

MY ILLUMINATED PATHWAY  
FROM CONFUSION TO A  
PURPOSEFUL LIFE

*Written by Fadila  
BOWZAHZAH*

If I have chosen to share my experience with you, by naming my impressions, it is with the intention of resonating with what most of us experience and feel, without being able to put it into words. Writing this story and allowing it to read is a very delicate step. Because I am not only revealing events that are still painful, but also feelings that I kept safe in my secret garden, accessible only to me. However, I now feel that the energy I used to hide them needs to be released, like a bird caged for too long eager to take flight.

Through this story, I open the cage and let the words soar freely, landing wherever they find resonance. In doing so I hope to touch your heart deeply, inspiring you to perhaps open yours as well. Or simply, encouraging you to reflect on your own life. May it inspire you and remind you that, despite appearances and difficulties, you are the creator of your life. I wish you a fulfilling read.

#### Biography:

Fadila is a certified Transformational Coach from the Institute for Woman-Centered Coaching, Training and Leadership, founded by Dr Claire Zammit and she brings with her a strong experience of twenty-three years in the financial sector. She has always had a profound interest in personal development, firmly believing that with the right tools and resources, we can enhance our lives significantly. At the age of forty-eight, Fadila made a life-altering decision to shift her professional orientation, as she felt that, more than seeking a job that fulfilled her material needs, she wanted to invest herself in a profession that would not only thrill her, but also have a deeper sense of purpose. So, she decided, without hesitation, to change course, to raise her sails and navigate towards unknown territories. She had no idea that, this journey would not only lead to a professional transformation, but also uncover well-hidden treasures and reveal her true-life path – the one that lies within reach of the hero within us, waiting to be embraced when we wholeheartedly dedicate ourselves to it.

## The starting point of my quest:

As I reflect upon the past, a clear revelation emerges – I was totally unaware of who I really was or what I wanted. This lack of self-awareness began during my university years. Why did I choose to study Economics? Perhaps it made the most sense to me given my skills. While I wasn't too bad at math, I wasn't proficient enough to pursue a scientific field of study. Nevertheless, it's highly likely that my decision was influenced by a lack of insight into my potential achievements. Pursuing a Degree in Economics inevitably steered me towards the financial sector - a logical next step in the path I had set upon when selecting my academic trajectory. This marked the starting point of my quest - this growing feeling of being on the wrong track.

Yet, from the outside, I projected an image of being accomplished, because I had a good job, a child, a husband, a house, I was travelling, I had some financial comfort. Despite all these blessings, a growing whisper resonated within me, revealing that I wasn't truly living my life; I lacked the profound essence that gives life meaning. It felt as though I was stuck in my own little comfort zone. Something was wrong, without knowing what. I stood as an observer, not the leading protagonist of my own life. I didn't really realize the extent and impact this was having on my mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

I suspect that this sentiment is not unique to me. Many women likely share it. While we reassure ourselves that we have everything to be happy, yet if we are totally honest with ourselves, this is far from the truth. We sense an absence of something crucial, like an unfilled void deep within us that remains regardless of our efforts. In using the feminine context here, I acknowledge the shared experience among many of us, although what I am about to unveil resonates universally, extending its embrace to men as well.

As I reflect on my own life journey, it becomes as well evident that my life has been shaped by pivotal key moments often manifested through transitions or by losses. It was during these difficult moments of uncertainty that I stepped out of my comfort zone and challenged myself. In the face of adversity, I not only discovered unsuspected resources, but also recognized the catalytic influence of these challenging transitions, although sometimes painful, which pushed me to make important decisions. I opted for choices that were

undoubtedly riskier yet made me feel alive with a sense of mastery over my existence. Then, after the storm, when everything was calm again, I fell back into my routine and lived like an automaton.

I found myself grappling with a duality within. On one hand, there was the outward-facing persona, deeply preoccupied with both the past and the future, which was very much absorbed in 'the mind', in accomplishments, action, and a sense of control. This version of me sought strategies to harmonize with the world around and subconsciously aimed to please others. To facilitate this, I had fashioned a facade that became intertwined with my identity, mistakenly believing it defined me.

In essence, we could label this as my ego. It's important to note that I don't merely refer to the negative connotation often shunned due to shame. It's the opposite as it has proven invaluable, serving as a guiding force in my choices and actions. I view it more as the sum of my past experiences as well as the knowledge gained from my early years within my family, culture, and education. All this was stored within my mind, akin to a database from which I could access to steer my decisions and navigate the currents of life. This aspect came to the forefront during moments of tranquility, when I was in my comfort zone.

However, what I failed to grasp was that by relying solely on this source of information, I was building my life based on experiences and knowledge forged in the past, without checking their accuracy, their origin, and more importantly, their suitability for me. To put it more simply, if I were to use color as an analogy, it's akin to assuming that blue has only one shade, the one I've always known. Whenever I thought of blue, that singular shade automatically appeared to mind, all without suspecting the possibility of other shades, and without truly knowing whether I even liked that specific shade. How could I have possibly known?

The second facet of my persona seemed more 'emotional' and harder to manage than the first— it was even inaccessible. Indeed, it is simpler to become aware of our thoughts, even if we don't know their origin, than it is to understand our feelings and inner experiences. This is because not many of us have the tools for this kind of self-awareness. Yet even though I wasn't conscious of it, this part had a significant impact, especially during tough times and transitions. I couldn't control it because it was operating in the realm of the

unconscious. When this aspect came into play, it could dominate causing my emotions to overwhelm my thoughts. This led to intense reactions which were sometimes very painful.

Interestingly, I also uncovered aspect of it, somewhat subtler than my emotional responses. It seemed to guide me intuitively toward a different path than the one dictated from what my mind or emotions dictated. If I managed to see beyond surface appearances and the reality projected by my ego, I discovered another concealed truth – an alternate world with other possibilities. It pushed me to delve deeper into this hidden reality beyond what I was consciously aware of at the time. With hindsight today, it become clear to me.

