wonderful, he introduced me to everyone with kindness and esteem, then he gave me the floor, winking at me, with a reassuring and smug expression; he conveyed all his confidence and approval with a glance.

When I took the floor, I kind of blacked out and suddenly the audience disappeared. I found myself focusing on the subject, looking only at the professor who was listening and nodding. I spoke masterfully without realizing it. When I finished, the whole audience spontaneously applauded.

At that specific moment, I felt I had crossed a limit I had carried in me that had prevented me from being myself. That professor, who is always in my heart, had unblocked me. His sensitivity and professionalism proved him right, I needed his help and he understood that.

I believe this was a fundamental episode in my life as a highly sensitive person, because a very negative emotion was turned into a deeply positive one, and this changed my way of being and perhaps also my professional destiny.

Since then, I started working as an educator, giving lectures and speeches in public. I began seeing things differently and working on myself to overcome all the limits my sensitivity brings with it, realizing that such limits are new horizons instead.

In the end, I switched courses and graduated in communication sciences.

A positive childhood memory happened one summer, when I went with my family to visit my aunt and uncle who lived in the countryside. It was a day of celebration: it was the feast of the patron saint of my parents' village; the tradition was to have lunch with the entire family. It

was a big family reunion, with all my uncles and cousins. For the occasion, my uncle was going to slaughter a lamb, and I felt sorry for the poor animal; I was never a vegetarian, but the idea of that lamb being killed made me feel sad. In the end, my state of mind convinced my uncle to give up his plan, and he changed the menu! It was a nice gathering nonetheless and for me a nice day to remember.

A negative event I would like to erase happened during my adolescence, when I beat up my younger brother in a fit of rage and I fractured his skull.

Although we get into fights occasionally, like all brothers do, I would like to erase this episode because my anger was triggered by futile reasons: watching a movie on television.

I remember I was blinded by rage, probably because of my brother's provocative attitude, but at the time he was only a child, while I was already a teenager. That bothers me because I am aware that, despite my legendary patience, there may be times when anger might cloud my reasoning and I can become extremely aggressive.

For a period of my life, I worked as an educator in a foster home for youths. Among them was a Roma teenage girl, who had been removed from her camp and was placed in the care of social services. She was a cheerful girl but sometimes she fell into a deep sadness that caused her to hurt herself; when she had emotional breakdowns, she would cut her body, her arms. She did not allow any of the caretakers or peers to touch her, not even to have her wounds dressed, except for me.

She trusted me, she talked to me a lot, she often told me about her discomfort about being a "gypsy", about people's prejudice, about the constant looks of intolerance she received; she said she couldn't live outside her "ghetto" and have a normal life because nobody would trust her, give her a job or any attention because she was a gypsy; at the same time she couldn't even stay in her environment, in the nomad camp, because she would be forced to live in a way she didn't like. Crying, she would tell me all these things while I was disinfecting her self-inflicted cuts, each time she felt overwhelmed by the awareness of her life situation.

Knowing there are people out there who still find themselves in these circumstances makes me feel sad, it fills me with a sense of helplessness, now as it was then. I hope that my empathy helped her overcome her discomfort. I have experienced empathy many times in my life; being empathetic allows people to have meaningful experiences, it makes us see life through the eyes of our soul.

I believe in God. I am Catholic, because that's how I was raised, since I come from a Western Catholic culture, but I do not believe in religious distinctions, which I think are just rituals that are related to social and cultural traditions.

At times, sometimes in unusual circumstances, I experience feelings of transcendence, I feel God's presence, or perceive signals or emotional vibrations. This happens most frequently when I gaze at nature or during difficult situations involving myself or other people, in which we feel shaken and become more perceptive.

I will share two such instances. Several years ago, I had a moped accident: I was hit by a car at high speed. As I was falling, I felt a hand protecting me and laying me on the ground. I got up without a scratch. I felt a strong spiritual presence while I was falling. Time perception was altered: everything happened in a few seconds, but it felt like a much longer time. I perfectly remember all the feelings, thoughts and images that went through my mind; it felt like being in an air bubble, protected and floating, surrounded by a positive energy.

Another memorable situation occurred two years ago, on the feast of the Epiphany. I was at the station in Rome waiting for my train, suddenly I felt a spiritual urge to go to a church. The feeling was intense, I felt vibrant and moved. I walked out of the station, aimlessly, looking for a church, which I reached easily, by attraction. The strange thing was that the relic of the cradle of Christ is preserved in that church in Rome, and it was the day of the Epiphany, when Christian religious tradition celebrates the adoration of the Magi.

In the future I will do everything I wanted to do and gave up. I will dedicate more time to myself and my interests, I will spend more time in positive environments, in contact with nature, art and interesting people. I will start painting and doing creative things again.

I want to spend more time listening to myself, have a more empathic relationship with myself, discover hidden sides of me: new skills and perspectives.

I want to give myself the same attention I normally give to others, without being selfish; give myself the possibility to pursue happiness.

I want to build a positive space around me, a part of the world where I would like to live, leaving out everything that is useless to achieve happiness.

For the next three years, I will be professionally busy with academic research. I personally believe that work is an important aspect of life, but that life is made up of many other important things. In this case, however, I find this professional experience to be very stimulating: it can be an opportunity to change many things in the future, to fulfill my dreams and other aspects of my life: doing interesting things, meeting new people, traveling and having meaningful experiences. Therefore, I do not see my professional activity as a job, but as a great possibility for openness and positive change.

During my life I have faced many emotional challenges: the loss of my loved ones, dealing with my mother's illness, the wish to complete my studies doing what I loved, the wish to constantly change and improve myself and my environment.

I faced all these challenges with great emotional involvement, always knowing I would be able to solve everything but feeling intense emotions when things were happening.

As a highly sensitive person, I am inclined to listen to others, to always have words of comfort for everyone, to never deny myself to others; but the flip side of the coin is that I am not inclined to open up, to be heard, to receive help from others.

I never express what I feel when I deal with problems, especially negative emotions: anxiety, sadness, anger, etc.

Perhaps this is the biggest problem I need to address. I must try to be less sensitive.