



Cultuur & Co

TRANSITIONS



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WHAT WE LEARNED IN...

Fermo 46 Berlin 52 Barcelona 58

The Transitions Project was possible thanks to the financial support of the EU Grundtvig Programme



Cultuur & Co

T RANSITIONS

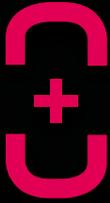
Building a network of creative people through a learning partnership about autobiography as a way of empowerment

Cultuur & Co

A NETWORK OF INDEPENDENT CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

Exploring international networks





Cultuur & Co is a Netherlands-based network of independent specialists, artists, writers, trainers, consultants and project managers in the field of culture, diversity & gender. The aim of Cultuur & Co is to share knowledge, experience, contacts and inspiration, as most of us work on our own as self-employed professionals and cultural entrepreneurs. Important aspects are reciprocity, empathy and learning. We are generous with our competencies and hope to learn from others.

What brings us together is our confidence in **art** and **cultural diversity** as a means of **empowerment**. As we come from different cultural backgrounds, intercultural exchange is an important inspiration for us all. Some practice this exchange within the Netherlands, others focus on international affairs. We share the website www.cultuureenco.nl and regularly organise informal meetings and activities. On the International Day of Cultural Diversity (May 21) we organise a larger activity. The first was a collaboration with the Netherlands UNESCO committee, Netwerk CS and Imagine Identity and Culture, to investigate possibilities of international work towards intercultural dialogue.

Cultuur & Co was founded by Bertien Minco and Dineke Stam in 2005. Both had worked as stimulators of diversity within organisations in the mediasector (Bertien) and in the field of museums and cultural heritage (Dineke). While starting off as independently working professionals they wanted to keep in touch with former and future colleagues. In 2009 Cultuur & Co has around 25 members with different levels of involvement. The network welcomes members working in the field of culture, arts and diversity who want to **share** their skills with other colleagues.



Cultuur & Co is a 'light vehicle' for social and artistic projects. It has already run three successful projects, two of them 'Grundtvig' projects under the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. These were the learning partnership Transitions, and the individual participation of one member in the follow-up conference of Museums Tell Many Stories, in partnership with Map for ID (Intercultural Dialogue) in Rome, June 2008. From 2008 to the present, for the Dutch government programme 'Heritage of the War', Cultuur & Co has been working on an oral history project about four Dutch women who took part in the resistance during World War II.

The ARENA model for intercultural learning has been used extensively by Cultuur & Co. This model was developed by Ido Abram and Jenny Wesly. In August 2008 Jenny Wesly organised a training for all teachers of Sirius primary schools in Amsterdam, in which twelve C&C members were trainers together with a pilot group of teachers.

A peer intervision group is active within Cultuur & Co. We have learned to give feedback using the power of collective thinking in small focus groups, or through brainstorming and mind-mapping. We have shared artwork, IT skills and knowledge of how to make an effective project application. Our Tai Chi specialist Jenny has shared her exercise and practice.

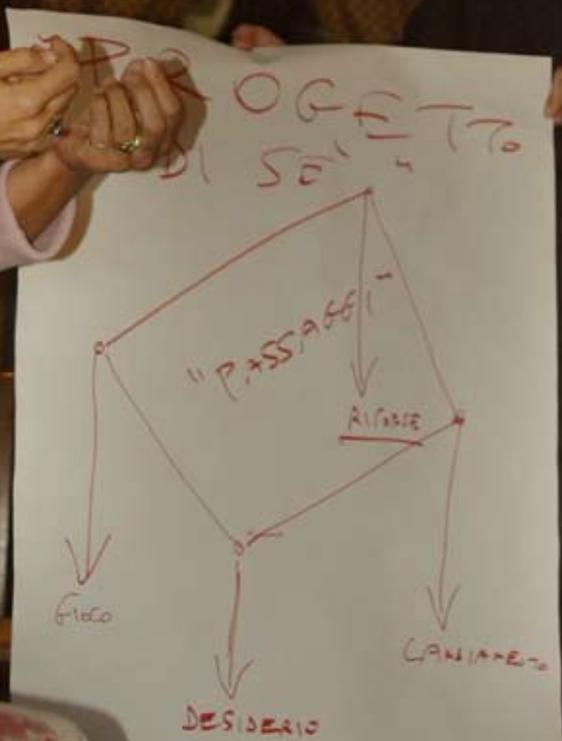
We want to stay open to new members, ideas and exchange on the basis of professional involvement in culture and diversity.





Transitions

Methods of autobiographical writing



A European Grundtvig Project

Transitions is a European learning partnership in the Grundtvig programme for Lifelong Learning and Adult Education. Maria Teresa Marziali from the Italian organisation Generazioni, which focuses on intergenerational dialogue and adult education, is the initiator and coordinator of this partnership.

The aim of Transitions is to explore the learning potential of autobiography and self-narration for people who are at a point of change and transformation in their lives. In Italy, a writing group had already been practicing an autobiographical method. It was time for international exchange. 'I am more than happy with the results of the project since 2006', says Maria Teresa. 'We had the opportunity to learn from other people and their methods of self-narration. Because of the different languages we also had to explain our own method in various ways, and that helped a lot to clarify and develop it. The intense and very serious way that we used self-narration in Generazioni was lightened by other, more visual and playful methods that were introduced. The effect was that our pupils actually took it more seriously!'

The Dutch Partnership

Maria Teresa contacted Dineke through a common contact at OWN Europe, the Older Women's Network in Europe. The idea was to exchange methods of autobiographical writing that can be used for empowerment. Cultuur & Co decided to join the partnership, because of the things we could learn and the skills we could offer.

The ARENA model (see page 35, 52 and 53) seemed a suitable method for sharing our knowledge for intercultural dialogue and self-empowerment with the other European partners. Ido Abram and Jenny Wesly from the C&C network are specialists in this model, so it made sense that Ido, Jenny, Bertien and Dineke should be the first C&C members to participate in an international workshop. Besides, time was too short and travel too complicated to go on the first trip to Fermo, Italy with more people.