Indeed, I now recognize that the biggest decisions in my life, I now know with certainty, were influenced by this aspect. That was the one that once prompted me to realize that it was time to fly high and create the life I deeply desired. Of course, the existence of these two distinct 'Me's', somewhat separate from one another, was not initially evident to me. However, I can now identify them. Since then, I have developed the ability to differentiate between them and have gained a broader understanding of my experiences.

Even though it was somewhat of a vague idea, I sensed these two sides. Firstly, there was a part that made me believe I was making life choices with complete awareness, although it was not as conscious as it appeared. Secondly, there existed an unconscious that took control when strong emotions arose, beyond my grasp. This second aspect led me to something greater than my mind could picture and propelled me beyond the boundaries of my past experiences.

## Some catalytic transitions generating radical changes:

As I mentioned before, my life has been shaped by changes—shifts that, though tough, have been helpful in steering me toward a new path. These changes have led me onto different roads compared to what I might have chosen during more peaceful times. The major shifts include my parents' divorce, moving to Luxembourg, my own divorce, my father's passing, as well as the joys of motherhood, my second marriage, and changing careers. Whether these shifts were the result of conscious choices or were imposed by life's circumstances, each of these moments brought about a sense of uncertainty about their outcomes and left behind a feeling of irreplaceable loss. This isn't just about losing material things; it's about the sensation of losing an anchor—the comfort of a home, the presence of loved ones, the freedom to focus solely on myself, my familiar places and family ties, my financial stability, and, lastly, my self-assurance. Essentially, the common thread through all these experiences was the unsettling feeling of having little control, or of being a "victim" of life's circumstances and having to confront the **Unknown**.

It might seem simple to put it this way, but I believe many of us share this perspective on change. We might appreciate and even desire change, yet certain shifts can shake us so profoundly within our familiar comfort zone that we find ourselves wishing nothing had changed in our "old" life. Unconsciously, we resist these shifts, although it is often difficult to admit it. Nevertheless, Life itself is characterized by change and uncertainty. Everything undergoes transformation at every instant. A quick glance at nature helps us grasp this concept. Nothing remains constant; everything evolves with the changing seasons. While there are occasional destructive storms, nature doesn't cease its transformation. So, why is it that we, as Human Beings, often feel anxious about significant changes? Why do we tend to view them as something to avoid, even though at times, we are the ones who initiate these changes through our decisions and choices?

I had to go through other upheavals to truly grasp this, but these experiences were so painful that they left me with an extended sense of loss without compensating gains. The initial shock was the passing of my mother, followed by the loss of one of my sisters.

Before delving further, it is crucial I provide some context about the situation I was in at that time, along with my state of mind. After spending twenty-three years in the finance world, I made the decision to transition into life coaching. At the age of forty-eight, I realized it was the right moment to dedicate the next two decades of my life to a purposeful profession. I had finally identified my calling. It's true, it may have taken me some time, but as the saying goes, it's never too late to make the right decision. And I committed myself to giving it a try. We all aspire of having a paying job that allows us to excel while contributing. For me that path was in life coaching. I had taken courses that convinced me that with the right tools, we have the potential to significantly transform our lives. The human being possesses many untapped abilities and holds the key to their own transformation and success.

A year after embarking on my professional transition, I experienced the loss of my mother and sister. I must admit that this transition, even though carefully planned, brought about a change in my routine for which I wasn't fully prepared. Shifting from being an employee to becoming self-employed isn't an overnight shift. As the name implies, you become entirely self-reliant in every way. While it might sound appealing on paper, the reality is different. You must establish a new work rhythm, unrelated to conventional office hours, and structure your day around your fresh responsibilities and objectives. You find yourself on your own, without the guidance that was present during my prior professional ventures. In my employee role, my day revolved around tasks assigned by my job, and regardless of the effort I put in, I received a paycheck at the end of the month. When you become self-employed, you provide your services to potential clients. Without clients, there are no paychecks.

The reason why I dwell into the context of my situation is because it lays a significant foundation for the rest of my story. Why is this important? Well, even if your job as an employee isn't your favorite, it still provides a degree of security, especially financially. It offers a sense of direction and structure that creates the illusion of predictability about the future. Once you transition to being self-employed, that structure is no longer there. It might not have been perfect for you, but it was reassuring in its own way. It's akin to standing on ground that's constantly shifting beneath your feet. You're now carrying an extraordinary level of responsibility, being 300% accountable for your days, choices, and actions. Your

ability to generate income through your services becomes the roadmap for the future you're aiming for. Some of you might find this quite evident, but I must confess, for me, it was profoundly unsettling. For the very first time in my life, I was no longer on autopilot; I was in control of a fighter plane, equipped only with the pilot's manual I had studied.

With a significant amount of courage, which, I must confess, was indispensable during this phase, I established my coaching company which I named "Gioia Life Coaching". Gioia means "joy" in Italian. By choosing this word, I was paying tribute to my Italian origins (inherited from my mother), and it served to convey my belief that even behind the darkest clouds and fiercest storms, sunlight persists. If we have the courage to see beyond surface, we can unfailingly unearth beauty and happiness in unexpected places. This is precisely what I wanted to bring through my coaching practice.

It proved to be an incredibly enriching year of experiences, pushing me to extend my limits once more. I found myself undertaking endeavors I had never imagined possible. I engaged actively on social media, hosted workshops, and I even made a series of YouTube videos delving into the influence of mobile phones on our relationships. While my clientele wasn't extensive, I had a few. I even embarked on a yoga teacher training course. In essence, I was embracing what I held dearest in life—living my dream and structuring my days according to my own desires.

