w4w

PEOPLE CHANGING THE WORLD
ONE SMILE AT THE TIME

THE JOURNEY ISSUE



Nina Papiorek, Tomasz Lazar, Susan Lehmann, Anna Pawelski, Sophie Epstone, Mareen Fischinger, Nicola Longobardi, Lea Stumpf, Annemarie Barnes, Eric Grant, Karen Niven, Astrid Greve Spencer, Pilar Silvestre, Catherine La France, Dr. Kristopher Patterson, Margarida Silva, Ana Nunez Sanchez, Rebecca Douglas, Laura Kleinas, Bert Stephani, Katarzyna Gajewska, Bruna Corazza, Vitoria Ribeiro da Silveira Romano, Ghiwa Khoury, Yana Tsi, Birgitte Thygesen, Georgina Pereira, Annett Leitgebel, Valentina Tamborra, Katarzyna Janowicz, Masahiko Yamamoto, Sumire Kuroda, Fabio Rao, Margherita D'Alessandro, Monica Pandey, Juanita Richards, Eugen Kamenew, Raffaele Horstmann, Andrea Vailati & Simone Biavati.

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Issue n.12

EDITORIAL



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THE JOURNEY ISSUE

Welcome to the twelfth issue of W4W.

A journey is rarely just a movement from one place to another. It can begin with a departure, an unexpected encounter, a difficult decision or a question we can no longer ignore. Some journeys take us across countries and cultures. Others unfold quietly, through healing, reinvention, learning or the gradual discovery of who we are and what truly matters to us.

This issue brings these different dimensions together through stories that are deeply personal, yet remarkably universal. They remind us that the paths that shape us are seldom linear. They are made of curiosity and courage, setbacks and new beginnings, moments of uncertainty and the people who accompany us along the way.

Across these pages, photography becomes much more than a way of documenting a journey. It helps us slow down and observe more closely. It preserves memories, brings overlooked realities into view and creates connections between people, places and experiences. Sometimes it captures a destination. More often, it reveals the transformation that happened along the way.

This issue unfolds through three interconnected perspectives. **Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses** invites us to look beyond the familiar and experience the world with greater attention. **Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope** shares stories of vulnerability, resilience and renewed purpose. **Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose** celebrates those who have followed curiosity, challenged expectations and created paths of their own. Together, they show that every journey, whether visible or unseen, outward or inward, has the power to change not only where we are going, but how we understand ourselves and others.

This edition also marks another important step in the evolution of W4W. By welcoming an increasingly diverse community of contributors and perspectives, we are broadening the conversation while remaining true to the spirit that has always guided us: creating a space where authentic experiences can be shared, where people can feel seen and where one story can give someone else the courage to begin their own journey.

I would like to thank every contributor who entrusted us with a part of their story, and everyone who helped bring this rich and ambitious issue to life.

As you turn these pages, I invite you to travel slowly. To pause. To look beyond the most visible milestones and notice the quieter moments of transformation. Because the most meaningful journeys may not always take us far away. Sometimes, they simply bring us closer to who we are.

Enjoy the journey.







Issue n.12

THE JOURNEY ISSUE

UNFOLDING WORLDS: JOURNEYS OF THE SENSES

4 What happens when you travel slowly enough to really look closely?
NINA PAPIOREK

14 Never ending journey
TOMASZ LAZAR

26 Learning to look closer: a journey through curiosity
ANNA PAWELSKI

38 Away from now
MAREEN FISCHINGER

44 The upside-down coffee of Banda Aceh
NICOLA LONGOBARDI

66 I'm still here
PILAR SILVESTRE

86 The Invisible Threads
REBECCA DOUGLAS

102 Becoming a project-based photographer: from craft to connection
BERT STEPHANI

118 The courage to be seen
YANA TSI

136 Where the ocean meets the Apennines
VALENTINA TAMBORRA

162 Before the photograph
JUANITA ANTOINETTE RICHARDS

170 The power of women in astrophotography
EUGEN KAMENEW

176 My journey between worlds
RAFFAELE HORSTMANN

182 MADRI (MOTHERS): a journey through living memory
ANDREA VAILATI & SIMONE BIAVATI

RISING STRONG: JOURNEYS OF HEALING AND HOPE

20 The power of photography
SUSAN LEHMANN

32 On a trek for change: developing cancer care for all
SOPHIE EPSTONE

50 Road to stage: finding power and purpose in bodybuilding
LEA STUMPF













54 A before and an after
ANNEMARIE BARNES

76 25 years of courage, growth, and hope
MARGARIDA SILVA

110 Health, citizenship, and inclusion in riverside communities of the Amazon
BRUNA CORAZZA

126 Following the unseen
GEORGINA PEREIRA

130 Life's too short for bad cake: how photography taught me to navigate the journey of grief and growth
ANNETT LEITGEBEL

146 Solo woman travel to Central America
KATARZYNA JANOWICZ

152 Where are mum and dad?
FABIO RAO

156 My true journey: from the shadow of Annapurna to finding myself
MARGHERITA D'ALESSANDRO

FORGING PATHS: JOURNEYS OF PASSION AND PURPOSE

58 The long journey of a free mind
ERIC GRANT

60 A life in learning, leadership and listening
KAREN NIVEN

64 Continuous learning and the courage to travel unknown paths
ASTRID GREVE SPENCER

70 Advice to my younger self
CATHERINE LA FRANCE

74 Beyond the Odds: A Journey Built on Belief
DR. KRISTOPHER PATTERSON

80 From family farm to global water resilience – a career shaped by climate and curiosity
ANA NUNEZ SANCHEZ

94 Finding her own voice: the journey of Laura Kleinas
LAURA KLEINAS

98 The journey nobody sees
KATARZYNA GAJEWSKA

112 Letter to young Vitoria
VITORIA RIBEIRO DA SILVEIRA ROMANO

114 Standing for purpose: Ghiwa El Khoury's journey through reinvention, motherhood, healthcare, and the courage to find her voice
GHIWA KHOURY

124 Factory of Hope
BIRGITTE THYGESEN

148 Faithful design begins with hands-on creation
MASAHIKO YAMAMOTO

150 Designing across borders: my journey as a medical product designer in Malaysia
SUMIRE KURODA

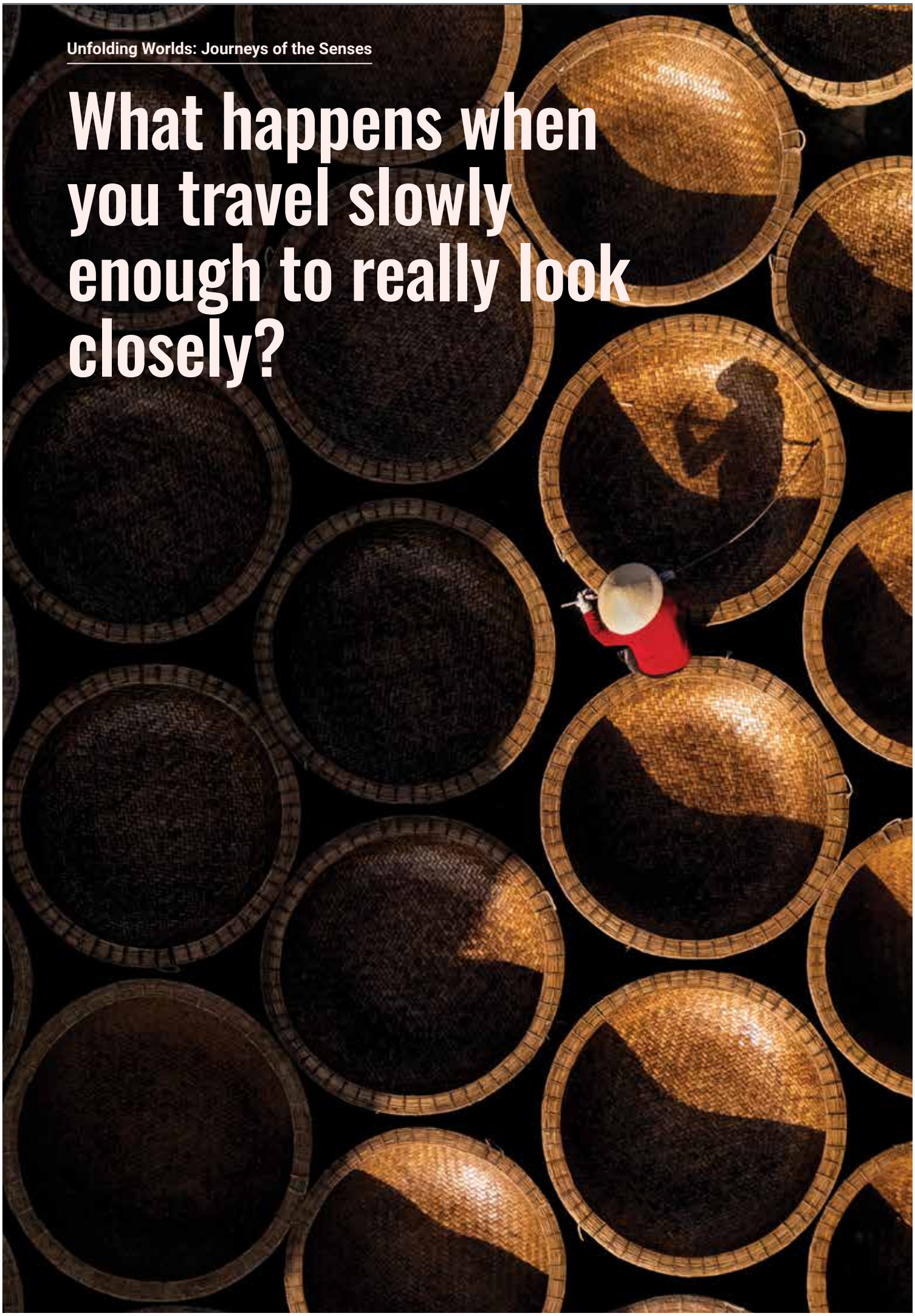
160 Beyond barriers: a woman's journey in medtech
MONICA PANDEY







What happens when you travel slowly enough to really look closely?



On arriving in Hanoi, I did what I always do in any city: I went exploring.
I walked through the narrow streets of the Old Quarter, through the seemingly endless honking of motorbikes, past makeshift food stalls and small cafés. Vendors pushed their trolleys along the pavements; the clatter of crockery drifted from open doorways; and somewhere amidst it all, people sat on tiny plastic chairs, eating steaming bowls of pho, going about their daily lives right there on the pavement.
The air was heavy with heat, humidity and exhaust fumes. There seemed to be movement everywhere.

For a street photographer, a city like Hanoi holds a magnetic allure. The next shot awaits around every corner; every second seems 'photographable'. That was precisely what fascinated me at first: the visual overload, the controlled chaos that simultaneously overwhelms and drives the senses.