For the second and third meetings, however, we could take four more people. The diversity of our group was an important criterion for the composition of the team. We brought our youngest member, Erika (photographer), another man, Frank (journalist), our theatre and art multi-talent Neske, and our designer Zwing.

The specific input of our group in the learning partnership was to broaden the focus on writing biographies and reading texts to other people with visualisation, drawing images and making pictures and film as a means of sharing life experiences. We hope to co-operate in more Lifelong Learning projects to also allow the other C&C members & affiliates (see the website for their names) to benefit from the exchange with citizens from other countries of the European Union.





B e r l i n 2 0 0 8



What's in a group?

Reflections by Neske Beks



There are eight of us: an octet of standard bearers for Cultuur & Co. But what is eight? Eight is two times four or four times two. Forming smaller groups within the group is among the possibilities. Togetherness too. ‘Eight is a round number, and round numbers have a positive influence on group behaviour’, my mother used to say. ‘Eight is also one plus seven’, I reply. ‘Seven is a magic number and one stands for the individual.’ The truth is no doubt somewhere in between.



Then: Berlin, 2008

Like an eight-headed monster we meander together through Berlin, wheeling our suitcases like growling dogs behind us, our street maps clutched firmly in our left hands as our only lifeline. We exchange a little small talk here and there, mainly over work, art, culture and food. A suitcase wheel catches on a *Stolperstein*, a shining bronze pavement plaque that marks the locations where victims of the Holocaust had their last homes. We stop, and for the first time that day we all fall silent.

Central Berlin, Tiergarten Park

Two tables, with eight people around them, and right in the middle a parasol advertising Warsteiner beer. Some of us have known each other for years, others have barely met and are still feeling their way in the group. A dapper grey-haired Jewish gentleman, no longer as young as he was but still alert as a young greyhound. A blonde woman in sturdy walking shoes, with short socks and well-developed calves: the very picture of true Dutch wholesomeness. A petite Indonesian woman in a thick winter coat, rather too warm for this time of year in fact, somewhat withdrawn but eloquent and incisive when

she does speak. A half-Pakistani man, younger but also greying, with a mischievous glint in his eyes. A white-haired Jewish woman with a bearing that even here in Berlin radiates aristocracy. A smiling Korean woman with both feet firmly anchored in the Dutch polder. A grey-haired Jewish lady with colourful spectacles and an infectious girlish laugh. And a black woman with Flemish roots, her abundant curls dyed in the national colour of the Netherlands: orange. A group that quite probably draws second glances.

When hunger overcame us and we wanted to order lunch it called for a generous helping of integrational capability and compromise. Our octet turned out to be made up of four vegetarians, two people who were not completely kosher (but not far off), one total omnivore, four enthusiastic drinkers, two teetotallers, a rice-hater and three-and-a-half smokers. Not necessarily in that order. It occurred to me that if you can manage to order a communal meal for such a diverse ensemble you'll go far in the world...



But manage it we did, and after our stomachs were filled, on that terrace in the park, the stories began to flow. The shared beginnings and the interlocking connections, the loss and the pain, like tangled seaweed exposed by the tide.

Eight totally different people who are coming closer together, talking all the while, discovering and rediscovering how closely bound together they were by the road that lay before us, and the unifying respect for those who trod that road before us, through the war, or through 'mixed blood', race, culture or other roots.

Could there be another city in the whole world with a more telling past, present and future for a group like ours? Could there conceivably be a better backdrop for discovering each other and together breaking down sections of the walls that held us apart, or leaving them standing where we wished, sprayed with the graffiti of our stories?

On our lips, the words *Ich bin ein Berliner* acquired a different context. Or another saying, which could be one of my mother's: 'Know yourself through the other'. The story of being different, and of how the world reacts to that, were repeated in eightfold. Always different. Always new. Sometimes with tears. Often with gallows humour. But always moving and with the impact of a sledgehammer blow.

There I saw the girl who was summoned into her father's presence because she had done something

'naughty'. I empathised as she told of how she had waited for hours in the waiting room of her father's office, to then be told that members of her family should be an example to others in the village. I learned from the man who told me that a word like *sjacheraar*, 'haggler', a word that I had only learned since being in the Netherlands, a word that is often used innocently, can be just as offensive as the 'N-word' is for me.

The breeze fell still when he spoke of his childhood in a Japanese concentration camp. A little while later we were reduced to helpless laughter by the woman who told of how in the



'ordinary' people could only dream of, and we laughed even harder when it was suggested that all Indonesians are stubborn. Recognition on all sides thus, and inevitably, talking all the time, we arrived at the source: our mothers, and therefore of course our childhoods.

The breeze in the park wafted through the white hair of the woman who shared with us how she had mothered her own mother her whole life long, simply because her mother did not have that ability herself. Another told of how his mother had been a feminist *avant la lettre*, and had inspired him as a young child with blood-soaked tales of Bluebeard. And what to do if you never knew your mother, and know that you probably never will because your adoption papers were destroyed in a fire? And then the story of the boy whose father left the family home one day and never came back, leaving his mother to weep for years on end. Something he had hardly told anyone before. He and I learned from each other that we share a fear of going on journeys. But also the ability to go anyway, with the accompanying possibility of meeting the other, and a chance of coming home for good.

'If you want to get somewhere in life, first you have to truly know where you come from', my mother would say.

A monumental truth.

After that afternoon on the terrace in the park our group would never be the same again. As I

am writing this I realise that it is perhaps mainly my perspective that is being expressed, but that afternoon a *fond* was laid that became our firm basis.

**Round like 8,
magic like 7,
and one as only 1 can be.**

Now. 2009. Barcelona

One year further down the road.

We haven't seen so much of each other this year, but the thread is picked up without a break. On the very first evening we managed to find the restaurant that satisfied every one of us, with all our diverse



preferences. We share chocolate, sample food from each other's plates, drink red wine, and white wine, and order more *watèrrr*.

As I am writing this I am sitting in the monastery garden. I see Jenny giving a Tai Chi class to a group of Italians, Spanish ladies, Lithuanians, Germans and all kinds of other mixes like ourselves. I see Ido enjoying a discourse with a Spanish beauty, I see Bertien at work on the laptop, I see Dineke building bridges, and Frank wondering whether or not to catch that one unmissable jazz concert. Zwing is talking nineteen to the dozen with Caroline from Germany, and Erika is our trusty technical *wizzkiddo*.



