

***INTERVIEW INSPIRED BY: THE LIFE STORY INTERVIEW (Dan P. McAdams, Northwestern University)***

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

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***Name/nickname: Diana***

***Age: 22***

***Gender: Female***

***City/Country: Bucharest/Romania***

***Vocation: Artist***

### **Initial comments**

This interview will concern the history of your life. I want to ask you to play the role of a storyteller who talks about their own life, to create a story about your own past, your present and what you expect in the future. Your story should tell how you are similar to other people, and how unique you are as a highly sensitive person.

The purpose of the interviews is to collect and organize various life stories of highly sensitive people. The interview will consist of several parts.

The interview begins with general things and comes to details. I think you'll enjoy taking part in the interview. For most people it is a positive experience.

## **I. LIFE CHAPTERS**

I want you to start with thinking about your life as a book that contains a story about your life. All stories have their characters, scenes, plots, heroes and villains. A longer story may consist of several chapters. Think about your life as a story that has at least a few different chapters. What are they? Give each chapter a title and briefly describe its general content, as if you were to briefly summarize the action of each of them. There may be as many chapters as you want, but I suggest a minimum of two or three chapters, and a maximum of seven.

### **Chapter 1. To start at the beginning**

I think that one of the most formative and important experiences of my life, is one that I have no way of remembering. I only remain with the retellings of it, from the three different perspectives of my family. Immediately after I was born I had issues eating, and, while it didn't seem like something truly grave, babies are fragile little things, and it's best to treat everything seriously. However the hospital I was in decided to take me into intensive care without notifying my parents beforehand. The stories do diverge, as I remember hearing at some point that my mother ended up with another baby for a little while, which she immediately recognized as not being me. I ended up at another hospital, with an intravenous perfusion. Not being a children's hospital, the nurse had trouble locating the little baby vein in my hand, so the doctors had to cut my arm to find it. I still have the scar, very prominently on my arm. Once my parents got hold of me they went directly home.

It is perhaps one of the most interesting things that has happened to me, and it feels strange, disconnecting to have to rely on other people's retellings of such an important event in my life. But what has remained of those stories, were things that did inspire me for life. One of the most important things I remember is the way my father acted, supposedly confronting a nurse one head taller than him and eventually finding out where I was through his connections. It gave me a strong idea of what type of person I should be, confident, unafraid to stand up and fight for my loved ones, but sly enough to have formed connections everywhere I go. It's what I respect in him to this day.

But I ended up being a different kind of person.

## Chapter 2. *A child no-one noticed all that much*

From my parent's stories about me as a toddler and my own memories of kindergarten, I was a quiet child. I spent summers at my cousin's house, where I live right now, just with my grandmother. My main friend group was here, on a street that had a strange concentration of children my age or younger. We eventually made the rules for my favourite game, which for us at the time was hard to describe, but I can now confidently say it was just roleplaying. I did learn that most kids roleplay as parts of a family, but we weren't all that

interested in that, but in recreating stories we saw in cartoons and movies, and putting our own spin on it. It is then that I learned I got the most enjoyment of creating, of putting my mind to work with stories like that, of using spare paper from my grandmother's office to draw the same things, again and again.

Two or three months after I started school I switched homes, and school, and came to live permanently where I am now. I resented the choice for a very long time, as though I did not live in an apartment block anymore, and had a wonderful garden to play in as well as friends my age, it was still my childhood home I was taken from. I remember hot summer afternoons in that apartment, unending, unbearably boring. And still I missed it. But now I have to admit I am glad we moved here.

### **Chapter 3. *What I wouldn't give for four years***

I mentioned being moved in my first year of school. This was not the first time, and certainly not the last time that would happen. I did change kindergartens as well, and, in the end, ended up being unable to spend four full years in any educational institution. After that I moved in fifth grade, because my parents thought I needed to go to a better school, and I still think, to this day, that they were wrong to rip me away from my friend group, from the people I knew and from the school ten minutes away from my house. Instead, all of a sudden, I had to travel half the city on my own, at late hours. There was no way to get over that dissatisfaction, that I ended up with strangers who pretty much knew each other already. It was there, against that social challenge and against the sudden increase in school work, that I began retreating further.

And then came high school, with the ups and downs of figuring out a growing inner world and how that complicated relationships. But things calmed down as I went over that, and I woke up, during Christmas break, wanting to go to an art college. The pressure of deciding a future, of going out in the open waters and figuring life out, wasn't something I very much enjoyed. But I got excited, all of a sudden, at the thought of being able to bring my thoughts into existence, and, for a very unusual moment in my life, I was convinced that I

could get through any hardships that lay before me in getting there. I never did go back to second-guess that, not even after I decided that I wouldn't want to make money out of my art.