I love the feeling of immersing myself in the lives of strangers and, for a brief, unnoticed moment, becoming part of them.
And yet, after just the first few days, I had the feeling that Vietnam wanted to show me something else. Something quieter. Slower. And something that couldn't be captured in a fleeting moment.

As I travelled on through northern and central Vietnam, my photographic perspective gradually shifted. My plan was to document Vietnam's traditional crafts through photography. While Hanoi felt loud, fast-paced and almost overwhelming, outside the cities I encountered a completely different sense of time.

Together with a local photographer who works for National Geographic, among other publications, I travelled through remote villages and coastal regions off the beaten track. Many of these places still rely on traditional crafts today, whose techniques have been passed down through generations. Here, entire villages specialize in a single activity and carry it out collectively.

Naturally, as a street photographer, I was captivated not only by the results of this work, but above all by the people behind it. Their calm. Their concentration. Their natural ease. Their routine.

In a small fishing village, we watched elderly women mending huge fishing nets. They sat close together under a simple corrugated iron roof, while the blue nets stretched across the floor like landscapes. Hardly a word was spoken.



FISHING In the first light of dawn, the fishermen stand on the banks of Lake Thai Ba and prepare their cast nets. With a practiced movement, they cast the net in a circular motion over the water before it settles silently on the surface and slowly sinks. This traditional fishing method has been used in Vietnam for generations, particularly in rivers, canals and the extensive network of waterways in the delta. The catch is used to feed the family or is sold at local markets. Although modern fishing techniques are now significantly more efficient and have replaced this physically demanding work in many places, fishing with a cast net is still practiced – as a preserved craft and a visible testament to a long-standing tradition.



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All you could hear was the clacking of their sewing machines, the rustling of the fabric and, somewhere in the distance, the sea.
We sat there for a long time, drinking the tea that was naturally offered to us, and I didn't take a single photograph. I simply watched their hands.

Every movement seemed so precise and natural that it almost took on a meditative quality. At that moment, I suddenly realized how rarely we, as photographers, still take the time these days to really observe things – without immediately wanting to turn them into a spectacular image.

Similar thoughts accompanied me later in the salt flats. Even before sunrise, the workers stood ankle-deep in water, pushing heavy masses of salt across the mirror-like surfaces. The heat was already relentless in the early morning. Water, salt and light merged into a single dazzling expanse. The workers covered their faces completely with cloths; only their eyes remained visible.

And yet there was no haste in their movements. They worked to a rhythm that seemed to be dictated not by efficiency, but by experience. By repetition. By decades of routine.

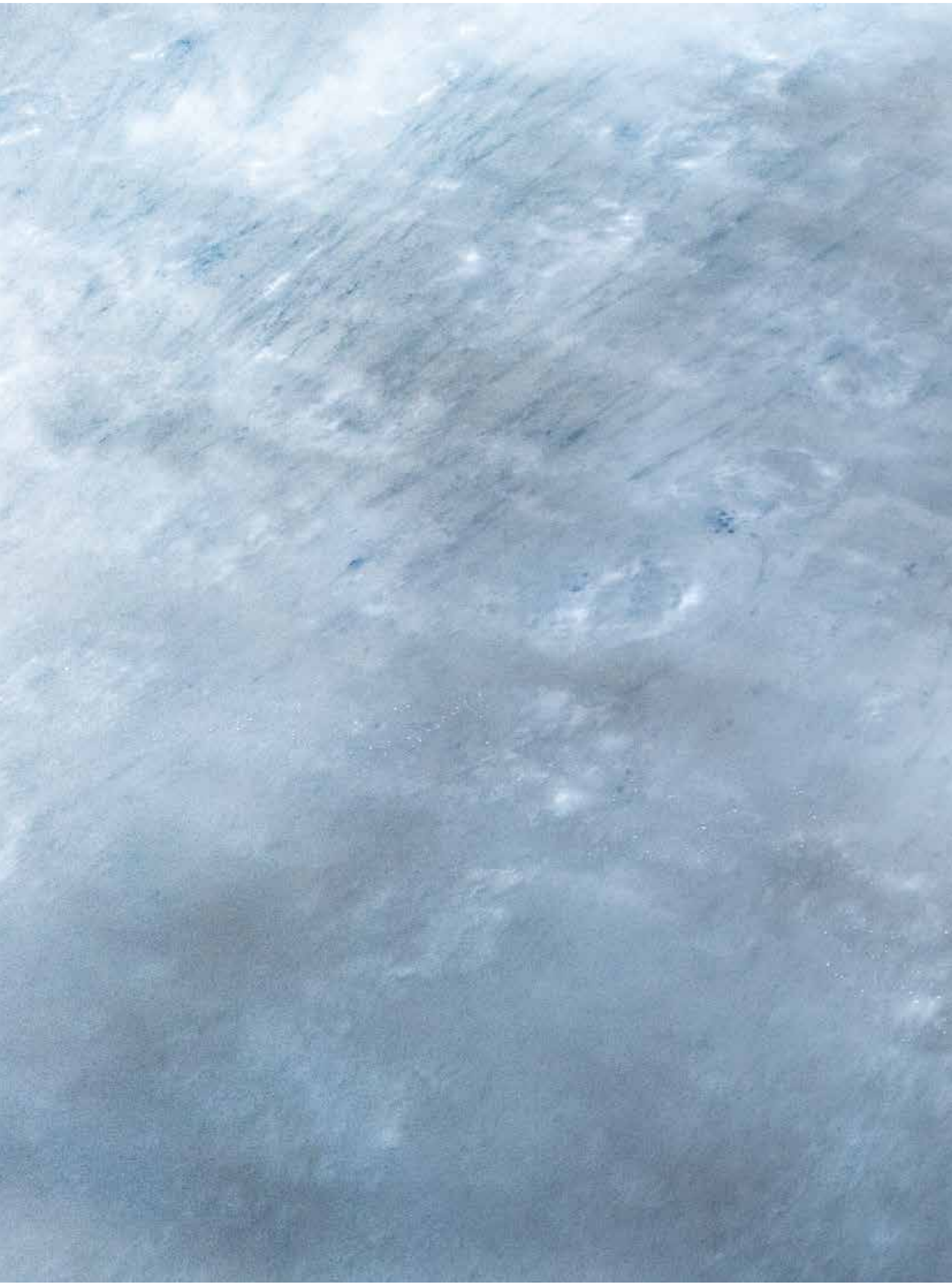
Such encounters stayed with me for a long time. Presumably because, in Western-influenced societies, many people today often associate work exclusively with efficiency. As fast as possible. As productive as possible. As optimized as possible.

In Vietnam, by contrast, I repeatedly encountered a different attitude. Here, work often seemed less a means to an end and more a part of cultural identity – something that connects people to their family, their history and their everyday lives.

This became particularly clear to me in the incense stick village of Quang Phu Cau. Even from a distance, the heavy scent of incense hung in the air. Bright red bundles lay across the ground, drying in fan-shaped arrangements like carefully composed patterns. Naturally, the visual power of these scenes immediately caught my eye, shaped as it is by my background in graphic design. But I soon realized that it wasn't just about aesthetics.

The people there weren't working for the camera. Nobody was posing. Nobody was waiting to be photographed. That was precisely what made these moments genuine.

Even before sunrise, the workers stood ankle-deep in water, pushing heavy masses of salt across the mirror-like surfaces. The heat was already relentless in the early morning. Water, salt and light merged into a single dazzling expanse.









And perhaps that was the most important realization of this journey.

Photography can sometimes create a sense of distance. You travel to a faraway place to 'take' pictures, rather than truly engaging with the place or an encounter. Vietnam reminded me that documentary photography often begins much earlier – with patience, attentiveness and, above all, a genuine interest in the people on the other side of the camera.

The longer I was on the road, the less I was interested in the spectacular single shot. Instead, I became interested in the relationship between work, culture and identity. Traditional craftsmanship in Vietnam is not merely tourist folklore, but remains to this day part of everyday life and the cultural memory of many regions.

At a time when images are consumed and forgotten within seconds, Vietnam has reminded me that some stories require patience and deserve time.

Vietnam has taught me to slow down and to appreciate the small moments again. Not just as a photographer, but as a person too.

Traditional craftsmanship in Vietnam is not merely tourist folklore, but remains to this day part of everyday life and the cultural memory of many regions.





SOYA In a small workshop on the outskirts of a village, a worker named Hành checks the large fermentation vats in which soybeans and grains have been maturing for months. Making soy sauce requires patience: it is only through slow fermentation that the characteristic flavor develops. Once the fermentation period is over, the liquid is pressed, filtered and bottled for sale. In Vietnam, soy sauce is one of the most important condiments and is used daily in countless dishes. For many family-run businesses, its production has been a key source of income for generations and continues to shape the region's traditional craftsmanship to this day.

LOTUS In a small pond, a farmer waded through water up to his waist. The lotus blossoms open in the early hours of the morning, which is when they are harvested. The fresher and more pristine the blossoms are, the better they sell at roadside stalls. They are then used as decoration, processed into aromatic tea or incorporated into numerous dishes of Vietnamese cuisine. Lotus flowers bloom in this region of northern Vietnam for only about a month a year, and the owner of the pond has to make his entire annual income from his small 'Lotus Pond'.





Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

Never ending journey





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The project *Sea of Trees* was born from a desire to understand a place that has long existed in the collective imagination as a symbol of death and solitude. What interested me was not only the forest itself, but the stories and emotions connected to it. Through photography, I sought to move beyond sensationalism and instead focus on the atmosphere of silence, emptiness, and contemplation of the human condition.

I approach every photographic project as a journey – both an external one, leading me to specific places and the people who inhabit them, and an internal one, unfolding within my own mind. Photography is, for me, a process of discovering the world while simultaneously discovering myself. It is through working on a project that I uncover my own emotions, fears, sensitivities, and the ways I respond to the reality around me. Each photograph becomes a question – a reflection directed not only at the viewer but also at myself.

This inner journey teaches me humility toward my own perception. The longer I practice photography, the less I trust my first impressions. I become increasingly interested in what exists between facts – in silence, in ambiguity, in the tension between what is visible and what can only be sensed. It is precisely there that photography acquires its greatest value for me – not as an answer, but as a space for contemplation.

The external journey opens me to the experiences of others and teaches me the value of attentive presence. Every story is a world of its own that cannot be reduced to simple judgments or ready-made narratives. Rather than trying to tell someone else's story, I try to create a space where their experience can resonate without being overwhelmed by interpretation. I have come to understand that photography is not about having answers. It is about asking meaningful questions – and having the patience to remain with them.

It is at the intersection of these two journeys – the external and the internal – that something greater than documentation begins to emerge. A continuous process of discovery unfolds: of the world, of other people, and of my own mind. Every project becomes an experience that transforms not only the way I see my subject, but also the way I understand myself. Over time, I have realized that the most significant outcome of my work is not found in the photographs themselves, but in the transformation that takes place within me while creating them.