Despite outward appearances, a persistent unease lingered within me, yet I struggled to pinpoint its source. It was an odd sensation, as if I were wearing a mask tailored for my professional shift but one that failed to address the core issue. Although everything had changed on the outside, it seemed I was constructing something new using the same underlying framework. To illustrate this, consider the metaphor I introduced in the opening chapter—our mind and its unique database. Initiating this transition was akin to introducing a glitch into this system. The system had collected a lot of information diametrically opposed to my decision: “you don't abandon a job offering financial security for something uncertain; you hold onto your 'safe' job until retirement beckons; lacking financial compensation excludes you from society; you are not an entrepreneur; you have the right to dream, while dreaming is possible, but you have to keep your feet on the ground; leaping into the unknown without a safety net is totally irresponsible; success is beyond your reach”. And so



forth. Naturally, I wasn't entirely conscious of this, yet these thoughts were like soft murmurs that persistently whispered I was mistaken.

I proceeded along a path that, I must admit, lacked clarity. This journey was profoundly educational yet simultaneously daunting. Why? Because I found myself without a clear roadmap on how to navigate the launching of my business. No mentors or role models were available to show me the way. Most importantly, I hadn't fully grasped the extent to which I was undermining how much I was sabotaging myself from within with my own thinking. Engaging a coach was a step I took, and she urged me to act, but I eventually realized that this alone wasn't sufficient. It is pointless to think that you can gain confidence simply by pushing yourself beyond your limits and doing things outside of your comfort zone when our inner voices persistently cast doubt on our chances of success.

And then came the first shock: the passing of my mother. Naturally I was deeply saddened, yet I persisted in working on my coaching project. I had followed a similar approach when I experienced the loss of my father a couple of years earlier. I believed that by adhering to my daily routine and concentrating on my work, I could avoid confronting my sorrow and find a sense of direction for the day. I thought that by directing my attention away from my grief, it might gradually fade over time. However, my professional commitments were not as demanding as they had been prior to my transition. As a self-employed entrepreneur, I had the freedom to choose whether I wanted to engage in work or not. In conclusion, due to my limited client base, I found myself with a considerable amount of free time.

It was precisely this abundance of available time that has had a significant impact on me. When you're occupied, it's simpler to ignore your emotions and thoughts. Beyond just having more free time in my day, when you experience the loss of a loved one, it is very difficult to contain your emotions. It's almost impossible. I tried my utmost to present a composed facade, but I was ready to break down emotionally.

However, I believed I knew how to embrace and welcome my emotions inspired by the personal development courses I had undertaken emphasized the significance of acknowledging one's feelings. I genuinely exerted effort in this regard. Unfortunately, these attempts were rooted in that "intellectual" aspect I mentioned earlier – one that happens to

be highly strategic, logical, and rational, yet leaves minimal room for emotional expression. While its primary objective was survival. I was confronted with an issue that hindered my progress, so naturally, I sought a resolution to overcome it. This perspective came from my underlying belief system. Nevertheless, it didn't prevent me from undergoing intense emotional episodes, as these transcended the control of my ego. Furthermore, we know how crucial stages of mourning are and the considerable hardship associated with losing one's mother.

Many of us struggle to support ourselves when faced with pain and the overwhelming wave of emotions from our losses. We attempt to handle or make sense of our feelings using our minds, believing it's the only way. We persistently keep going, no matter what, because delving into our emotions might lead us in getting lost. And we can't afford to let ourselves down, especially during such moments. We think that, anyhow, it wouldn't change the fact that we've lost someone dear. This is why we pour all our energy into avoiding emotions, a skill I must admit I had mastered.

Despite this will and resistance against allowing myself to feel, I eventually reached a breaking point. The weight of my pain was compounded by the burdens inherent in navigating my professional transition which required a lot of energy. This wasn't the opportune moment to nurture the growth of my enterprise, particularly within the realm of life coaching. The very essence of this pursuit was to extend support to my clients with their own challenges. Yet, it became evident that I was barely capable of supporting myself, so how could I help others?

Yet, I persisted in my efforts to move on, ignoring what was going on within me. Until my second shock. The passing of one of my sisters, merely six months after losing my mother. That was too much!

## The darkest moment of my life:

I could no longer contain this emotional tsunami within me. My inner barriers crumbled, one after another. The coping mechanisms that once allowed me to survive despite my pain proved inadequate against this second loss. However, this was ultimately beneficial, as it was time to confront my emotions. What I had been doing to shield myself wasn't contributing to my well-being. After all, it's inherent to our human experience that we cannot simultaneously navigate through losses and undertake a significant life transformation, such as a career change, which demands constant self-improvement. I had held back so much from expressing my sadness that it left me broken mentally, emotionally, and physically.

I have faced challenges in the past, and my response has always been marked by resilience and perseverance. This ability to fall and then rise again is undoubtedly a strength. I consistently discovered something to anchor myself to—sometimes as simple as the routine of getting out of bed each morning for work, and then taking one step after another. However, this time it was different. The framework that enabled me to "operate," avoiding delving too deeply into my emotions temporarily, had vanished. I had deliberately removed it when I made the choice to switch career paths.

I hadn't fully realized how much my job seemed to define my connection to the world, as if it were defining me. I hadn't yet built a new framework that could take on the same role my old job did. Ironically, I felt like something had been taken away from me. Despite making the decision to change careers using all my adult capabilities and still being in the early stages, I felt like I wasn't succeeding. I was measuring my success solely on financial measures. It's astonishing how we experience things while looking through the lens of our pain, distorting what we see. We often underestimate the profound impact of our misconceptions, which stem from the perspective our pain provides and aren't aligned with the true reality. But when you can't step back, they become unquestionable truths. It felt like I was at the bottom of a pit I could never climb out of.