And me? I sit in the garden and I think of my mother.

And count my blessings.

8,7,1? 16? (8 x 2 or 8 + 7 +1) maybe

Like an eight-headed monster we meander further down the road.

This time through Barcelona.

We are still wheeling those growling suitcases behind us. Yet slowly but surely we're loosening our grips on our street maps...

Just as a year ago we descended into the *Denkmal*, Berlin's Holocaust monument, we now wander through the underground passageways of the Barcelona metro. Sometimes we see another disappear.

Then reappear again.

But no matter how much this seems like hiding away, we know that this is no longer possible for us.

For after all, we have become a group.

*A further introduction to
the Dutch participants*



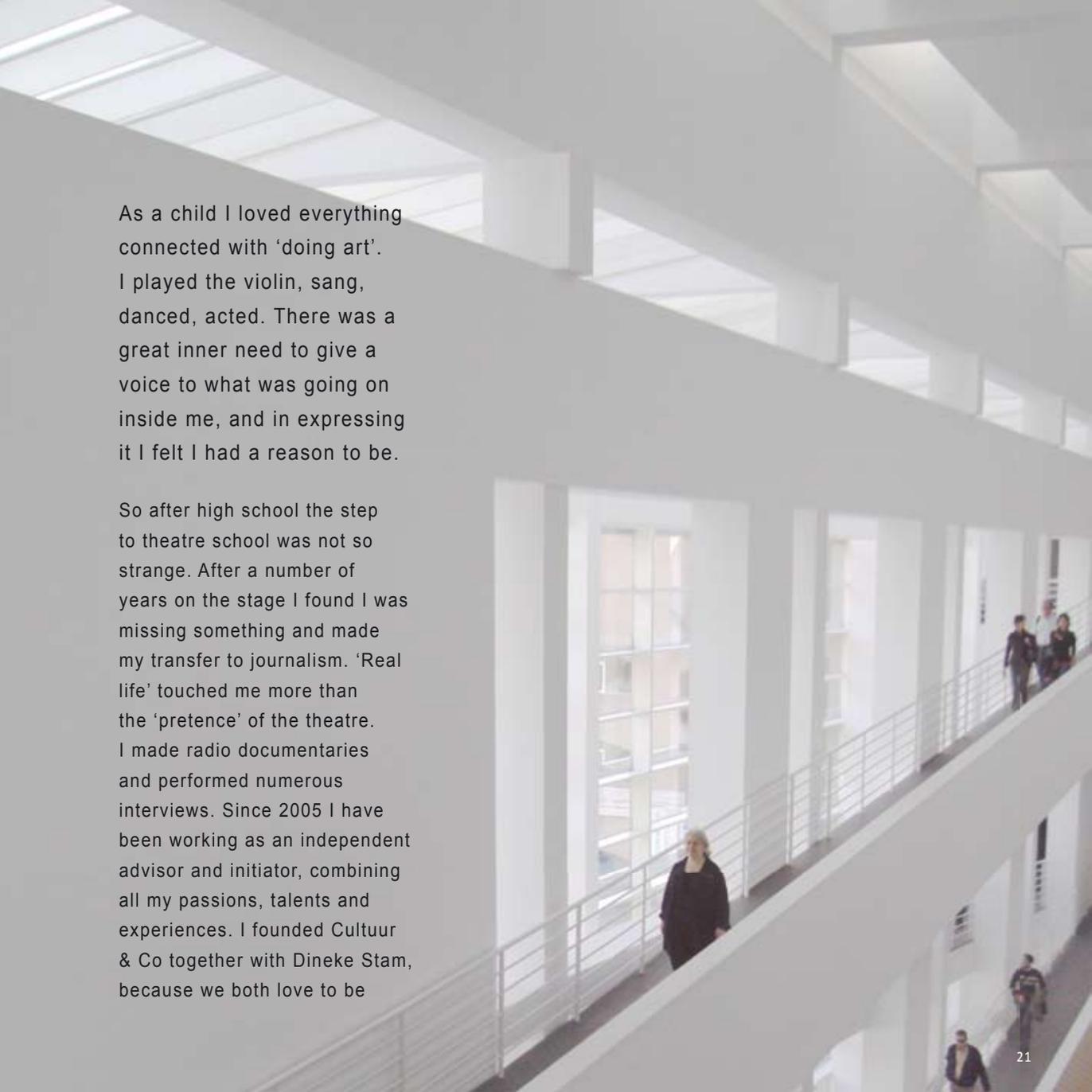
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Bertien Minco

(Groningen 1963) | *Advisor,
discussion leader, interviewer,
writer and director* |

www.cultuurenco.nl/netwerk_bertien.htm

www.jeugdcultuurfonds.nl



As a child I loved everything connected with 'doing art'. I played the violin, sang, danced, acted. There was a great inner need to give a voice to what was going on inside me, and in expressing it I felt I had a reason to be.

So after high school the step to theatre school was not so strange. After a number of years on the stage I found I was missing something and made my transfer to journalism. 'Real life' touched me more than the 'pretence' of the theatre. I made radio documentaries and performed numerous interviews. Since 2005 I have been working as an independent advisor and initiator, combining all my passions, talents and experiences. I founded Cultuur & Co together with Dineke Stam, because we both love to be



surrounded by inspiring people. We have succeeded in gathering a group of highly experienced, talented and above all very friendly professionals around us. We share knowledge and experience, we help each other like good colleagues do, and we all like good food! What riches!

I often act as chairman at conferences and as a discussion leader at various cultural events. Recently I've established *the Jeugdcultuurfonds*, a youth culture foundation that finances cultural activities for disadvantaged children. I'm convinced of the necessity and the power of singing, acting, dancing,



painting and writing for all people, but especially for children. All children have the right to be able to develop themselves through art. I know for myself how important that is.

Transitions

What I learned in the Transitions project is to explore different methods of unearthing stories and giving them context and perspective. I use my own family history as a basis for written stories. Life stories are very inspirational for me. They give me a guiding light. Transitions offered me a rich view of different methods and people.