It is through the convergence of these two paths – the observation of the world and the observation of my own mind – that wisdom slowly begins to take shape. Wisdom is not a destination to be reached once and for all, but an ongoing process of questioning one's beliefs, expanding one's perspective, and learning to remain attentive to the unknown.
As Ryan Holiday wrote:

"Wisdom is not work you do once. It is work that must be continued. The mind is constantly at war with itself – with its own prejudices, simplifications, arrogance, patterns, and demons."

Sea of Trees explores the story of a remarkable forest located approximately 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Tokyo, at the northwestern base of Mount Fuji in Japan. Seen from above, its dense canopy resembles a vast green ocean. The forest was formed around a thousand years ago following the eruption of Mount Fuji and covers an area of approximately 35 square kilometers (14 square miles).

During the nineteenth century, the forest became associated with the ritual of *ubasute*, a practice in which elderly or infirm family members were abandoned in remote places to die from exposure, starvation, or dehydration – a story rooted in ancient beliefs, and the harsh realities of survival.

The association between Aokigahara and suicide emerged in the 1960s following the publication of Seichō Matsumoto's novel *Tower of Waves*, in which two lovers, unable to be together, chose to end their lives in the forest. The novel had a profound cultural impact, and by 1988 approximately thirty suicides were recorded there each year.









A further increase followed the publication of Wataru Tsurumi's *The Complete Manual of Suicide*, which presented Aokigahara as a suitable place to end one's life. The number of suicides rose dramatically, reaching 105 in 2003. Many bodies have never been recovered, and countless mysteries and legends continue to surround what has become known as the 'Suicide Forest'.

While creating this project, my intention was to show that the forest is far more than a place associated with tragedy. It is also a landscape that invites reflection on life, suffering, isolation, and mental health. My photographs do not attempt to provide definitive answers. Instead, they leave room for interpretation, encouraging viewers to confront their own thoughts and emotions.

For me, ***Sea of Trees*** is a story about the fragility of human life, the limits of psychological endurance, and the necessity of truly seeing one another. It is a project that encourages us to pause and reflect on subjects that are often ignored or burdened by social taboo. At the same time, it is a record of my own journey – a reminder that every journey into the world is also a journey inward.

SEA OF TREES



Watch on youtube:

TOMASZ LAZAR: SEA OF TREES FUJIFILM



The power of photography

Why photos can be more than just a moment – My personal story after breast cancer



VERTICAL MOTION - COLOGNE CATHEDRAL
This photo reflects my breast cancer diagnosis and the first shock that came with the diagnosis. The ICM helps me to express the inner chaos I experienced



SUSAN LEHMANN
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Some moments are not loud, but they can change everything. Mine began in October 2023, when my world suddenly slowed down – I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 29.

However, the initial shock faded quickly. The doctors told me that although the tumor was very aggressive, it was also highly treatable, and that I would make a full recovery. I couldn't change what had happened, so instead of getting lost in negative thoughts, I chose to focus on the here and now and look toward the future with optimism.

Deep down, something began to grow within me at that time: the desire to emerge stronger from my breast cancer journey and to do more of the things that truly bring me joy.

After completing my treatment and before starting rehabilitation, I rewarded myself by going to a concert that was very special to me. I had not been able to secure tickets for the Coldplay concert in my hometown during the presale, and thought I'd never get the chance to see them live. Then, unexpectedly, a small additional batch of tickets were released a few days before the concert took place.

That moment turned the concert into something even more meaningful to me. After nine months of chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation, I experienced pure joy for the first time in a long while. The music still accompanies me today – it carries a very special meaning for me, as strong as photography does. I captured the concert on my smartphone to preserve this extraordinary moment and feeling forever.

In October 2024, I took part in the Pink Style Tour — a program offering women with and after breast cancer a carefree day filled with styling, makeovers, and inspiring impulses. There I realized how powerful it is when moments are consciously preserved and turned into lasting memories.

Because I'd always enjoyed taking photos with my smartphone – and had experienced firsthand how powerful photographs could be – it felt only natural to take the next step and buy a camera to explore photography more deeply. I wanted to learn how to use a camera intentionally – to translate my feelings into images. In November 2024, I bought my first mirrorless camera and began transforming my hobby into a deeply personal passion.

Photography became a creative language for me — a way to express what is often difficult to put into words. It is my perspective on small and fleeting moments: gestures that last only seconds, human connections, or the relationship between peo-



IN BETWEEN
This image conveys a feeling of peace, conscious perception, and the powerful new beginning.



ME IN ACTION WITH MY CAMERA

ple and public space, shaped by light and architecture. As I became more confident with the technical side of photography, I started to understand that technical settings are not the goal for me, but part of my language. So, I started to use shutter speed, movement, and focus as tools to translate what I feel into what I see. Not to control the image – but to allow emotions to take form.

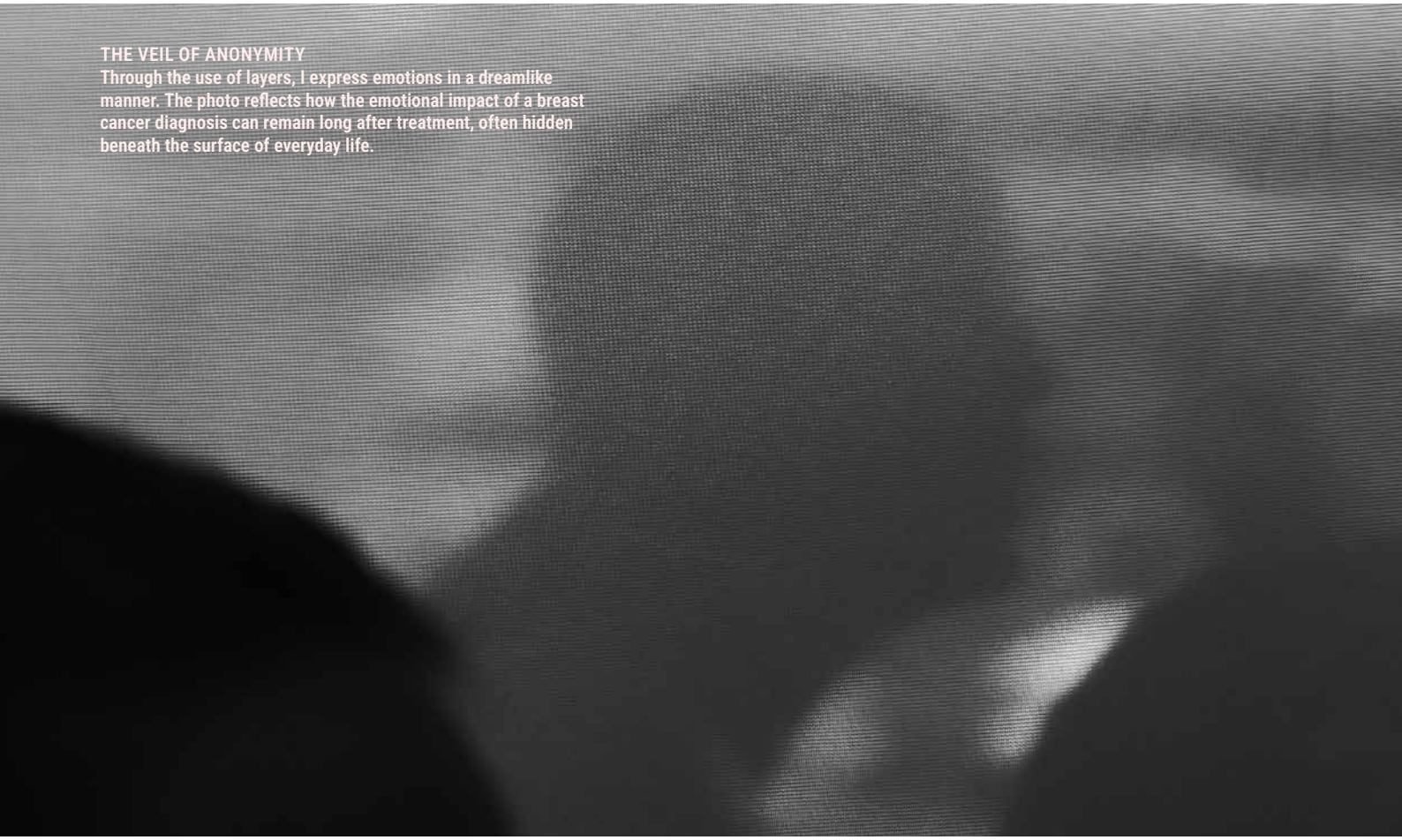
I also enjoy using photography as a metaphor. The intentional camera movement (ICM) helps me to express emotions and feelings that are difficult to describe. For example, I use rotational camera movement when I feel a certain sense of inner chaos – for example, when everything feels too much at once and there is only one point of focus. The zoom burst effect helps me to capture the intensity of things happening too quickly to process. All these are inner emotions that arise very suddenly, and photography allows me to translate them into visual metaphors in a way that feels very natural to me. And sometimes I use ICM just to show places in a surreal way – even to the point of complete abstraction. It also helps me express the emotions that still surface when I think about being diagnosed with cancer at such a young age.

I also enjoy working with layers – reflections, fabric, or glass – allowing me to merge two different worlds into one. This helps me to create images that often feel slightly surreal or dream-like, leaving space for interpretation and helping me creatively express my emotions and perceptions.
With my photography, I intentionally want to leave space for interpretation. Each person carries their own story and experiences, and I hope my images can serve as mirrors, inviting viewers to connect with them through their own perspective and imagination.

Each person carries their own story and experiences, and I hope my images can serve as mirrors, inviting viewers to connect with them through their own perspective and imagination.