The reason I switched professions was because I wanted to shape a life that matched my values and what I considered important. However, it felt like I was burying myself alive. I had abandoned the "real" world to follow an unrealistic path, a dream, when "Real Life" isn't something, you can dream about. My thoughts were all jumbled up, and all the things I had ignored for years finally surfaced out. Unfortunately, they came out in the form of negative self-talk, filled with judgments and guilt. I believed I couldn't take on this new mission, that I had nothing valuable to offer my clients. It seemed like evidence that I couldn't handle myself first.

I was incredibly hard and uncompromising with myself. I didn't allow for a moment of grieving, the experience of sadness, or the acknowledgment of feeling lost and disheartened. My way of thinking wouldn't allow it. "You can't do that, you need to work, you must keep moving forward, you have to manage your finances, you have to..." But who set these rules? I struggled against them, resisted, and persisted until the final collapse, when I lost the desire to get back up.

I was overwhelmed by my emotions and my sense of direction was lost. I felt ineffective, even a burden to my family. It was difficult to find reasons to start the day. I began to question the purpose of my life. Why continue living in these circumstances? Nothing seemed to hold meaning for me anymore. Looking back, I understand that having the freedom to manage my time was a true blessing during that period. However, I didn't allow myself to embrace it because it felt shameful; I wasn't the only one who had experienced the loss of a loved one. Yet, others carried on with their lives, never ceasing their work. I can say that these moments can be seen as turning points in our lives, where our future can be determined in a matter of minutes. Change becomes possible, for better or for worse. Like engaging in a game of Russian roulette with one's life. Or like a tightrope walker, walking on a wire without a safety net. A fall could occur at any moment, and the consequences are irreversible. That's how I experienced it.

Around three months after my sister's passing, I found myself swept away by a wave of intense emotions. They reached a point where they gained control over me. Flooded with highly critical thoughts, I believed that the only solution to cease my suffering and relieve others of any burden I might pose was to leave this world. I distinctly remember this

happening on a Sunday. My agony wasn't physical; there were no outward signs, yet internally, I was in immense pain. I can honestly say that prior to this, I had never entertained thoughts of ending my own life. However, in that very moment, I contemplated the swiftest and most assured ways to bring everything to an end, ensuring there would be no room for failure.

However, contemplating ending one's life and taking such a step are two vastly different things. It requires an immense amount of courage or being pushed to the brink of desperation. I, however, was lacking in both, no matter what I might have believed. Nonetheless, this triggered an alert in my mind. Struggling to assist myself and lacking anyone nearby to offer the support I required, I dared to reach out to the emergency services. I was lost, yet the prospect of seeking help brought with it a sense of shame. Because my belief system seemed to prohibit it, as if only those deemed 'unstable' ended up in hospitals. Despite this turmoil, I must admit that my intentions were resolute and practical. Driven by logic, I sought to unearth a remedy for this inner torment. Having explored every possible solution independently, I came to the realization that my sole refuge rested in the expertise of a specialist.

This is why I refer to that moment as "the darkest period of my life." I openly discuss this challenging experience, which might give the impression that it no longer affects me. Yet, I must honestly admit that this is far from the truth. Despite the advancements in our society, openly discussing the overwhelming impact of emotions, to the point where considering suicide as an option remains taboo and stigmatized topic. I've always held the conviction that I could handle life's challenges on my own, relying solely on my inner strength. It is with great humility that I must admit that I could never have managed without support. However, a remarkable occurrence unfolded that played a pivotal role in influencing my decision.

Emotionally charged and intently focused on my quest for a solution, I described the context of my situation to the doctor (a psychiatrist, to clarify). His response caught me somewhat off guard. He stated: "I don't have a magic pill". I'm not sure if my story effectively conveyed my high expectations for his proactive involvement in seeking a resolution to my issue. Nevertheless, his response managed to introduce uncertainty and bewilderment into my train of thought. Could this place not hold the perfect answer I sought? Where, then,

could such a solution be found? Hearing his words was remarkably beneficial, akin to emerging from a troubling dream. It was as if an internal cry resounded within me, shouting, "***I want to live!***" and with unwavering determination, I vowed to harness every ounce of my strength to rise above and feel better.

I had plunged so deeply into despair that I had reached a point I had never experienced. The doctor's response served as a much-needed reality check. I truly required assistance, but not within in that space. Naturally, I'm not implying that I'll never require it. Certainty is elusive, and I comprehend that. It's fortunate that such institutions exist in our country. As for me, I felt that I could seek it elsewhere.

An unshakeable determination to break free from my dilemma had taken hold of me with ferocity. At that point I made a promise to myself to exhaust every effort in search of a solution. Though I was uncertain about how I would fulfill that pledge, it became my guiding light, my new path forward. This determination was sufficient to keep me moving ahead. My decision was clear: I would uncover my "magic pill" and finally start living for myself — no longer settling for mere survival. I was ready to embrace my life, to make choices that benefit me and let go of what does not. The power to alter the course of things rested solely within me, and I was resolute in uncovering how to bring about that change.

## The turning point in my life:

The immediate assistance I required came about by "coincidence" when I discovered a non-profit organization specializing in bereavement. With the utmost gratitude, I extend my thanks to the individual who directed me to this association and its highly skilled personnel. I was in dire need of a space where I could lay bare my sorrow and learn to grieve while feeling secure. For there is nothing more fragile and exposed than confronting one's own pain. Yet, it's a crucial stride in the process of grieving. Despite this, I was uncertain how to approach my grief without becoming overwhelmed by it. The therapist, displaying remarkable compassion and understanding, guided me in dismantling my internal resistance through a technique known as EMDR (abbreviated from Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, devised in 1987 by the American psychologist and behavioral therapist Francine Shapiro).

So, three years ago, with support in my personal journey, I made the choice to confront past wounds and navigate my grief in a wholesome manner. I set aside any thoughts of further advancing my professional endeavors. I was so bewildered that resuming my coaching project seemed beyond my imagination. Something else had taken precedence: **me**. For the very first time, I had become my top priority.