Dineke Stam

(Dinxperlo, 1958) | *Historian,
exhibition-maker, writer, advisor,
researcher, concept developer* |
www.imhp.eu



Energy, enthusiasm, a feeling for quality, a taste for difference, connecting and guiding people, these are some of my characteristics.

I am the youngest of a loving family of six children, and was raised in a small village on the Dutch-German border. My parents taught us to love literature, history and the company of people. There is so much to explore in the world!

The subject matter of my work often centres around human rights and the fight against oppression. I am educated as a historian. My challenge is to present histories and



present day issues of women's rights, anti-racist fights and people's emancipation. We as human beings make history, and we can change it as well. I look for ways to transform a difficult subject into something digestible or even beautiful. An example of this is the concept for *Kind aan de Ketting* ('Child in Chains'), an exhibition that I curated for the National Institute of Slave History and Heritage in Amsterdam. I have added a new content to the initial association

with enchained slave children. In the past, blue beads were used to buy slaves. As a form of empowerment, visitors can make a new chain of beads with written wishes for the enslaved children of today.

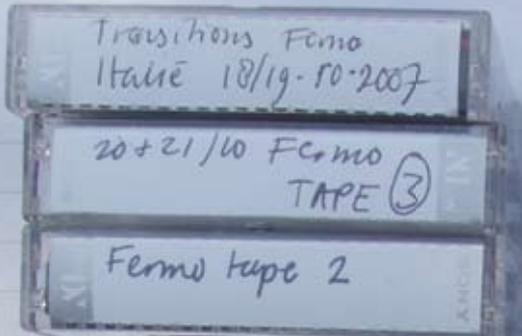
In 2001 I left my job as a curator at the Anne Frank House to start work at the Netherlands Museum Association as a project manager for Intercultural Programmes in the Heritage Sector.



CARE PER CONTATTARE L'OPER
GET IN TOUCH WITH OPERAT

ITALI

CARTA DEI DIRITTI DEL PASSEGGERO



tape 1 / 2

- 0.17 interview Ulla
- 18.32 kon servert
more spaghetti
tagliene tetra
- 22.53 ^{manina} coat of arms
presentatie door
- 26.00



Both nationally and internationally this was a rewarding experience; again meeting interesting people with a passion for museums, community art projects and social inclusion. 'Dancing with Diversity' was the title of our final conference, and a dance it was indeed! Since that time I have worked as an independent cultural entrepreneur. I am very happy that my work brings me into contact with inspiring people. Bertien Minco

and Cultuur & Co are really important resources for this.

Transitions

The EU 'Transitions' project fits well with my other activities. Intercultural dialogue centres around the personal heritage that people bring with them in their life stories. To exchange intangible heritage with other people is a joy, and enriches my life both personally and professionally.





Erika Blikman

(Pusan City, 1974) | *Visual artist,*
photographer | www.jip-photography.com

My work is concerned with how others see me
and how I see others.



Self-image and identity

Images (and the visual arts) are a thread that runs through my entire life. My identity and my image were totally at odds with one another. Because of my Asiatic appearance people didn't see me as Dutch, although that is how I saw myself... until I looked in a mirror.

From word to image

I decided to follow communication studies because I'm interested in encounters and interpersonal change processes. Building on my communication studies, I wanted to follow a course in graphic design, and that's how I arrived at the art academy. A lecturer at the Enschede Academy of Visual Arts found the combination interesting, with the result that I ended up doing two courses at once.

Choice for photography

It was only later that I realised what an important role that one meeting with that one lecturer had played in my life. When I was eleven years old I was given a camera as a present, because I had such a passion for images. At the art academy everything fell in place. I'd finally found a way to communicate about my origins: images!

In 2005 I organised the 'Remi' exhibition in the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam; the first large-scale exhibition about adoption. 'Remi' examines the experience of adoption from the perspective of the

children - or rather the adults who were adopted as children. It was at that exhibition that I presented my own photos for the first time. And so 'Remi' brought me back to photography.





The focus on the other

In my earlier work I mainly dealt with my own origins. That has to do with the fact that, for me, adoption was a great transition. Now I'm primarily interested in the processes that take place when people settle in new situations and environments, such as the neighbourhood where I came to live. An old working class area, with formerly rented accommodation now occupied by people who have bought their own homes. They are pioneers,

because they are settling in a strange place that is gradually becoming their home. I'm fascinated by recording that process of transition, and the encounters with other residents. I recognise myself in it.

The intense exchange of personal histories within Cultuur&Co's Transitions project has broadened my horizon. I take this further in my work.





Frank Siddiqui

(Valkenswaard, 1960) | *Journalist, consultant, intercultural pioneer and jazz fanatic* | www.fsp-jc.nl, www.studioharcigny.nl



For over 15 years I have worked successfully as a research journalist and editor for national media. A few years ago I had the strong feeling that I was on a wrong track.

Criticism, competition and individualism are basic features of the profession of journalism. These values are contrary to openness and learning - at least that was the way I began to feel about it. I was fed up with competition and longed for learning and meeting...

As I wanted to develop my skills in communication and teamwork, I didn't find any satisfaction in what the media sector had to offer, but by following my



passion for arts and culture, I gradually found a new focus. In my research and consultancy work for cultural organisations and funds I can now combine my skills as a journalist (research, analysis, writing) with my passion for the creative, for learning and for the wonders of art itself. Cultuur & Co helped me to make this 'transition' by providing an informal network of wonderful, creative colleagues and friends, sharing different skills, contacts, information and - not least - the openness and willingness to learn from each other. Respect and mutuality are core values of Cultuur & Co. 'You take something, and you bring something'. It's not so important what you bring, it's important that you bring it from the heart.

However loose and informal our network may be, it brought me to the realisation that teamwork without competition is truly possible. Apart from the Grundtvig project, I worked together with at

least five members in various projects – such as booklets, websites, research projects, training, a little Tai Chi... these were learning experiences in 'working while playing and learning'. It's a way of working that's so much more rewarding than the competitive 'being fast and first' that I was used to as a journalist.

I have very much enjoyed the Transitions project, and I've learned a lot about the importance of sharing personal histories and experiences. I admire the teachers who developed the methods that are described below, and I'm already using them in my work and my personal development. Which I hope to share of course...