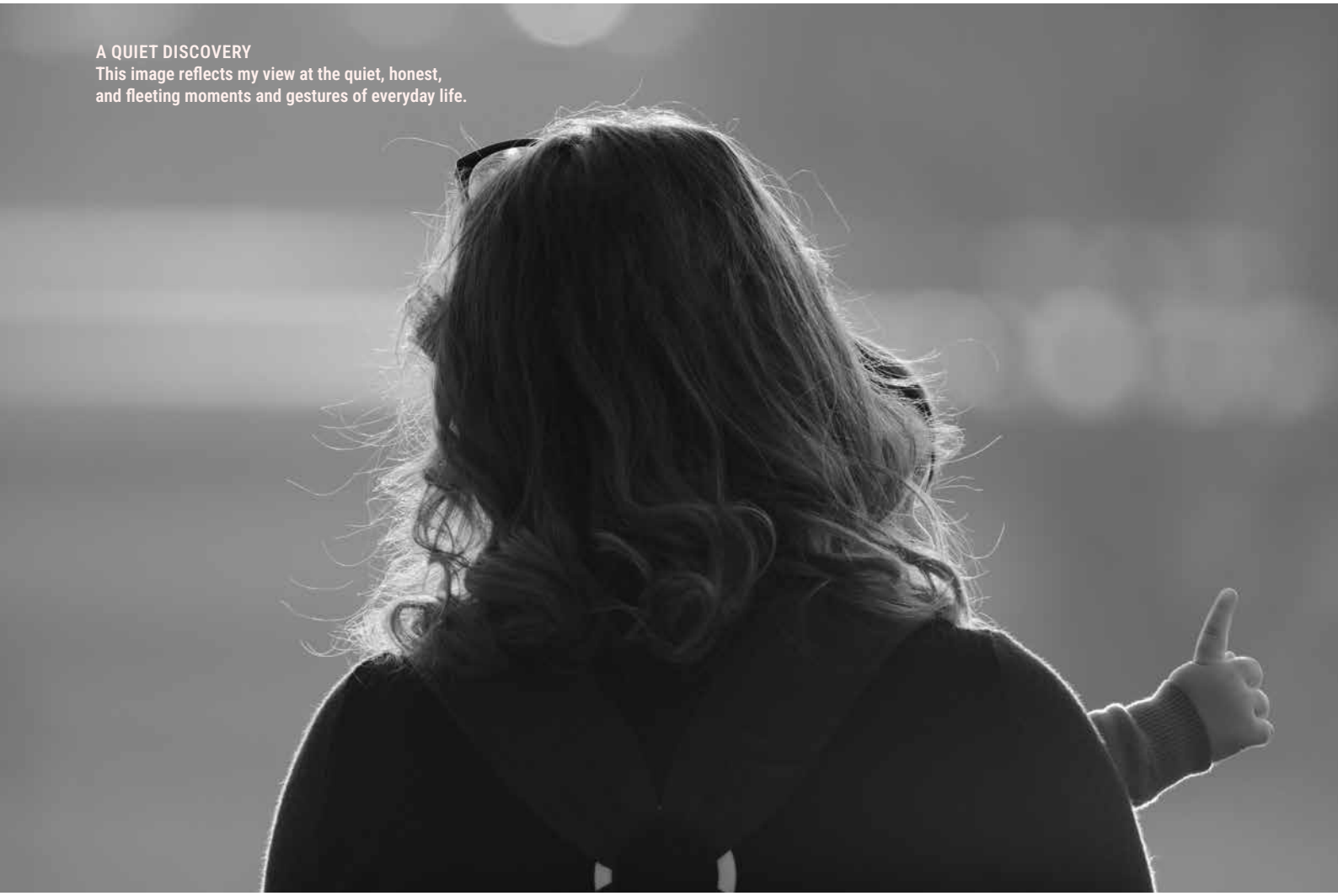


BENEATH THE SURFACE
This image is a visual metaphor that represents the silent, internal battle against my breast cancer. On the outside, one often continues to function in difficult situations, but the true reality remains hidden behind the facade. The small silhouette, trapped between the towering walls, represents the painful ambiguity of such a diagnosis: the brave exterior facade that remains upright, while an entire universe of chaos, fear and transformation rages within.



THE VEIL OF ANONYMITY

Through the use of layers, I express emotions in a dreamlike manner. The photo reflects how the emotional impact of a breast cancer diagnosis can remain long after treatment, often hidden beneath the surface of everyday life.



A QUIET DISCOVERY

This image reflects my view at the quiet, honest, and fleeting moments and gestures of everyday life.

Because I am a calm person, my images do not need to be loud. On the contrary, the quiet images can carry a very special kind of power – one that can evoke something very intense in the viewer.

I was incredibly grateful to be invited as a patient to take part in a lunch talk about breast cancer in October 2025 at the European headquarters of Fujifilm. I had the opportunity to speak about my personal experiences and share my story during and after my breast cancer journey. Alongside photography, it became one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. It showed me new sides of myself that I had never known before and became another important step in my personal development. I am deeply grateful to everyone who made that experience possible.

Another defining experience was receiving a press accreditation during a sports photography workshop, allowing me to photograph a German third-division football match from very close to the action. During that experience, I realized how much joy I find not only in capturing the moments of the action on the field, but especially in documenting the quiet, honest moments before, during, and after the match – the human side of sports. It allowed me to tell the story of the event from my own perspective. A few days later in February 2026, I had the opportunity to share my personal story about the power of photography at the Community Wednesday at Fujifilm X-DEN in Düsseldorf. I never thought I would have an opportunity like this and find the courage to do it. Standing in front of about 50 people and speaking about such a deeply personal topic was something really special for me. It was once again an experience and another moment of growth, showing me that I was capable of things I had never imagined before.



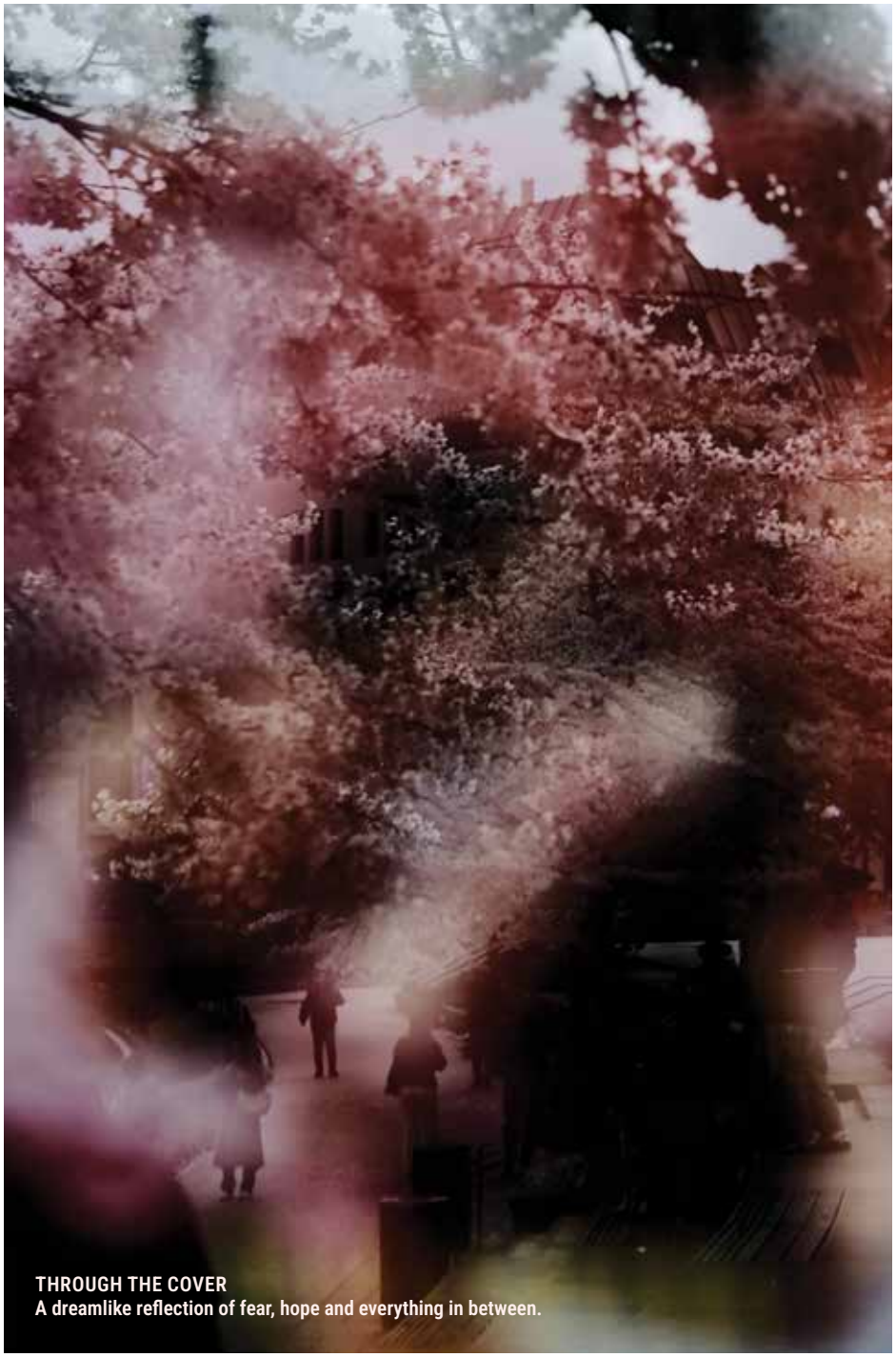
PURE JOY
This image becomes a metaphor for my new beginning and newfound freedom. After the hard diagnosis, it symbolizes letting go of fear and shows the return to the pure joy of the present moment.

My illness, my photography, and all these experiences have shaped me greatly both personally and creatively. I'm deeply grateful to my family and friends, the incredibly kind people I've met, my mentors and the entire community at Fujifilm X-DEN for this opportunity and the reactions that followed.