I must admit that this period was very special. Still lacking the motivation to resume all the activities I had assigned myself throughout the day, I gradually let go of them, one by one. What I stumbled upon was rather unexpected. I started recognizing that I often engaged in occupations without even considering if they truly addressed a genuine need. To illustrate, I embarked on a yoga teacher training course—an enriching experience I don't regret. Yet, I questioned the purpose behind this endeavor. Was it about excelling in this field or becoming a yoga instructor alongside my coaching work? It's a somewhat difficult to admit, but in all honesty, it's a question I never asked to myself. Despite this, I remained committed to pursuing my practices to attain a 500-hour certification. However, it was transforming into more of an obligation than a source of enjoyment. Regrettably, this dimmed the pleasure I derived from pushing myself through yoga. Moreover, it required a significant investment of time and money, and considering my career transition, I already had my hands full.

By halting my daily routines, I created a cocoon that afforded me enough space to acknowledge and embrace my sorrow. A place where I could mourn. During this time, my family, and the therapist I saw weekly were my sole connections to the outside world. To be honest, it wasn't a simple task. I continued to struggle with the concept of "doing nothing" as per my interpretation. Yet, the truth is, confronting your pain, tending to your wounds, navigating grief, and dedicating yourself to healing is anything but "nothing." Nevertheless, for someone accustomed to constant action, putting a halt to everything becomes a great challenge for the ego.

Deep within, I sensed that this was the sole course of action in the state I found myself. I could no longer operate as I had in the past, almost mechanically. I was merely getting through each day. My mind was in turmoil, and a path forward needed to be found. This is why I hold the therapy sessions with high gratitude, for they enabled me to address my internal defense mechanisms without relying solely on the mind - thanks to the "EMDR" technique. Left to my own devices, I would never have been able to confront it.

Following this guidance, I unearthed that beneath these protective thoughts lay suppressed emotions from my childhood. My mind alone proved inadequate for addressing them. Through this method, I uncovered a means not only to revisit past beliefs but also to engage with their emotional responses. This required significant bravery. However, after each session, I sensed the emotional intensity associated with the explored situation diminishing, eventually reaching a point of neutrality. Often, I found these thoughts to be inaccurate. My brain had devised scenarios and strategies as a defense mechanism, shielding me from emotions I couldn't handle during my childhood.

It's fascinating to observe how our brains possess this inherent survival capability. Yet, it was less heartening to come to terms with the fact that, even in adulthood, these very strategies, beneficial during earlier years, continued to linger. This realization unveiled a truth that had previously eluded me, introducing me to an uncharted realm I often refer to as the hidden world. While accessing our conscious thoughts is straightforward, delving into the recesses of our unconscious mind to question our beliefs and thoughts from within proves to be a more intricate endeavor.



Allowing emotions that had remained silenced for an extended period to surface wasn't a skill I had mastered. I didn't comprehend every facet of the process. Yet, one fact stood clear: I experienced increased serenity and a slightly broader viewpoint regarding my circumstances. To illustrate, it felt akin to suddenly being able to behold the entire expanse of the sky. Previously, this panorama had eluded me due to my limited perspective.

I greatly appreciate the quote by *Einstein* that encapsulates my revelation: "**A problem cannot be solved by the same thinking that created it.**" Essentially, this underscores the impossibility of seeking a solution, particularly within the emotional tumult I was grappling with, solely through my mind. After all, it was my mind that created the problem.

Gradually, I uncovered the origins of my wounds and the persistent ache that lingered. I came to understand the weight of guilt, profound sadness, and a sense of helplessness. These emotions were not only tied to my losses but had become intertwined with my process of mourning. I realized the presence of numerous unconscious and unhelpful beliefs that had accumulated over time, entrapping me within a constricting reality. When you experience the loss of a loved one, it's likely that all the unresolved aspects, whether they are close or distant, connected to that person, rise to the surface. These matters demand attention and often become impossible to overlook. It results in a state of chaos, making it exceptionally challenging to untangle the complexities.

## My great discovery:

After several months of dedicated work with the therapist, we reached a mutual decision to conclude our sessions. Though still fragile, I felt a certain lightness. The fear of being on my own and relapsing lingered, yet I found comfort in the knowledge that her support and kindness remained available whenever I required it. I was no longer navigating this journey alone. Furthermore, her encouragement and belief in my capacity to recover bolstered my self-assurance. The intensity of my pain had diminished, and I felt a renewed eagerness to incorporate new elements into my days, all while respecting my need for a more measured pace. The task at hand was to construct a fresh framework that could provide support, transcending the confines of a mere to-do list. However, where to start?

I continued my daily meditation practice, which seamlessly melded into my morning routine. Additionally, I reintroduced yoga, not with any specific goal in mind, but solely to derive joy from it. This small change was already infusing my days with a fresh energy, although it may have seemed modest. Given my challenges with concentration, this was sufficient. My capacity to embrace new activities daily still felt rather confined. Yet, it was crucial to honor this new rhythm and to progress gradually. It was akin to a car running low on fuel—it became imperative not to squander energy needlessly. I also yearned to break free from my isolation, although I was keen on avoiding excessive pressure to attend every networking event. It's somewhat hard to articulate, but I sensed a desire to connect with others while maintaining the security of my cocoon. Engaging in casual conversations just for the sake of it seemed daunting. Thus, I found myself in a dilemma: how could I satisfy my longing for connection without subjecting myself to the strain of constant socializing?

In the words of the Persian mystic poet *Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*: "***As you start to walk on the way, the way appears***". While I initially grappled with uncertainty regarding the tangible steps of my path to recovery, my unwavering commitment to find the magic pill for my inner turmoil acted as my guiding light. This focused intention was powerful enough to point me in the right direction. So, when I remember how I came across a training course that was a perfect match for my needs at that time, it brings a smile to my face. I'm inclined to believe that it wasn't just a coincidence. To those who might doubt this, I acknowledge that different perspectives exist. However, when I think about all the factors that came

together for me to join the course, it's hard to think it was only by chance. The way everything aligned felt almost like a plan, shining a clear path for me even during a time of confusion.