The main thing is to meet one another with respect and openness for who we are, what we try to achieve and what we can learn from each other. Class, colour, country, language, profession, age - we can easily cross these borders if we want. That is what 'diversity' means to me. It is freedom, a guarantee of 'lifelong learning', and the key inspiration for the next steps I will take in my professional and personal life...



Ido Abram

(Batavia/Jakarta, 1940) | *Director Stichting Leren- Learning Foundation* | www.stichtingleren.nl, www.identiteitscirkels.nl

I was born in 1940, and I studied mathematics and philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. From 1990 to 1997 I was Professor of Holocaust Education there. I carry out research, publish, give lectures and workshops, and design educational programmes in the fields of Jewish identity, 'bringing up children after the Holocaust' and intercultural learning. At the conference in Barcelona I gave the mini-lecture below on the 'matza', which covers all three of these themes.

MATZA

Matza is the unleavened bread that is used as a substitute for ordinary leavened bread during the Jewish festival of Pesach.

Pesach, Passover, the biblical story of the Exodus, briefly comes down to this:

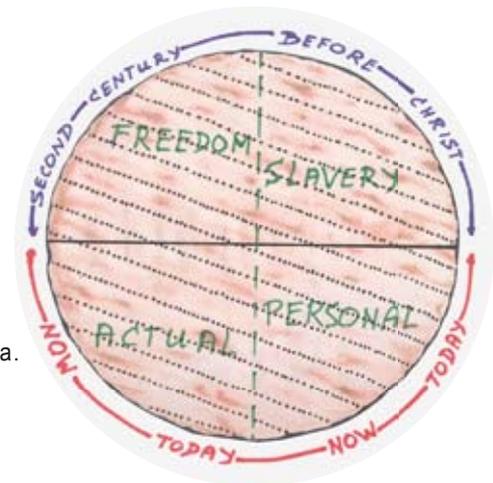
Once we were slaves in Egypt. We fled in great haste. There was no time for the bread yeast to rise. That is why the matza is flat. Now we are free, and as a reminder of our slavery and liberation we eat matzot (the plural of matza) for one week every year.

Every year we tell this story as if it happened yesterday. And it did too. Every slave yearns for freedom. If he manages to achieve it, he must not belittle and oppress others in his turn. The fact that this only moderately succeeds is the cause of the unbroken chain of great wars and small conflicts.

Finally, a personal experience. As a child of three in the Second World War I ended up, together with my mother and older brother, in a Japanese concentration camp in Indonesia. Two years later we were liberated. A clear transition from freedom to imprisonment

to liberation. Since that time, being free is feeling at home, and slavery is every form of subjugation and displacement.

I made this identity circle based on the matza.







Jenny Wesly

(Maastricht, 1948) | *Photographer, empowerment coach, trainer, tai chi tao teacher* | www.focusprojecten.nl, www.identiteitscirkels.nl, www.chinglian.nl

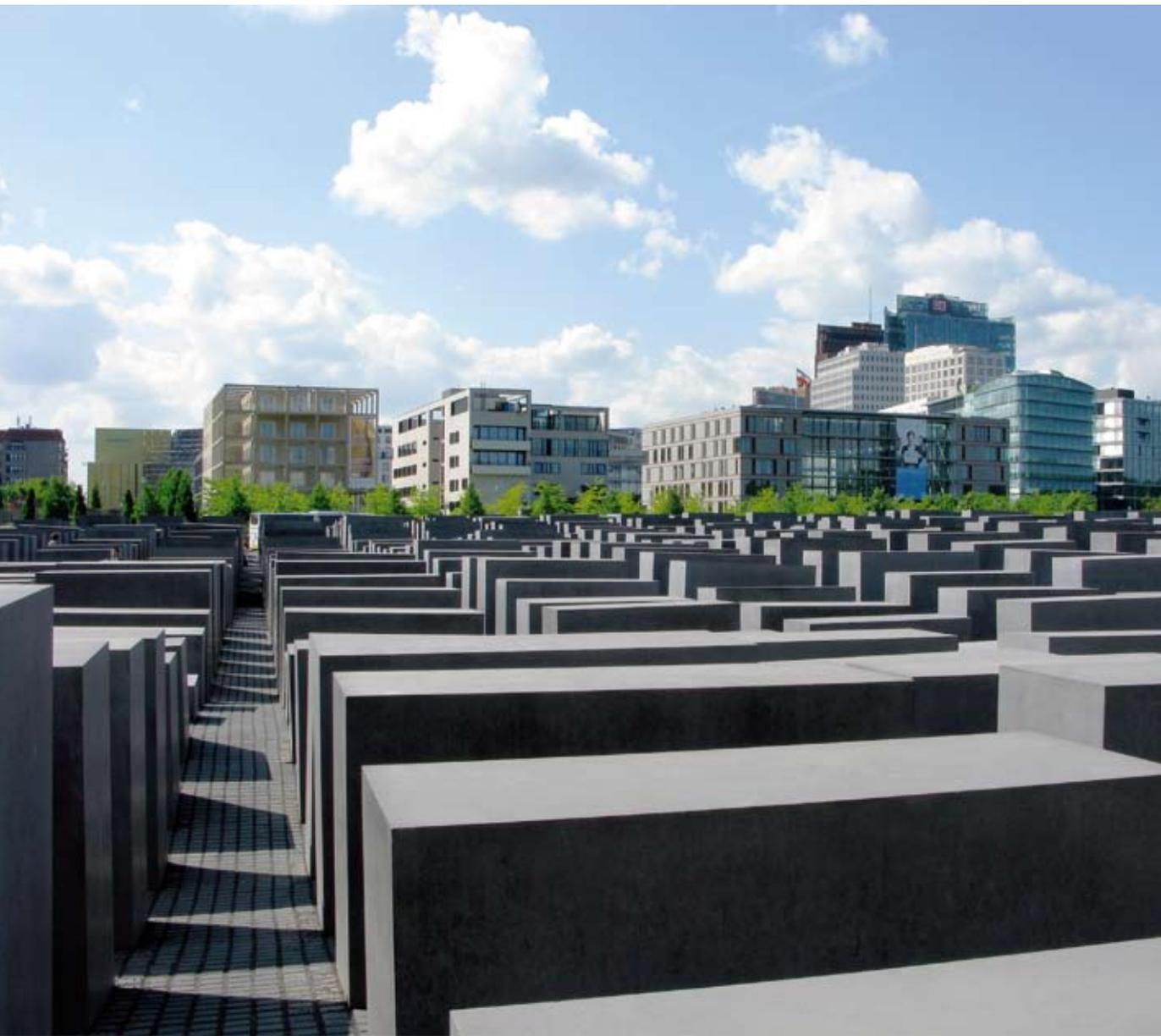
Photography has been an instrument for transforming heaviness into lightness.