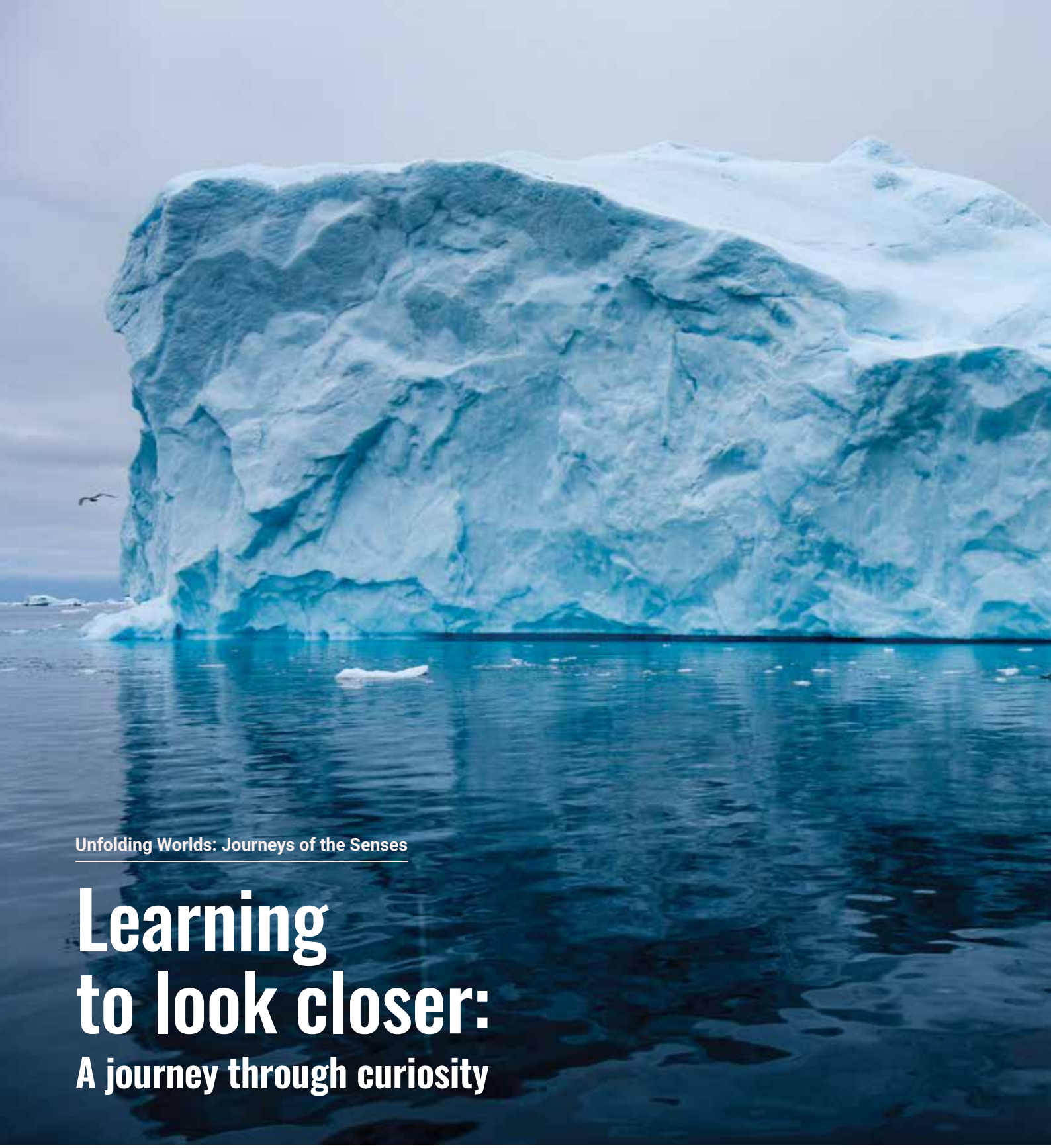
Through my journey, following my breast cancer diagnosis and my path as a photographer, I want to show that there can still be a beautiful life after a life-changing setback. I want to inspire and encourage people to believe in their dreams and visions and to turn them into reality. Photography has shown me that even quiet moments can hold enormous strength – and that sometimes, exactly there, a new beginning emerges.
Looking back, all of these experiences shaped not only my photography, but also the way I see the world. Today, photography means to me:

Perception.
Mindful observation.
Connection.
Sensitivity.
Meditation.
Healing.
Growth.
Expression.
Strength.





THROUGH THE COVER
A dreamlike reflection of fear, hope and everything in between.



Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

Learning to look closer:

A journey through curiosity

Curiosity drives innovation and development in our modern world, but for me, it is the beginning of my individual growth. Long before I understood where curiosity might take me, I already knew that I wanted to look closer, ask more, and explore what was hidden underneath the obvious. That's where my story with Fujifilm begins.





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Working with international photographers with diverse backgrounds reshaped how I thought about photography itself, and slowly, I noticed my interest stretching beyond people. I wanted to see what else I could capture.

I'm Anna, ESG Communications Specialist at Fujifilm Europe. I joined the company back in December 2022 as a working student for the Open Innovation Hub. Since then, I've grown within the team, moving to the ESG department while also taking on responsibility for the Women4Women magazine. Along the way, that strong, natural curiosity of mine turned into something more concrete: a habit of paying close attention, of noticing what's changing around me, and eventually, of picking up a camera to try to capture it.

I came to Fujifilm with two years of prior job experience, having worked as a PMO assistant at a small management consultancy with a startup mindset and a fast, hands-on way of working. I thought I understood corporate life, but Fujifilm has reshaped my understanding.

Working 20 hours a week alongside a team of five, I got my first real taste of life inside an international company, and it looked nothing like what I'd known before. Somewhere in those early





months, something shifted. I'd always been curious about innovation theory, economics, design thinking, the kind of topics that sound abstract until you're suddenly living them and seeing how interconnected they are. It was a mind-blowing experience all by itself, but what surprised me most was how much bigger the world of Fujifilm was than I'd expected.

It was around that time that I bought myself an art pass and started spending my free afternoons in museums, especially art, design, and photography exhibitions. Not long after, I spent my first salary on a Fujifilm X-T5. I didn't know it yet, but that camera would become part of the story too.

Within the Hub team, some colleagues were trained as presenters, using the space as a platform for internal and external communication, and stakeholder engagement. My supervisor at the time pushed me toward that training, which was well outside my comfort zone. But I went for it anyway, and so I learned, and kept learning, not just how to present, but the areas in which the company operated, and how its heritage continues to shape its future. I became genuinely fascinated by Fujifilm's core technologies and its ability to constantly adapt to new markets and their conditions. With the support of my managers, I decided to write my thesis on Fujifilm's membrane technology. Over the next five months, ten experts guided me through a subject I had known almost nothing about, generously sharing their expertise from our manufacturing site in Tilburg.

Just as I was submitting my thesis, the Hub team was going through some changes of its own, and I moved on to the ESG team. It felt like a big step at the time. I hadn't realized yet that my thesis topic on renewable energy would become the foundation for me to go from a working student to my first full-time job, almost overnight.

Joining the ESG department wasn't just a change in responsibilities. It was a shift in perspective, quite literally. I went from working in a mostly male-dominated environment to joining a team almost entirely made up of women. That department became something like a second family to me.

It was around this time that I noticed how I'd almost subconsciously started taking pictures of everyone around me. Friends, family, anyone who'd let me. I shot my first wedding for a friend. I photographed the wife of one of my oldest friends during her pregnancy, and a year later, their little one's first birthday. I did a shoot for a former colleague who records their own music, and somewhere in all of that, I realized what I actually loved: capturing people's emotions, not just their faces.

Not long after, I became responsible for the Women4Women magazine. Being part of an editorial team shaped almost entirely by a female perspective broadened my view even further. That perspective grew through every stage of bringing an issue of the magazine to life: sourcing photographers, proofreading, selecting contributors, and refining layouts. I collaborated closely with imaging divisions across Europe to select photographers, and in my free time I got involved with the X-Den in Düsseldorf, a Fujifilm platform where photographers exchange their work, their stories, their ideas, and grow their network. Working with

international photographers with diverse backgrounds reshaped how I thought about photography itself, and slowly, I noticed my interest stretching beyond people. I wanted to see what else I could capture.

I had never really travelled alone. So, after submitting my thesis and joining the ESG department in September 2024, I made myself a promise: 2025 would be a year of new experiences. I booked a trip to Greenland, partly as a personal challenge, partly because the pull toward the Arctic had grown too strong to ignore – Greenland had almost inexplicably been at the back of my mind for so long.

Just thinking about travelling solo though used to make me anxious. But after a previous trip to Iceland, the wish to see the real Arctic had turned from a dream to a necessity, and in June 2025, it became real. I flew from Düsseldorf to Copenhagen, then Copenhagen to Nuuk, but then a freak storm meant we suddenly could no longer land in Nuuk. Instead, we had to land in Kangerlussuaq, an American military base in the middle of nowhere. Another story to tell, at another time, I suppose, but also the first sign that this trip was becoming a real adventure.

I spent most of my time in the west of Greenland, particularly Ilulissat, a place I'd never even heard of before I booked the trip. Somewhere along the way, I fell completely in love with the Arctic and its people. It opened something in my mind. Working for ESG, I'd read about climate change constantly, the reports, the data, the consequences, but I had never actually experienced it. During the trip, I spent much of my time listening to locals tell stories of how their lives and traditions have been shaped by constantly shifting environmental conditions, and the impact these changes have had on everyday life. In these moments, I realized why I was destined to make this journey.











Standing before icebergs, listening to the sound of breaking ice, I realized I might be one of the last people to witness the beauty of the Eqi Glacier in this way.

For the first time, I photographed landscapes instead of people, from a boat, chasing shifting lights, trying to hold onto something I knew wouldn't last much longer. It was its own kind of journey, learning to see the world through a different lens, quite literally. That trip changed something in me. I have never felt happier than I did standing in the middle of nowhere on the Arctic Circle, disconnected from the modern world, nothing but icebergs and freezing cold air around me.

Looking back at everything, the Hub, the thesis, the move to ESG, the team who became family, the friends I photographed, the ice I never imagined standing on, I can say my growth within this company has been remarkable in ways I had never planned for. It didn't happen in a straight line. Just like any journey, it has had its highs and lows, detours and unexpected turns, but ultimately, you reach your destination, and start planning the next one. I, for one, cannot wait to see where else my curiosity will lead me, but I know that I'll have my camera ready to capture whatever exciting adventure comes next.





Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

On a trek for change:
developing cancer care for all

BUILDING LONG-LASTING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE

During my twenties, the idea for Trekstock Cancer Support came from close friends receiving a cancer diagnosis. I realised how little support existed for people in their 20s, 30s and 40s living alongside cancer, and I wanted to find a way to create better opportunities for those going through these life-changing experiences.

My journey began having completed a degree in International Fashion Marketing, after which I started working in the fashion industry in product development. I have always been creative and loved taking an idea and turning it into something tangible. This drive also led me to work for an architecture and brand agency, where I worked on experiential events for brands.

These creative environments allowed me to build strong relationships, bringing people together and creating experiences centred around connection. Looking back, these early roles gave me vital skills I still rely on today, and laid the foundation for Trekstock.

THE SOUND OF CHANGE TO COME

Seeing people close to me receive a cancer diagnosis in their twenties motivated me to look for ways to support them, to get creative and think outside of the box as to how I could make a difference.

Before Trekstock Cancer Support became a charity, I started by organising a series of live music events under the Trekstock name to raise money for young people with cancer. The name 'Trekstock' originated from the idea of cancer being a trek or a journey, where support shouldn't just end when treatment does. I signed up to trek to Mount Everest, so decided to combine the names of the iconic music festival Woodstock with the 'Trek' I'd be doing to raise money for my friend. As a result, the name 'Trekstock' was born and has remained ever since.



SOPHIE EPSTONE MBE
Trekstock Founder & CEO
UK

LI: sophieepstone

Seeing people come together with such energy and generosity at these live music fundraising events made me realise there was an opportunity to do more than just fundraise. I began to question what life looked like once cancer treatment had ended for these individuals in their 20s, 30s and 40s. What support was missing? Could Trekstock, as a charity, fill that gap? From the very beginning, it was important to me that Trekstock complemented, rather than duplicated, the incredible work already happening across the cancer sector. We sought to work alongside people with lived experience of cancer to shape the charity from day one, making sure all our services reflected real needs.

WHO ARE TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT?

Trekstock Cancer Support is a UK charity dedicated to helping people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s navigate life with and beyond cancer.