This program consisted of a seven-week online course offered by the Institute of Women-Centered Coaching, Training, and Leadership, established by Dr. Claire Zammit, a prominent figure, and Transformational Coach in the field. Participating required a personal commitment and a relatively modest investment of time and money. This is how I rediscovered my enthusiasm for daily study. By reactivating my intellectual abilities (the course was conducted in English, while I am a French speaker), which had felt somewhat dormant for nearly a year. I had set a personal challenge to complete the course within seven weeks, a small yet meaningful goal.

Furthermore, each week included opportunities to engage in live events, whether within larger or smaller groups. This satisfied my desire for connection without necessitating excessive involvement. The training's objective appeared remarkably optimistic, reaching far beyond my current aspirations. It aimed to guide us towards our life's purpose. Given my tendency to take life day by day, envisioning a destiny seemed challenging under those circumstances. Nevertheless, the concept intrigued me enough to invest in the opportunity.

With the help of the EMDR method, I had unlocked the door to emotional release. However, I was missing many pieces of my puzzle to understand their influence on my overall well-being. As I embarked on this training, the first of several, I remained unaware that it would surpass my expectations and lead me onto a profoundly transformative path, one that would prove to be lifesaving.

Initially, I acquired techniques that greatly empowered me to independently manage my emotions. Furthermore, it provided me with a fresh perspective on the period spanning from my career transition to the losses within my family. This was genuinely eye-opening, surpassing all anticipations. It instilled a newfound sense of hope, reassuring me that I could overcome these challenges.

You might be wondering, what made this course different from the ones I had taken before? The core idea of this approach, which I'd call groundbreaking from my personal experience, was that every person possesses vast, untapped potential. It proposed that we

have inner resources that go beyond just our intellectual and mental abilities. Interestingly, these very abilities can sometimes get in the way of unlocking our true potential.

I acquired a technique that not only helped me ground myself within a secure inner space, where I could tap into my mature capabilities, but more importantly, it enabled me to create distance between myself and challenging situations where my ego had a strong influence. While this might seem like a simple task, I can assure you it's quite the opposite. I came to realize the extent to which my thoughts and emotions were steering my life, and how challenging it was to disentangle myself from them. Nonetheless, gaining a fresh viewpoint on our issues is essential for effectively resolving them.

In brief, when a situation evoked an emotional response, I discovered that by recalling a time when I felt self-assured, I activated my inner strengths. This allowed me to transition into the role of an observer rather than being overwhelmed by my emotions and thoughts. From this shifted perspective, I could then redirect my focus to the challenging situation and gain a fresh outlook on it.

Lastly, the most enlightening discovery was this: I realized that many aspects of my reality were influenced by patterns formed in my early years. These patterns were connected to strategies I developed for survival, but they also distorted how I saw the world. Adding to this, these patterns were hidden in my unconscious mind and the parts of me I wasn't fully aware of. Because of this, I not only didn't know they existed, but I also wrongly thought they determined who I was.

To give you a concrete example, if I think about one of my patterns: "I am invisible." It's likely that during my childhood, my mind picked up the idea, probably after facing uncomfortable situations, that being noticed was risky. In response to the emotional weight of those moments, my brain developed a way to handle it, allowing me to sidestep the unease. This is how I gained the ability to "vanish" as soon as my mind linked back to that initial remembered experience.

But here's the issue. Even though I'm now an adult with the ability to think logically, my coping mechanisms are still stuck in the same patterns as when I was a child. This has gone on for so long that it's become deeply embedded, becoming almost automatic. It reached a point where I linked my identity to these patterns and felt they were

unchangeable. In essence, I believed I was forever locked into this way of thinking – if I was invisible before, I would always be invisible. This becomes particularly evident in various aspects of my life, especially during times of mourning, when I tended to "disappear from the scene."

This newfound awareness has opened me to greater kindness, empathy, and self-compassion. In fact, when I first established "Gioia Life Coaching," I placed an immense burden on myself to become visible. Yet, the real barrier to my invisibility existed within me. Certainly, in this line of work, it's crucial to establish a presence and connect with others. However, no matter how much I attempted to motivate myself to take risks, my actions were shaped by these deeply rooted patterns. Trying to come up with fresh strategies for growing my business while caught in an unconscious, preconceived self-perception, my view of my abilities and possibilities, proved fruitless.

Though I wasn't consciously aware of it, a strong inner voice warned me that revealing myself to the world was risky. Given this, it's clear why I struggled to establish a presence. This realization also brought me comfort by affirming that I am neither incapable nor worthless. The reality is, I possess numerous talents, ones that have gone unnoticed, lying dormant until now. Nevertheless, by challenging this misconception about my identity and capabilities, I've been able to embrace and incorporate these talents, gradually learning to be more self-assured and visible.

It signaled the start of a new era. Empowered by this insight, it felt not just attainable but necessary to unearth and embrace my true self. The time had come for this transformation. However, to attain this "Grail," I needed to embark on the inner journey of unraveling my patterns. This required integrating and applying everything that could guide me toward profound internal change. Thankfully, I was on the right track with the variety of training programs offered by Dr. Claire Zammit.

Upon finishing the seven-week course, I made the choice to enroll in the Mastery course, which delved further into the previously explored concepts. Additionally, I took the step of registering for their professional training as a Transformational Coach. While doubts still lingered about this path, I granted myself another opportunity. After all, I was just at the starting point when I paused my professional endeavors.