#### **Chapter 4. *The fear of open waters***

After finishing college, I sat on my first job for one year. I was supposed to get one very soon after, but I injured my knee and couldn't go all the way to the other side of the city. I gave up as soon as I could, as quickly as I could, afraid of what having a job meant. Afraid that I wouldn't be able to do it properly, afraid, of my own reactions.

What helped was that I found the motivation, as I am looking forward to pursuing another college, to learn more about the world and find new paths I could take in the future. I intend to study geography, and more specifically weather and climate. It sounds as if it has little to do with my previous interests, but is part of my own quest to learn more about the world, and fuel my creative endeavours.

## **II. KEY MEMORIES**

Now that you have sketched out the outline of the chapters, I would like you to focus on a few important memories from your life story.

### **Memory #1**

#### **Childhood**

From my parent's stories about me as a toddler and my own memories of kindergarten, I was a quiet child. Not specifically obedient, but if I did disobey it wasn't to cause a ruckus, but just to take small pleasures for myself - stealing candy and rummaging through drawers I shouldn't be looking through. Friends I would make only if they came to me, and I wasn't reluctant, just never did the first steps myself, and that was something I continue to do to this day.

If there was one thing I would change about that period of my life, it wasn't the move. I wish my parents would've spent more time at home. So little were the opportunities we had to do things together, especially then, when their relationship was still good. They were always very proud of me, and thought so highly of me they might've set their expectations a little too high. They considered me smarter than other children my age, and sent me to school at six years-old, which made me almost a year younger than most of my classmates, at all times. You would think this isn't a great difference, but all my long-term friends ended up being the few born in the same year as me. I was proud of what my parents thought of me, and of the fact that I was pretty smart among my peers, but most of all I was proud of the stories we were able to create together.

## Memory # 2

### School

I was never able to comfortably answer in class, and felt fear and stress any time a question would be asked. Though I didn't understand them, I relied on my talkative classmates to tackle the questions, before I had the chance to stress myself that I did know the answer. I thought that it was good enough for me if I knew I was right. But it ended up making me another shy, retreated girl that only very rarely drew attention, and if she did it was because someone finally tried to make fun of her. Thankfully, that happened very rarely, but it also meant I didn't draw attention from the people I wanted to spend time with.

Forming relationships was the most difficult part of that period. If there is anything I would've changed was that I would've liked to start therapy before I ended up with such visible scars. But, for those friendships that were successful, that is what I am most glad to have accomplished in this time.

## Memory # 3

### Professional work

Even now, after having grown accustomed to my current job, I often stress myself about what my next task is going to be. Will I be able to do it? Would I have an angry customer hurrying me to do something I don't know for sure how to do? My other colleagues don't seem to have these issues, and are more concerned with either doing a better job or skimming out of the work as much as possible. At least I can take pride in the fact that I try my best to help customers when I can, even if my pay may take a hit because I spend too much time with each of them. It's hard to say when this will all get better, but, for now, I can at least manage it, and try to build confidence. Though I wouldn't mind it if I had more people to rely on during this period of my life, to make the little free time I get feel that much more valuable.

## Memory # 4

### My family, friends, loved ones

In high school, being a teenager, and with the background of my family life being torn apart with my parent's divorce, it was bound to end up badly. I finally found people I really had a lot in common with, and wanted to be friends with very much. Too much, as I discovered I had the ability to form very unhealthy relationships, to cling to a person that gave me something no-one else did. Paid attention to my stories, to my ever-growing inner life. And so I wanted more, even though there was no more to be given. Everyone in our group had over-complicated teenager issues, which are hard to understand and tackle at the time, and perhaps I felt that very little was left to spare for me. It was at this time that I turned to self-harm, trying to convince myself that I had something to be sad about, because I couldn't correctly identify the source of my sorrows.

And I think what I value most in relationships is having people be curious and accepting of my inner life. I find that I'm much more likely to bend my schedule for other people, to be available for them and feel disproportionately hurt when they are unable to do

the same. I also don't seem to need as much space as other people, and that makes it difficult to maintain a lot of relationships.

## Memory # 5

### In love with the world

I switch often between writing and drawing, trying to flesh out my ideas and bring them to life as much as possible. I have found that the source of my creative drive is the fascination I have with the surrounding world, the way light is different from one day to the other, the subtle changes of the seasons gradually passing. How important and meaningful little gestures can be. I aim, in my heart, to bring to life something that is as good as the simplest things in life. It is strange to me then, that most satisfaction I get when somebody else enjoys my work, when they allow me to ramble about it at length. It is the most important form of affection I can receive from somebody else.

## III. THEME

I think that that has been and will be the driving force behind my choices. Does it offer me an opportunity to experience the world in a way that I can write about, that I can illustrate? I am trying to build my own story, and figure out what kind of character I want to evolve into, as I balance it with the resources I need to keep the story going.