At intense moments of depths and heights I keep a diary of writings and drawings. Transformation and gratitude are firm bases for my current life. I was born three years after the Holocaust into a safe yet sad Jewish family with many lost lives to mourn. Transformation was a way to gradually move from surviving to living. *The radiant lotus flower is nourished on a bed of mud.* As I grow older, 'there isn't a day without transitions...', the light wins from the darkness. My early black and



white photos, heavy with symbolism and content, have gradually become playful, light and colourful.

My workshops and projects support people in their journeys and transitions towards the next step in their personal development, no matter how small this step





and had words of praise
the perfection of the
That was one of last
that we spent together
come a few days he
dull, until the last hug
merged our estimate
evocation of the men
noted the absence



might be. The greatest reward comes when participants discover their qualities and creative talents that help them to broaden their horizons and enhance their independence. My pupils are often my teachers. In my work I have an everyday opportunity to be creative and playful, and to live life to its full potential.

For me *Cultuur & Co* stands for communication and professionalism. At the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Partnership we have been able to introduce the Arena method for (intercultural) learning. We had many opportunities for learning. The diversity of the group and the free spirit with which we move in *Cultuur & Co's* space appeal to me. For this I am grateful to our 'founding mothers' Dineke Stam and Bertien Minco.



N

eske Beks

(Antwerp, 1972, living in Amsterdam since 1991)

www.neskebeks.nl | www.clubambras.nl

www.spreeknspeech.nl



'I'm not confused, I deconstruct the chaos that normally passes for perfection.'

Ramsey Nasr

For years I have been using this quote by the Dutch-Palestinian poet and actor Ramsey Nasr to express who I am and what I do. Since my work tells a lot about my path in life, I don't feel the need to write down a biography that repeats this, but I'll do my best to introduce the weird woman that I am right now (April 2009) to you and you and you and you and you and you and you...

Making art is expressing and communicating the emotions that one feels in life. I believe my main thing is telling stories. Depending on which story I want to tell I choose the medium I prefer:



I connect
I talk a lot
I film documentaries
I write spoken word / poetry
I am searching
I perform
I sing
I talk too much
I write scenarios for film and theatre
I meet people
I am a strong woman
I am a weak little girl
I love yoga because it teaches me to see the world upside down
I wrote a one woman show
I performed that same one woman show
I decided I didn't like touring with a one woman show
I am afraid sometimes
I can't attach sometimes
I direct theatre
I mix documentary and fiction
I love Spain, especially Eveissa and Barcelona
I am writing my debut novel
I love people
I develop
I could love you
I am trying to become a yoga teacher
I train people in public speaking
I try to be a good mother

I am becoming I, I guess.







Zwing Wieland

(Utrecht, 1956) | *Design and interactions* | www.zwing.nl

As a little kid, two or three years old, I always drew on wallpaper and ripped pieces of paper with motifs from the wall, very much to my fathers disapproval, as he later told me.

Apparently since childhood on I had some strange fixation for patterns. Now as a designer it's great to be a pattern maniac. So everywhere I go, without knowing it, I look for ornaments, motifs or other repetitions of structures in design. Throughout history new patterns could only emerge because of clashes between cultures. To set things in motion, we obviously need the influences of other cultures. Otherwise everything would become so static that soon we would die of boredom.

YEP... so we'd better choose a happy ending and accept the unknown and merge with other cultures for much more fun and excitement. The open network of Cultuur & Co and Transitions are surely examples of such fun and merging.



Instant Paper Structures



What we learned in Fermo-Italy

The first encounter...

The Coat of Arms exercise

The Coat of Arms exercise is an easy format for a larger group to get to know each other in a relatively short time. Because of the set questions and the visualisations, it is also useful for multi-language groups.

- 1 Draw a coat of arms and divide it into 5 parts
- 2 Put your name and nickname above it
- 3 Use one part to draw your **Hobby**, another part to draw **Something you are good at**.
- 4 Add your **Motto in Life** in words or drawing
- 5 Use the other parts to sketch your **Job** and **Something that others don't know about you** (and that you do want to share with this group)
- 6 Then end with describing or drawing your **Last success**.
- 7 Take only 2 minutes to do this and then present it to the others in 1 minute.



Maria Teresa Marziali, the initiator of Transitions: *'The international meetings helped a lot in thinking about the real potential of autobiographical writing.'*

Dineke Stam: *'I learned this exercise in Krakow (Poland) during my first learning partnership, called Pro Spectatore.'*

Audrone Kliukiene: *'I have used the coat of arms with all my new students since I learned it in Fermo.'*

Culinary Encounters

The excellent cook of the Agricoltura Fermo expressed his heritage in a tasteful way. Telling each other stories over dinner gave ample opportunities to share narratives and learn from individual life experiences. And so the autobiographical writing was digested, making meaning in informal encounters.

The Table Model

Writing about oneself as a method for empowerment. One could use the image of a table. On the surface is the title of the transition, and the four legs represent the structure underpinning this transformation. Four legs of the table of one's life are LOVE, WORK, LOSS and PLAY. With these four in mind, begin to write your biography. Start with some words and free memories. For instance: think of the stages in your life, tell some tales of your childhood. Think about important people in your family, about when you



moved house, about other people that are important and about your professional life. When you come to a difficult point in the narrative, you could adopt 'writings in dialogue': sharing your writings in a supportive group.