Every day, 99 people in this age group are diagnosed with cancer in the UK.

We help people get back on their feet, reconnect with their bodies, regain their confidence, and improve their quality of life.

In the UK, specialist teenage and young adult cancer services often end when someone reaches 25, or around a year after treatment. That's where Trekstock steps in. We support people living with and beyond cancer by helping them manage the physical impact of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery through movement, exercise, and mental well-being.

Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach, we work alongside people in our community living with or through cancer. This ensures our tailored plans covering fitness, nutrition, rest, and rehabilitation, are designed around the realities of life during and after cancer. We ensure continuous support from diagnosis to recovery, because cancer doesn't stop when treatment ends.
Trekstock was officially registered as a charity in England and Wales in 2009. Since then, we've hosted numerous initiatives, including our 'Trek This City' challenge across London, the ***Are You Better Yet?*** exhibition in collaboration with Fujifilm UK at the FUJIFILM House of Photography in London, and the launch of our Food + Cancer Guide, produced in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. This guide offers clear, evidence-based information on food and nutrition for people living alongside cancer.

We have also launched bespoke fitness and exercise programmes, a menopause programme, and have just launched the Jane Goodman Sanctuary Room at University College London Hospital (UCLH). This dedicated wellbeing space for young adult cancer patients is the first of its kind in the UK.

We help people get back on their feet, reconnect with their bodies, regain their confidence, and improve their quality of life.



ARE YOU BETTER YET? exhibition launch at FUJIFILM House of Photography, Covent Garden (Photo by Michael Rankin)

TREKSTOCK AMBASSADORS who participated in the ***Are You Better Yet?*** exhibition at FUJIFILM House of Photography, alongside photographer Michael Leckie who shot the portrait photographs. (Photo by Michael Rankin)



ARE YOU BETTER YET? exhibition (Photo by Michael Rankin)

GROWTH THROUGH PERSEVERANCE

The journey I've been on to establish Trekstock has not always been easy. Navigating ever-changing fundraising landscapes, economic uncertainty and the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging. At times, we've faced setbacks, or the path ahead has felt uncertain.

Over the years, we've celebrated incredible milestones, but we've also experienced the heartbreak of losing members of our community. Those moments never become easier, but they've reinforced why our work matters, and they give us more motivation than ever to continue doing the work we do.

I've learned through founding Trekstock that resilience isn't always about feeling strong; it's about continuing to move forward, to trust the process and remember that meaningful change rarely happens overnight. Most importantly, I've learned that leadership isn't about having all the solutions; it's about staying true to your purpose, listening to the people around you and continuing to show up, even on the hardest days.

WATCHING THE CHARITY FLOURISH

Since Trekstock was established, our team has worked incredibly hard to create programmes and services that bring people together while helping to tackle the isolation many people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s experience during and after cancer. Over the years, we've also taken supporters on fundraising treks across the UK and around the world. One of our proudest milestones has been welcoming our first team of 12 London Marathon runners in 2026, who together raised more than £65,000.

We've also had some amazing celebrity ambassadors over the years, whose support we're incredibly grateful for. Their support

TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT
x Fujifilm UK team



TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT'S
10th anniversary Trek in 2019



TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT'S
early Trek events



has helped us raise vital funds, increase awareness of Trekstock and ultimately reach more people needing our services.
Most recently, we have partnered with Fujifilm UK on ***Are You Better Yet?***, a photography exhibition at the FUJIFILM House of Photography in Covent Garden. This exhibition featured photo diaries and personal items from eight Trekstock ambassadors, telling their stories and allowing people to see the reality of living with and beyond cancer. The exhibition was shot by renowned photographer Michael Leckie and created opportunities for our community members to have their voices seen and heard on a national scale.

I have learned a great deal on a personal level through Trekstock's growth and development. As we've expanded the charity's reach, I've learned the importance of not being afraid to ask for support. People can't back your mission unless you give them the opportunity. Often, it's the small conversations, chance meetings, or even a 'cheeky' ask that lead to the most incredible opportunities and partnerships.

A female founder friend gave me one of the best pieces of advice early in my career: be bold. Make a list of the people who inspire you: founders, leaders and women whose careers you admire, and ask them for a cup of tea. You might be surprised how many people are willing to share their time, experiences and advice. These conversations can open doors, build confidence and change the direction of your journey in ways you never expected.

Looking back, I'd tell myself to ask more, be bold, trust my instincts and remember that people genuinely want to help when they believe in what you're trying to achieve.



HARRY STYLES by Matt Irwin



TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT'S
early live music events



TREKSTOCK CANCER SUPPORT'S 10th anniversary Trek in 2019

LESSONS FROM INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN

I can't talk about my journey building Trekstock without acknowledging some of the incredible women who have shaped who I am and encouraged me to pursue this career.

Jane Shepherdson CBE showed me that strong leadership and commercial success can go hand in hand with kindness, warmth and creating a culture where people genuinely thrive. Jane also gives the best hugs.

My sister Holly has also been a huge source of inspiration. Having her by my side over the past four years has been invaluable, and I'm so proud to have watched her grow into her role as COO at Trekstock.

Together, these women have shown me that the best leaders create environments where people feel trusted and valued. They've also helped me to look inwardly at myself and trust my intuition, ideas and creativity, and to maximise how these can positively impact Trekstock's trajectory.

ONE TREK AT A TIME

My hope for Trekstock's future is that one day, in the not-too-distant future, whenever someone is diagnosed with cancer in their 20s, 30s and 40s in the UK, they'll know they can turn to us for support. This is the mission that continues to drive me. My goal is for Trekstock to continue reaching people when they need us most by growing our digital services, creating more spaces like our NHS Sanctuary Room, and building meaningful partnerships like we have with Fujifilm UK.

You might be surprised how many people are willing to share their time, experiences and advice. These conversations can open doors, build confidence and change the direction of your journey in ways you never expected.

Sixteen years on, there's still so much more to do, but with a strong team and brilliant partners alongside us, I'm excited to see what the next chapter brings.



Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

Away from now



MAREEN FISCHINGER
Photographer, production manager, Spokesperson of the Board, BFF (German Professional Association of Freelance Photographers and Film Creators), member of FPC, AOP Accredited Photographer, appointed to the DGPh
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TEN ROLLS OF FILM, A SUMMER ON THE BALTIC SEA, AND THE INVISIBLE WORK BEHIND THE PERFECT IMAGE.

It was a gas station somewhere on the edge of Lower Saxony, toward the end of spring. Golden evening light fell upon a magazine rack nestled among snacks, maps, and self-service coffee machines. I had only intended to pay, having let my son climb around on the rest stop's playground for a little while longer. Then I saw this cover: a coastline near Zingst, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania: picturing pine trees (for which I have a soft spot), soft light, wind-shaped dunes with foaming surf – almost unreal. I took a step back. Where was that? And why didn't I know this place?

Before our move to North Rhine-Westphalia in 1990, I had attended pre-school in East Germany and had family in Potsdam and Berlin. As a child, I used to visit Rügen with my parents, an island in the Baltic Sea. There is an old photograph of me by the sea – a shot I later recreated with my own son – my younger one, who was with us on this trip. Yet, despite this history, the landscape on that cover felt like a blind spot in my own memory.

My husband – a geographer and geologist – knows Germany through maps, routes, and landscapes. He can even recall exactly where he once made a turn on his road bike twenty years ago. When he looked at the magazine I took home, he simply said: "That's where we're going for our summer vacation." And just like that, the perfect vacation came into being – quite by chance. Not through an algorithm, but because of an editorial decision printed on paper.

NO AGENDA, NO RUSH

We ended up in Boltenhagen, and later in Wismar. The area felt as though it had simply ignored the pace of the last few decades. Few shops, some tourist infrastructure, and vast distances between towns. Horses in the farmyards. Steep coastal cliffs. Patches of forest with giant sequoias that looked utterly surreal in that setting. It was almost overwhelming to take it all in – especially without the geotags my digital camera would normally record. We took excursions to Lübeck, stood before the Holstentor, and wandered through churches and harbors. But, in truth, the vacation consisted primarily of having no agenda at all. It was an unfamiliar sensation.

Normally, I plan everything: productions, academic programs, photo shoots, professional association work. My calendar is meticulously organized. Even my leisure time often turns into a logistical challenge. Yet, as had often been the case before, my husband had planned this trip. He selected the vacation rental, organized the itinerary and the stopovers, and took care of many things that would otherwise automatically fall to me.

And yet, my mind didn't simply switch off. Women can delegate tasks, but rarely the underlying responsibility. You hand things off, yet simultaneously find yourself thinking: Did you think of that? Is everything on track? Is anything missing? The mental load doesn't vanish. At most, it merely quiets down. Perhaps that is precisely the invisible labor performed by so many women: organizing life around others in such a way that, for everyone else, it appears effortless.

> **Women can delegate tasks, but rarely the underlying responsibility.**

TEN ROLLS OF FILM

For this trip, I brought along ten rolls of 35mm film: Fujifilm Neopan Acros 100 II. The cooperation had provided them to me. It is a black-and-white film with a depth that renders skin tones darker – rich in contrast, yet simultaneously crisp and clear. With only a few exceptions, I hadn't shot film since my university days.

For years now, I have worked digitally – with precision and control. In both my commercial and artistic work, every reflection is planned, every detail carefully calibrated; I plan the mise-en-scène down to the minutest detail. I have worked independently as a photographer and production manager for around 25 years – and for the last few years, also in the fields of hybrid AI and new visual landscapes. In that realm, everything happens instantly: it is visible, controllable, and reproducible.

This journey was the exact opposite. The old camera revealed nothing immediately. No display, no preview, no constant evaluation. Just light, film, and time. I had to start thinking like I did as a 16-year-old: What shutter speed? Is there enough light? ISO 100 – that meant sunshine was practically a prerequisite. Once darkness fell, I couldn't photograph anything else as I did not bring a tripod.

Today, technology compensates for almost everything. Back then, you had to wait, observe, and decide. A single battery last-



Photo: Mareen Fischinger / Christoph Möller



ed the entire vacation. When shooting digitally, I often take 2,000 photos in a single day. Here, it was ten rolls of film for ten days. Every single shot carried weight and value. And suddenly, something rare emerged: mindfulness.

LETTING GO OF CONTROL

At first, I photographed the way many people do on vacation. I thought about subjects, about getting "good" shots, about the final result. But at some point, something shifted. Perhaps it was because no one had any expectations regarding these images. No client was waiting for a pre-selection.

My younger son climbed trees – taller than any he had ever known. He examined a crab, jumped on the bed, and stood, tiny beneath a soaring church ceiling. My husband swam the butterfly stroke. In the evenings, candlelight flickered on the table. Driftwood lay scattered on the beach.