## My experience of the “no man's land”, between two worlds:

During a meditation session, the realization of my inner transformation came to me in the form of a metaphor: throughout my life, I had believed myself to be a dandelion flower. The type of flower that thrives without needing special care to flourish. I occupied the small spaces between stones and rocks, with my attention directed outward, admiring other flowers for their beauty. Then, a realization struck me. This perspective was far from accurate. In truth, I was the seed of a flower, perhaps a wild rose, that had never been given the attention it needed to blossom. Since that moment, I committed to removing each stone that hindered my seed from receiving the sun's warmth and enriching the soil around it. With immense patience and dedicated care, I learned how to nurture it. I provided compost, water, and abundant affection. It became clear to me that I alone held the power to create the optimal conditions for growth, nurturing it from germination to full blossoming.

This metaphor perfectly illustrates how I had been navigating through life before this moment of self-reflection. As I had mentioned at the start of my journey, I sensed something was wrong without being able to pinpoint the cause. Finally, I grasped it. I had been holding myself back in various ways due to my perception of being a simple dandelion flower – insignificant and adapting to the world around it. These underlying patterns, operating behind the scenes of my life, became particularly active during my career change and in the wake of my bereavements. They became so intense that the system experienced a glitch. It crashed to the point of creating a crack in the wall of desolation I had constructed to shield myself from the outside, all the while unaware that this effort was in vain. The source of my suffering was within.

That's why, reflecting on these personal experiences, I believe that extreme situations such as losing a loved one or navigating significant life changes disturb the usual system designed to safeguard us. Because we're uncertain about what's happening, we naturally resist this shift. Nonetheless, these junctures can serve as pivotal moments to question the established patterns. During times of smooth sailing, there's no urge to unveil what's steering our lives. In my case, I faced a critical junction. Uncovering the secret to my own transformation became one of the most important steps for me.

However, having this realization only on a mental level wasn't enough to support my transformation, as the real change took place within my inner thought patterns. This meant exchanging a story that I had constructed my life around, essentially my identity, for a new narrative that empowers me to actively shape my life experiences. As I deserve to lead a life that mirrors my true essence and brings me happiness.

I had developed habits, a specific way of thinking, and a framework that firmly rooted the notion of me being that dandelion flower, with all the implications that came with it. Transitioning to the new story that identified me as this wild rose seed didn't occur overnight. It required a reprogramming of my belief system, implementing new habits, and the creation of a fresh structure that aligned with this newfound narrative. And it all begins with a change in my reference point, a shift in how I view and consider myself and my potential.

Moreover, abandoning the old structure was essential in setting up a new one. As the saying goes, "no pain, no gain." It's important to remember that embarking on a transformational journey isn't easy. It requires a genuine personal commitment. Without this dedication, all efforts will be in vain, because what had seemed « normal » to me until now took on a different light.

Even though certain thoughts were harmful to me, releasing them meant grieving something I had become used to and had considered secure for a significant time. Giving them up wasn't an easy task. Nonetheless, it was crucial to move through this phase that I refer to as "cleaning" – a process of clearing space for new thoughts. It felt as if I was leaving a familiar world into an unfamiliar one, and in between, there was a feeling of emptiness, a kind of "no man's land," where I could feel quite isolated.

Another significant challenge to address is the impact of those around us. Often, they don't keep pace with your changes and might not fully comprehend what's happening within you. Some might even express a preference for your previous self. This can further amplify the prevailing feeling of isolation. Encountering resistance when you attempt to assert your ideas or opinions is quite common, especially when it's something they're not accustomed to – much like how I used to be, conditioned to remain "invisible." Drawing from my personal experience, I've come to realize that expressing oneself is a capacity that requires nurturing.

It's a skill not everyone is accustomed to witnessing in others, and I speak from firsthand experience.

Honestly, there were moments when I hesitated to continue this journey. I feared that I might end up losing those closest to me. However, fortunately, thanks to my training, I found myself in an environment that provided a supportive structure, normalizing this process of transformation. We were consistently reminded that all changes go through phases where it seems like our world is falling apart.

Guided by my ego, which was conditioned to ensure my survival, every decision, choice, and way of expressing myself was determined by my programmed responses. By exposing these patterns to the light and subsequently examining their relevance, I managed to separate them. However, what follows is pivotal in the process of gradually disentangling from these patterns: the next step involves behaving differently, both with oneself and with others.

Let's use a metaphor to illustrate this concept. Imagine that I have been drinking the same type of tea every day, even though I don't enjoy its taste. This habit persists simply because it's what I've grown accustomed to. To bring about change, I must empty the cup completely and replace its contents with the tea I truly prefer. Then, I need to discard the unwanted tea that no longer suits my taste. However, in the context of our cognitive mechanisms, this process is far more complex. It's not just about changing the content of the cup; it requires dismantling the entire framework that supported those old habits, making way for a new structure. This can be disconcerting, as we're venturing into the unknown territory of what will take its place.

So, with grit and bravery, I persevered through uncertainty. I was navigating forward without a precise roadmap of where my journey would lead. Yet, I nurtured an innate sense that I needed to have faith in myself. The price of maintaining the status quo was too high – it meant losing my authentic self. Patience became my virtue; knowing that true transformation began within. I sensed that the shift I sought internally would inevitably manifest externally at one point. My internal compass, linked to my quest for the "magic pill," illuminated my path. I believed I held the remedy for my healing deep within but



bringing it to light meant delving into myself. There were no easy ways out, no quick shortcuts; the path ahead demanded its necessary steps.

It is human to be afraid of not coming out of this transformation unscathed, potentially losing cherished relationships. At this critical moment, we confront a significant decision. We can either endure the weight of the baggage we've gathered and carried for decades, resulting in the significant price of hindering the eventual unfolding of our inner potential, potentially depriving us of the chance to witness the eventual bloom of that exquisite wild rose. Alternatively, we can choose to embark on this journey unburdened, freeing ourselves from the constraints that obstruct our growth. The choice lies within our hands.