Theatre Performance

Generazioni brought this method to the learners from Italy and showed the results in a Theatre Performance in the beautiful theatre of Fermo. A special training in multilingual writing was given to all participants during the meetings in Fermo, Berlin and Barcelona.

Marina Santinelli from Fermo: *'I am a teacher and a family counsellor, and since the workshop in Fermo I use the coat of arms with my clients. After the Berlin workshop I also use the identity circles.'*



Meeting Clara from Ancona

Clara Clementi lives in Italy, surrounded by nature. Clara has enjoyed the Transitions project intensely, especially the aspect of meeting of other people.



Clara is a candid, sparkling woman, always clear and straightforward. She's the pacemaker of the Italian group. Because her English is very good, she's in touch with everyone. She was born in Tripoli and has been a singer throughout her life. 'Since my second birthday I sang songs. I played in every school performance and always won the first prize. The

Golden Palm always travelled along with me, from primary to secondary school and on to my bookkeeping courses.' In Tripoli there was 'Picola San Remo', an imitation of the Eurovision Song Festival with purely Italian songs. 'I am an optimist, and as we say in Italy, 'Cora allegro Dio I 'aiuta' – A cheerful person is helped by God.' Clara is still performing today. 'As I can't memorise the texts any more (it must be my age!) I looked for a way to be on stage without the risk of forgetting my lines. Now I am super, a lady walking in the big operas like *Nabucco* and *La Cavaleria Rusticana*.' Typically Clara. Enjoying being alive.









What we learned in *Berlin*

The second encounter...

The Arena Model

In 2004 Jenny Wesly and Ido Abram developed the Arena method, a technique that makes one's own identity visible and allows one to learn about the experiential worlds of others.

Group Mapping

All the participants connect important places of their life to Berlin. It gives an image of our many connections to the world.

Location-based stories

Your Favourite Place. It started with everyone making an ID circle of their favourite place. After this, four immigrants to Berlin took us to their favourite places in the city, and there they told us on film why this place was important for them. The films were edited and shown at the end of the Berlin workshop and on the Transitions website.

The method has proved itself as an outstanding intercultural learning tool. Anyone can use it: young and old, pupils and teachers, parents and children, professionals and volunteers, ethnic minority and indigenous majority. The 'arena' of learning and living can be both a battleground and a stage, and it unites two pictures: how you see yourself (identity) and how others see you (image). These images are equally important, both real and incomplete. In any event they are never exactly the same. The difference between identity and image often leads to tensions and conflict, but it can also be the prelude



to a dialogue. And dialogue is the key. By opening yourself up to each other's cultural and experiential world, you reduce the gap between identity and image: and so you get to know one another (and yourself) better.

How to make an identity circle or an ID circle

- 1 Pick somebody or something that is important to you: which persons, pursuits, hobbies, objects, ideals, objectives, and the like. Remember everything or jot down key words.
- 2 Arrange the key words in order of importance.

- 3 Divide an empty circle in 'pie slices': make the most important pie slices large and the less important ones smaller.
- 4 Place the key words in the pie slices.
- 5 Add texts, drawings, colours, photographs or collages to the pie slices.

Some circle makers take a slightly different approach. Instead of making pie slices, they use other shapes: small circles in the large ID circle and / or an eye or cloud or other small touch here and there. Some use the empty space outside the ID circle as well. Anything goes.



ID circles of the workshop in Berlin. More about ID Circles in: I. Abram and J. Wesly, *Knowing Me, Knowing You. Identity and intercultural dialogue.* Forum / Ger Guijs, Utrecht / Rotterdam, 2006. www.identiteitscirkels.nl.



Meeting Elissabetta from Berlin

Elissabetta **Abbondanza** was born in Perugia, Italy. She can seem a little reserved and distant, but a happy smile takes over when she's taking her first steps in the sardana, the Catalan national folkdance, on a Barcelona square.



Elissabetta is a writer and gives courses to migrants for the AVO in Berlin. In 2006 she met Maria Teresa Marziali in Perugia and brought the Italian and German project partners together. 'The project meant an increase in professionalism for my courses. I focus methodically on autobiographical writing now. It improves the interaction with students and provides excellent working material.'

Writing and communicating in several languages at a time was quite a challenge, Elissabetta says, but meanwhile she could test different methods for multilingual groups. 'It works marvellously. Listening to each other's personal stories gives a great sense of community. Even the most critical students open up after a while. After all, every person wants to be heard.' Elissabetta is convinced that overcoming differences in language and culture is important for everyone. 'We are different, but we have much more in common. It's a way to emancipate ourselves from inner barriers. Just like the story of the Jewish matzos we heard today. We can move from slavery to freedom.'

Meeting Ben from Berlin

Ben Eberle was the driving force and cheerful host of our meeting in Berlin in 2008. Our American Berliner says he happily welcomed a project like Transitions at this stage in his life.



The German group has been writing very intensively, and has produced two booklets. One of these, about childhood, was adapted into a full-scale stage play by the German group. It was supervised by Elisabetta Abbondanza and performed during the conference in Berlin last year. Although some had difficulty with the duration of two hours, it was the artistic highlight of the Transitions project.

Writing is just the thing for Ben. 'In my private life I was going through an important transition as my children grow up and are about to leave home. It made me terribly insecure. The writing forced me to sit down and figure out what is really important to me. Besides that it's great fun, and it gives me a lot of satisfaction. Right at this moment, as I sit here in Barcelona, my son is moving into a place of his own.' Ben says he is delighted to take part in Transitions because he has learned methods that enable many kinds of people, of any age or educational level, to take part in a form of education that helps them develop their 'soft skills'.

What we learned in Barcelona

The third encounter...

The Topography of ME

- 1 Write down the most important events of your life, as if your existence is a journey and you want to represent it as an imaginary line or road.
- 2 Try to remember at least ten events and write them down, without making a trial version or any kind of criticism.
- 3 Order them chronologically.
- 4 Choose the most pleasant to read as follows. Feel those memories that have led to some something positive in your life, either because they gave confidence and security, or because you have been able to transform them from something negative into something good. Take examples from every period that have helped you to become the person that you are now, so you can live with fullness.
- 5 Write it in the first or third person, taking into account that the person writing about you loves you very much.
- 6 Draw a symbolic element such as a house or a tree, something that represents your safety. You can write the previous text or a summary of it inside the object.
- 7 Choose three adjectives to describe how you are feeling now.