Most of the time, I was behind the camera here as well. Not by conscious choice, but simply because that's how it was. Sometimes my husband took pictures of me. These images were created without the pressure of having to be seen. And perhaps, in today's world, that is precisely what makes them radical.

THE WORK BEHIND THE EFFORTLESSNESS

When people look at this series today, some say: a perfect family, a perfect vacation. Others remark that the images seem out of time – as if they had been taken thirty years ago. This isn't solely due to the film. Analog photography strips the "now" from the image. The film waits in silence. It was weeks before the prints finally returned from the professional Fujifilm lab.

This slowness changes everything. Yet it also renders invisible what lies beneath the surface of the images. No one sees the inquiries I have to turn down during every single one of my vacations. Life as a freelance photographer is not a state of perpetual glamour. Client relationships endure only as long as you remain present. Every rejection can mean that someone else lands the next assignments. Taking a vacation comes at a cost – and not just in terms of money, but in terms of visibility. Unless, of course, you are willing to be constantly online and lay bare every detail of your private life.

In my view, women – particularly those in creative professions – often find themselves navigating a landscape of contradictory expectations: be present, remain accessible, prioritize family needs, manage the emotional logistics of home life, and, at the same time, work with complete artistic freedom.







For a long time, I scheduled meetings and appointments only for times when the children were at kindergarten or school, or when someone else was available to look after them. These invisible constraints accompany so many women – even those who appear outwardly successful. Perhaps that is why these images speak of more than just tranquility. They also speak of just how much work is required to make something look effortless.

LESS GEAR, MORE REALITY

In the end, all that remained of this journey was a small cooler bag, ten rolls of film, and the realization that less control sometimes leads to more honest images. I love modern technology. I work with digital tools and AI every day. But this series reminds me of why I started taking photographs in the first place: not to control everything, but to observe.

On this vacation, the camera ceased to be a production tool; instead, it became a silent companion. Here, shooting analog was neither an act of nostalgia nor a purely aesthetic choice. It was a mindset: Plan less. Prove less. See more. And perhaps, in today's world, that is precisely what true freedom looks like.

"These invisible constraints accompany so many women – even those who appear outwardly successful. Perhaps that is why these images speak of more than just tranquility. They also speak of just how much work is required to make something look effortless."




83
83
95
96





Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

The upside-down coffee of Banda Aceh



NICOLA LONGOBARDI
Photographer
INDONESIA

In a café, a cup of coffee arrives upside down. So begins a journey that turns familiar assumptions on their head. In Banda Aceh, Nicola Longobardi meets young people balancing faith, ambition and belonging: a fashion influencer, students, musicians, two friends whose dream of a concert



Decades of conflict and catastrophe are vivid in the recent history of this piece of land.

bloomed into a small business offering financial security.
What seems distant slowly becomes recognisable. Beneath the cultural differences, how much of ourselves might we find?

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.



GROWING UP IN BANDA ACEH
Gen z & Sharia law



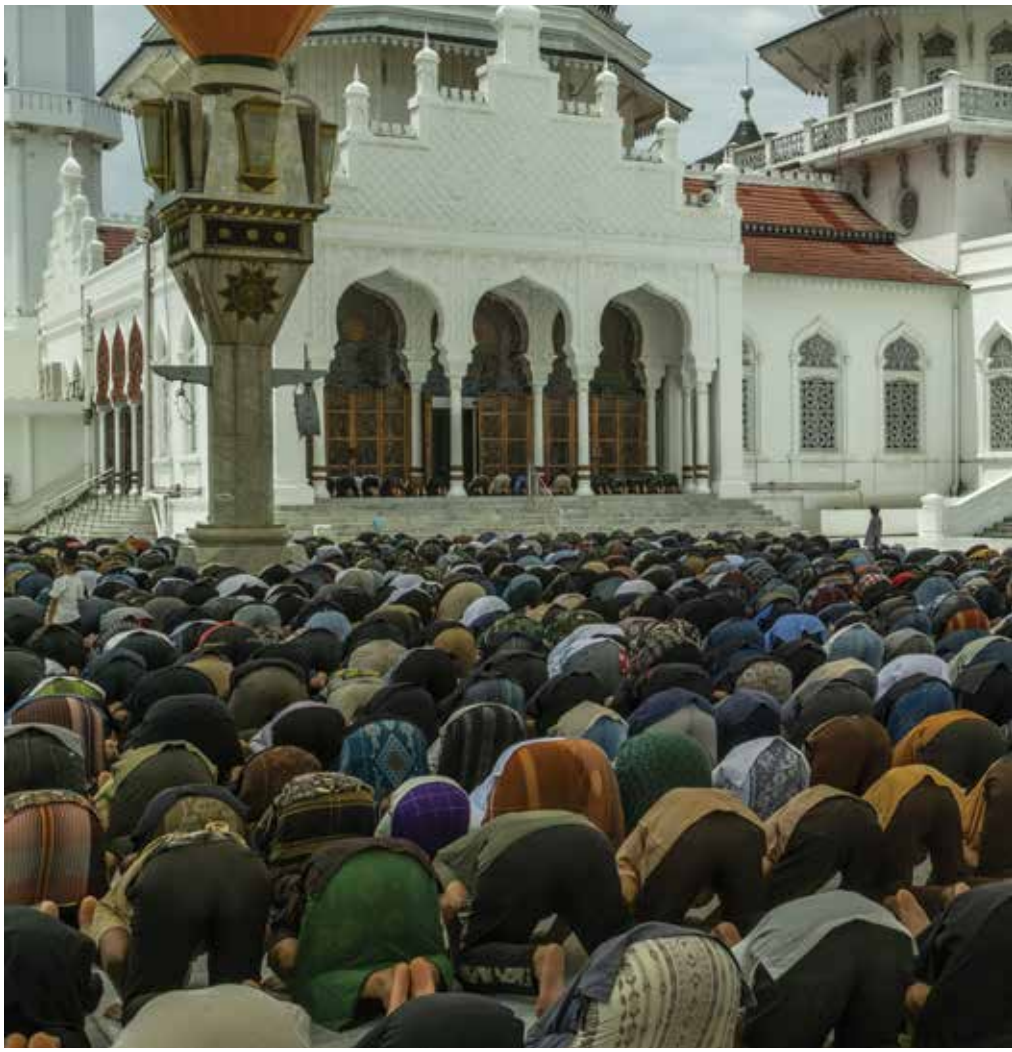
“She arrived in a white and light-blue outfit, a light niqab across her face, and ordered a smoothie before we had even finished our introductions. She was a university student, a fashion influencer, and a brand ambassador for a hijab label, and before I had formed a question, she told me: “The decision to wear the niqab was mine,” she said. “Nobody imposed it on me.”







"I asked the biology student about evolution; whether it created any tension to study a theory the faith explicitly contradicts. He had studied it, he said. He had learned it well enough to pass his examinations. But he did not believe it."







"I met other people before I left. A YouTube video maker. Punk musicians who played their music even though it was illegal, stopping whenever the muezzin called to prayer out of respect for the neighbors who tolerated them. Freelancers. People who wanted nothing more than a stable salary, a home near their families, and the quiet continuity of a life they already loved."





Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Road to stage:

finding power and purpose in bodybuilding

My name is Lea. I am 25 years old, and I am a bodybuilder. Along my journey, I also went through a period of anorexia.

From a young age, I had a very traditional idea of beauty in mind: tall and, above all, thin. Although I had always been active, I was born with naturally wide hips – a feature that never matched my own perception of beauty.

For a long time, I struggled to find a sport that I genuinely enjoyed. I tried everything, from athletics to dancing, but it always felt more like an obligation than something I looked forward to. My parents often said, "Lea just isn't athletic. Sports simply aren't her thing."

When I was 15, I discovered the gym, and I immediately knew – this is where I belong. I started training five times a week and, for the first time in my life, I truly enjoyed exercising. Before long, it became part of my daily routine, and I rarely missed a workout.

Despite all my efforts, I wasn't seeing the weight-loss results I expected. Like many 16-year-olds with little knowledge about nutrition, I started skipping meals and exercising even more. When I moved out at 18, and no one was there to keep an eye on me anymore, my behavior became more extreme. Every skipped meal felt like an achievement.

My eating disorder didn't just make me feel like I was getting closer to my goal – which, ironically, I never actually reached – it also gave me a sense of control. Over the years, my eating habits fluctuated between periods where I ate relatively well and periods where everything spiraled downward again. I had learned one thing: whenever life became stressful and I couldn't control everything around me, I could at least control my food.

At the same time, I struggled with severe binge-eating episodes that always followed the periods of restriction. After days or weeks of strict control came complete loss of control. I would eat until my stomach hurt and I felt physically miserable. Food became my enemy and completely consumed my thoughts. Every morning I woke up thinking about everything I wasn't going to eat that day. Food occupied so much of my mind that there was hardly any room left for anything else.

I think many women can relate to this: the more weight I lost, the more compliments I received. Because I was never technically underweight – thanks in part to my naturally wide hips – hardly anyone realized how much I was struggling. I enjoyed the positive feedback and often convinced myself, "If everyone thinks I look great, I can't be sick enough." Over time, an unhealthy relationship with food became my normal – and unfortunately, I know I'm far from the only woman who has experienced this.

When I reached a weight that genuinely worried my friends, and the compliments stopped, the situation became impossible to ignore. My best friend called me every evening at exactly 9 p.m. just to make sure I had eaten something that day. That frightened me enough to finally seek professional help.

The consequences of starving myself were severe: hair loss, constant exhaustion, fine body hair growing on my arms and legs, feeling cold all the time, and no longer having the strength to train. None of it was beautiful.

Eventually, I was diagnosed with **atypical anorexia**. Through therapy, I learned that there are healthier ways to regain a sense of control. I also realized that the quote, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels," is simply not true. Feeling strong and having muscles is far more rewarding than being thin.

To deepen my knowledge and give myself the best chance of success, I hired a coach. With a structured nutrition plan and clearly defined goals, I started a completely new chapter. My coach, Pierre, showed incredible patience – not only with my training but also with the mental struggles that came with my past. Together, we worked toward helping me become healthy and strong.

It would be a lie to say that the shift from "I work out so I can earn my food" to "I eat so I can perform my best in training" happened overnight. We've been working together for two years now, and even today I still face small challenges from time to time. The difference is that we now recognize the warning signs early and know how to deal with them before they become something bigger.

Working with my coach was the best decision I could have made. As time went on, I rediscovered my love for training. My strength returned. I became stronger from workout to workout, and eventually one dream began to take shape:
I wanted to compete.

What had once been "just going to the gym" slowly turned into competitive bodybuilding.

After a year of focused training and building muscle, we began preparing for my first competition in the Wellness division.