By embracing this journey, I assumed the role of the ***self-leader of my own inner transformation***. This newfound path illuminated an uncharted realm where I sensed my agency to be the ***creator of my life***. In the past, the term "leader" conjured an image of a confident woman holding significant roles in both professional and personal spheres. This picture didn't align with me, a humble dandelion. However, my perspective has since evolved, and I've grasped the true essence of it.

Certainly, anyone embarking on the journey of self-discovery, prepared to let go of what no longer serves them while fostering the conditions for its realization, emerges as a leader in their own life. This perspective elevates the purpose of my existence, granting it a deeper meaning, for I have finally found the missing compass point. Previously, I searched desperately for an external anchor to propel me forward. Today, I've come to realize that this anchor is not external, but rather within. It embodies my reason for being, my 'why' each time I rise in the morning."

## The inner 'big bang' of our lives:

As I conclude this chapter of my journey, a question emerges within me: What if change is not only a catalyst but an essential component of our evolution? Just like the Big Bang theory helps set the stage for the universe. Could it be that change propels us to dismantle our existing world, offering a canvas upon which to construct a new reality more harmonized with our aspirations? Through change, we are empowered to be active creators, attuned to the world we forge.

My journey of exploration, cleansing, and freeing myself from my myriad programs is ongoing, an eternal odyssey. Through these tumultuous shifts, even the painful ones, I've come to a profound understanding—I am the **creator of the reality** I inhabit. The convictions I once regarded as 'true' are entwined with how I perceived things during my childhood.

Much remains to be addressed and healed within me. This undertaking is challenging, as the process of deconstruction and reconstruction demands significant time, ample patience, and a profound self-love. The destination remains uncertain. I'm still unsure where this journey will lead me, what kind of future will unfold from the inner transformation set in motion three years ago. Yet, one thing is unequivocal: I feel no longer a “victim of life's circumstances”. My current level of awareness is not yet able to measure the significance of this new orientation. However, I feel more authentic, and on my **enlightened path**.

I am no longer that dandelion flower, waiting for external conditions to align before finding its place. No, not anymore! I am the cultivator of the wild rose seed that has yearned for my attention. And my role is to create the context for it to thrive, allowing it to finally bloom among the other flowers in the world's garden.

How many among us perceive ourselves as dandelion flowers, unaware of the flower seed within, poised to flourish? Often, it's our lack of awareness and inability to unlock our potential that keeps us trapped within our old patterns. It's a sad reality, one that underscores the significance of self-discovery and transformation.

This is why, following this **adventure**, that was both ordinary and uniquely special, I'm returning to the point in my story where I began: my career change. Armed with my experience and certification as a **Transformational Coach**, I am rewriting my story. While the

tasks ahead remain familiar – building my coaching business and attracting clients – there's an undeniable shift. I now possess the clarity I yearned for regarding my path and coaching approach. Despite external constraints and life's unpredictable moments, I am making a conscious choice to engage and take an active role.

Guided by my role as a Transformational Coach, my aim is to illuminate the path for those who have lost their way. I strive to show them how to empower themselves to flourish into the inherent beauty they possess, all the while reframing the belief that they are nothing more than dandelions.

My personal journey of self-discovery and transformation has revealed the profound impact of shedding limiting beliefs. This understanding fuels my unwavering commitment to guide individuals through self-exploration and empowerment. By helping them access their unique potential and providing them with the tools and techniques I've acquired. I work to support others in the process of rewriting their stories, embracing authenticity, and stepping into lives that are more empowered and fulfilling.

By harboring the ability to recognize the collateral beauty beyond the losses and setbacks, I can embrace the inherent positivity and boundless possibilities that contribute to the creation of a purposeful life. Anchored in my essence, I establish a connection not only with my authentic self but also with the greater forces at play—whether we label it Life, the Universe, or God.

And I believe that learning to navigate through our pain and turmoil, even if it shatters us and brings us down, enables us to uncover and convey the concealed beauty of this world. Moreover, it allows us to tap into the inherent goodness and profound dimensions that reside within every individual.

Embracing my vulnerability and imperfections as a Human Being who will forever be on a journey of self-discovery, I'm deliberately committed to forging my unique path. My aspiration is to serve as a role model and a source of inspiration for those seeking to illuminate their own shadows. It's comforting to realize that there's someone who comprehends our struggles and is just a few steps ahead of us. This person can act as a beacon, illuminating our path and leading us to discover the beauty within us all.

In the past, I lacked the understanding that could have made a significant difference when I went through transitions or faced losses. I deeply wished for someone who could have stood by my side, helping me grasp the essence of my experiences. Someone who could offer an alternative perspective, alleviating the pain I was enduring. Navigating through our personal storms and utilizing those challenges to unearth our limitless potential is to become a *pioneer* in our journey of transformation. And perhaps, within this pursuit, lies an uncharted territory, both fertile and rich, nurturing the growth of our own "Garden of Eden."

I'm presently undergoing personal and professional transformations. Yet, I can feel my inner foundation strengthening steadily. Instead of allowing the storms to determine the course of my ship and guide me wherever they may, I'm actively cultivating the skill to navigate. Day by day, I'm refining my ability to steer according to the path I've chosen for myself.

I still carry a sense of sadness regarding the loss of my loved ones, and my heart continues to mourn what has departed with them. However, beyond the need for purpose, a destination, or hope, what I sense more deeply is an inner, unshakable trust in life and in the person I am. This trust animates me and opens me up to new possibilities. It propels me forward on this path of growth and exploration, accompanied by curiosity, authenticity, and a profound love for the woman I am evolving into. Imperfect yet brilliant, I am resolute in unlocking my untapped potential. I am on a journey to become the author of my own story, drawing thoughts from a realm of boundless possibilities.

**THE END... Which is only the beginning.**