Reflections of the writing group from Barcelona:
'The advantage of shared writing, reading the text out loud, is that it produces a thematic reflection. The voice of the others has been ringing in our minds and we noted many common situations. Sometimes a social or historical context, sometimes our own experiences. It made us realise that we can close situations that were still open, despite the years. We have learned to improve the communication with ourselves and others. We change continuously. We have learned to overcome the myths about writing: you only need a piece of paper, a pen and a group to share your texts.'



Meeting Maria from Barcelona

Maria Vila is a slender woman with expressive eyes. She speaks softly, but without hesitation. As co-ordinator she is the driving force behind the Catalan delegation.



The group consists mainly of elderly people who have written very personal stories within the framework of Transitions. Asked the question 'what did art mean to you during a transition in your life', she needs a moment's thought. It's the film 'Prince of Tides', with Barbara Streisand playing a psychiatrist. 'I've seen the film countless times since my mother passed away.

Yesterday it was exactly five years ago that she died. In the film a man tries to come to terms with the suicide of his sister. He could never weep until one moment in the film, during a session with the psychiatrist. Then he cries his eyes out.' Maria was never able to cry either. Like the protagonist in Prince of Tides she has a sister with a history of psychiatric problems. Maria underwent family therapy with her mother, brother and sister to help her sister. She couldn't remember anything of her childhood. She could work through her grieving for her sister and the death of her mother through this film. She wrote the full story and read it to the participants of Transitions in a theatre in Barcelona.

Methods from Lithuania

During the Transitions project the teachers of Panevėžys Adult Education Centre in Lithuania used, researched and developed several self-narrative writing exercises and methods. This turned out to work so well that the methods are now being integrated into the daily teaching work in the centre.



Bank of Memory : evocation of fragments of life

Paradises Lost : a list of idyllic situations

Paradises Refound : fortuitous events with a link to the past

Writing About :

A photograph, old or recent

A movie or a concert

A tradition or a celebration (birthday, silver wedding)

From a list of adjectives, choose one and write about what it suggests to you.

Choose an object related to one's own experiences and evoke the memories. A special trip.

Above all we realised that the best methodology is the writing itself, shedding all kinds of prejudice.

In Barcelona writing about a photograph and the Tree of Life were explored.

The Tree of Life

- 1 Each learner draws his/her tree of life, where:
 - the roots stand for the family and ancestry
 - the stem stands for the present life: education, family, job, relationships
 - the branches stand for sources of information: the press, radio and television programmes, the internet, books, interests
 - the leaves stand for friends, acquaintances
 - the fruits stand for achievements: jobs done, education completed, achievements in sports or other fields
 - the buds stand for hope

2



When the drawing is finished, each learner shows his/her tree of life to the others in the group and talks about each part of it. Other learners can ask questions.

In this discussion it is important to help

the learners understand what and who have influenced their personality, what is the meaning of their present life, who are their friends, what are their hopes for the future.



There might be no answers to these questions for them at present, but it is important that they start thinking in this direction.

- 3 One has to be open and trust one's partners, so it is recommended to practice this activity with a group of students who know each other well and feel secure.



Meeting Audrone from Vilnius

Audrone Kliukiene from Lithuania looks at you with mischievous, giggling eyes, betraying a quick mind and an ironic sense of humour.



She speaks English fluently, and so she became the translator and spokesperson of the Lithuanian delegation of teachers from the Panevėžys Adult Education Centre.

‘We found the Grundtvig project quite simply, via the internet. We thought it was interesting for our students, and autobiographical writing was something new for us. And, to be honest, we also wanted to see some more of Europe than the Nordic countries we already know.

The Transitions project brought several surprises, says Audrone. ‘The autobiographical aspect brings about a strong involvement of adult students which is otherwise quite hard to accomplish. Lithuanians are open-hearted among people they know well, but not in public.’ Autobiographical methods break the ice in a short time. Telling stories around personal photographs, a method the centre has developed during the project, is a good example. ‘Students get to know each other very well. It enhances the atmosphere and their involvement. And it worked that way for the teachers as well.’ Audrone strongly believes in the importance of cultural exchange. ‘It really changes your outlook on the world. Reading about Barcelona is one thing, being there is something different. In Lithuania we can use some of that.’

The turning point of my life

The arrangement of the life is such that everybody has to undergo different ups and downs. In this way we start evaluating even the tiniest twists and turns, which become immensely joyful, valued or even educational. In my life such turning point was a rabbit, present on my puberty. Then I could not imagine how precious it was bound to be.

Firstly, the rabbit has taught me of responsibility. Being the youngest child in a 5 member family I found it natural to be pampered and spoilt. No chore bothered me. However, my pet required to uncover my undiscovered abilities. Not mentioning the conventional duties, the fluffy creature made me feed it at required period, look for the nutritious food and render sanitary works. At this point, it proved that I was no so hopeless and careless as the youngest child is always meant to be.

Secondly, I leaned to be tenderer. Humans are so used to noises and telling offs that we usually do not pay attention or react. But a pet is a different story. Any has word or even a gruff tone can receive a prompt reaction. It is expressed in a sudden jump

or a low squat in my pet's case. All this has shown that my behavior or speaking manner has been not as appropriate as I have thought. That is why I really do my best to control myself.

Finally, the pet is a shelter for a rainy day. I often heard people speak about the physical comfort, tranquility and the healing power of some of the illnesses. Then I considered it being tittle-tattle. Yet I have acknowledged that a hug or a stroke can do a lot to decrease the misery, depression as well as weariness. To add, even my pet's existence sometimes halves colossal misfortunes.

To sum up, I consider myself as a lucky person who has gained not only the pleasure of being entertained by the pet, but also revealed some perdue features as responsibility and tenderness. To be honest, I really did not expect the pet to brighten my teenage life.

Essay of Justina Savickaitė (2hsn1 class), student from the Panevėžys Adult Education Centre.



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TRANSITIONS

Self-narration and autobiography as empowerment for mature and older people changing direction in their lives.

www.transitions.jimdo.com

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