LEA STUMPF
HR Business Partner
FUJIFILM Healthcare Europe GmbH
GERMANY

LI: lea-stumpf

This category is known for its pronounced X-frame, with particularly well-developed legs and glutes. The federation I compete in also places importance on athletes maintaining a healthier-looking physique, meaning competitors are not expected to reach the extremely low body-fat levels seen in some other bodybuilding divisions.

The contest preparation lasted 28 weeks – 28 weeks of eating, training, and sleeping according to a strict plan. Every morning before work, I completed my cardio session. Five evenings a week were dedicated to weight training. I ate four carefully planned meals every day, and even my salt intake was weighed to the gram.

I also began practicing my posing and focused entirely on my new goal. Surprisingly, despite the strict dieting phase, I noticed how freeing it could feel to have a peaceful mind. As contradictory as it sounds, those weeks helped me let go of many of the beliefs my eating disorder had taught me.

Preparing for a bodybuilding competition also meant making sacrifices. During business trips to Copenhagen, I couldn't join my colleagues for dinner and instead ate my prepared meals alone in my hotel room. Birthdays and Christmas were no exception – I baked cakes for my partner while watching everyone else enjoy them. Everything was for one goal.

At the same time, the muscle I had worked so hard to build became increasingly visible, and watching my physique transform was incredibly motivating. After 28 weeks, I stepped onto the stage as a Wellness athlete at an international newcomer championship. It was an unforgettable moment.

In that instant, I knew I had finally found my sport – and that every sacrifice had been worth it.

The evening before the competition, I received the first of three coats of competition tan – applied with a paint roller. The tanning product was sticky and had a very strong smell. To make sure it adhered properly, I wasn't allowed to use shower gel, deodorant, or perfume for an entire week beforehand. You can imagine what our Airbnb smelled like.

On the morning of the competition, the final layer of tan was applied before we headed to athlete check-in, where we were weighed and measured. After that, I had my makeup done. Looking in the mirror, I barely recognized myself. It was in that moment that I realized I was truly living the dream I had worked so hard for.

To avoid retaining water, we then moved backstage, where everyone rested with their legs elevated. Everything was sticky, everyone smelled – especially the men – and the excitement kept building. Our backstage 'meal' consisted of rice cakes and a total of two grams of salt to help create the best possible stage look. It wasn't exactly glamorous.

Right before stepping on stage, I did my final pump-up workout and ate some fast-digesting carbohydrates – gummy bears. Without a doubt, they were the best gummy bears I have ever eaten.

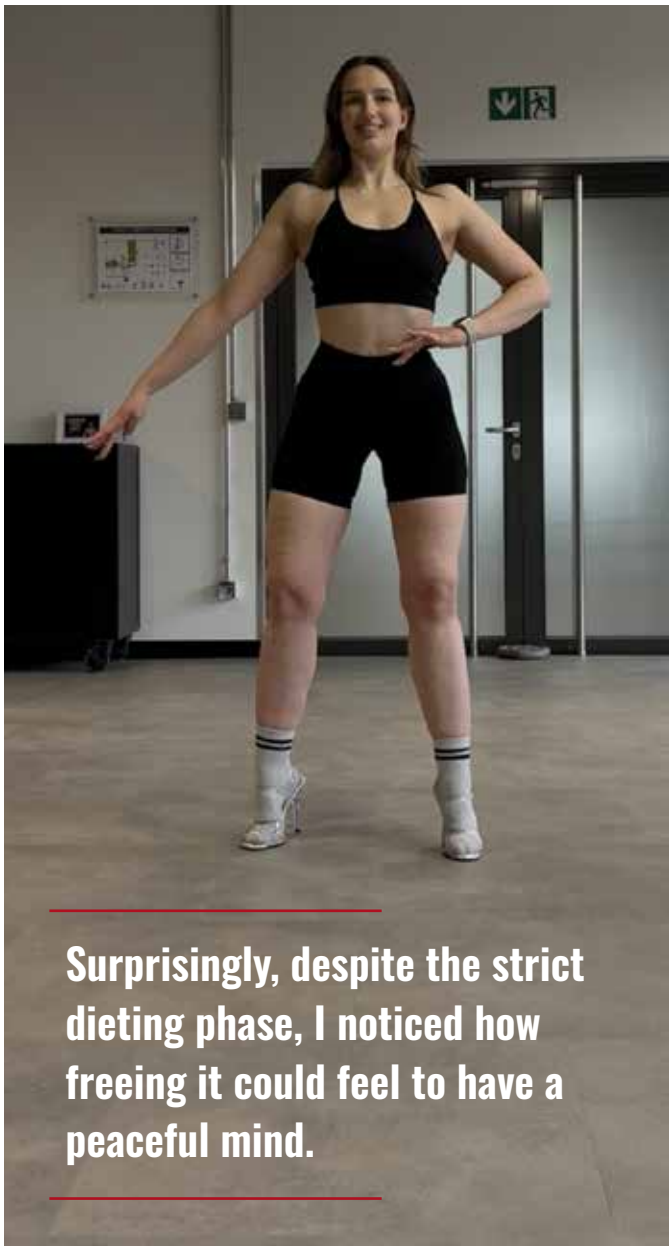
But the moment you walk onto the stage and the lights hit you, you realize that every sacrifice, every difficult day, and every ounce of discipline was worth it. For me, it was one of the most rewarding moments of my life.

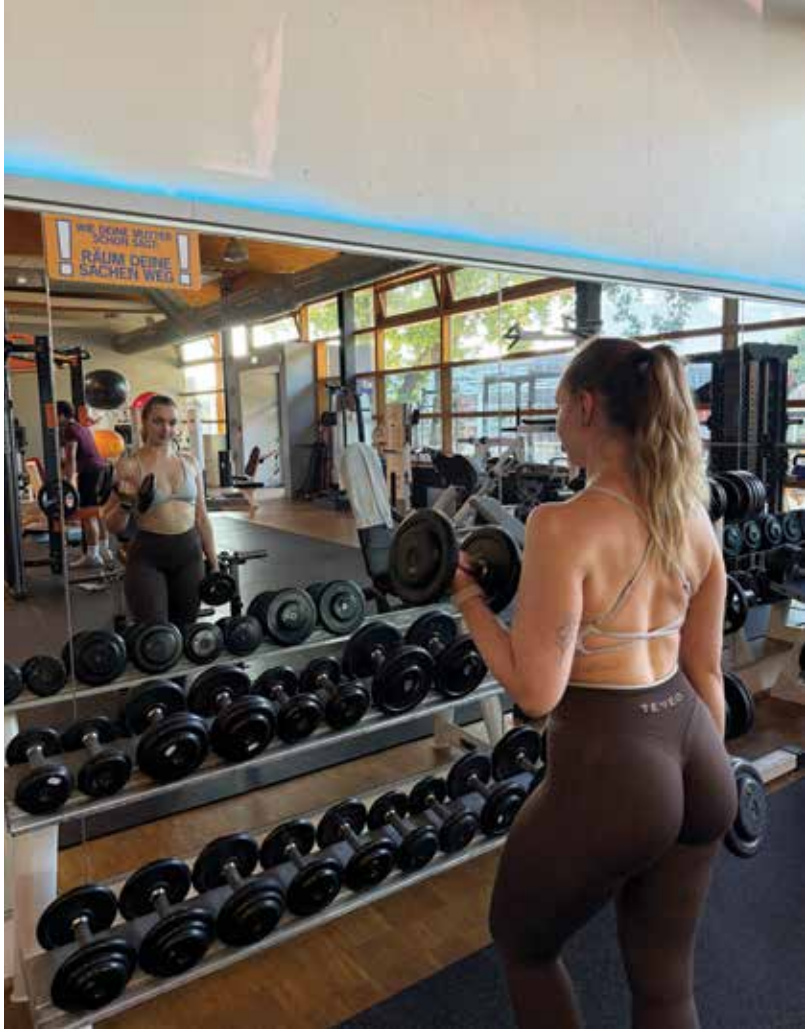
As incredible as the experience was – standing on stage in a sparkling bikini with flawless makeup, proudly presenting everything we had achieved – bodybuilding is not a healthy sport. None of the women on stage still had a regular menstrual cycle, and none of us carried enough body fat to truly feel healthy or energetic in everyday life.

That is why, after the competition season, our focus shifted completely. Our goal became restoring my health, gaining weight, and building more muscle. Just eight weeks after the competition, I had already gained ten kilograms – and they are the most beautiful ten kilograms of my life.

For me, bodybuilding is so much more than just a sport. It is a passion and a journey that challenges and inspires me every single day. Over the past months, I have deliberately focused on improving my weaknesses because I know that real progress only comes through honest self-reflection and consistent hard work.

One area that still needs significant improvement is my shoulders. I also see tremendous potential in my legs. Recognizing these weaknesses has helped define my training priorities and allowed me to structure my workouts with much greater purpose.







Nutrition plays a crucial role in that process. Together with my coach, I deliberately chose to stay in a slight calorie surplus – enough to build muscle consistently while minimizing fat gain. It's a delicate balance that requires patience and discipline. I pay close attention to everything I put into my body because I know that nutrition and training must work hand in hand to achieve the best possible results.

My training routine is both intense and highly structured. I train in the gym five days a week, dedicating two sessions to shoulders and back, while the remaining three focus on my legs, as this is where I want to make the greatest improvements. In addition, I complete 30 minutes of cardio every day to improve my endurance and support recovery.

What fascinates me most about bodybuilding is the mental growth that comes with it. It is a never-ending journey that constantly pushes you beyond your limits – and teaches you that those limits can be moved. My mindset has changed dramatically. I listen to my body far more carefully now, recognize its signals, and know when it's time to push harder and when it's time to recover. Bodybuilding has taught me that the body is like a high-performance machine: if you want it to perform at its best over the long term, you have to take care of it, maintain it, and fuel it with the nutrients it needs.

This journey is about much more than building muscle. It is a personal challenge that continues to help me grow, both physically and mentally. Every improvement, no matter how small, motivates me to keep going and become a better version of myself. Bodybuilding has become a lifestyle that has taught me patience, discipline, resilience, and, above all, never to stop believing in myself.

My journey began with the worst mindset imaginable. I wanted to weigh as little as possible and eat as little as possible. I skipped birthdays, celebrations, and social events simply to avoid food. I isolated myself because I had grown up believing that a woman could only be beautiful if she was thin.

Today, I know better.

A dress size says nothing about beauty – and certainly nothing about a person's worth.

When I decided that I wanted to step onto a bodybuilding stage, many people told me I would never make it. They said my legs would hold me back.

Today, I can proudly say that I proved them wrong. I did it – and I'll do it again.


CANCER TURNED MY WORLD UPSIDE DOWN
Joey
CANADA
HAVING A BALL
"HIS STRENGTH AND SPIRIT CONTINUE TO INSPIRE US EVERY DAY."



A before and an after

The journey that changed my life was not one I chose. Before cancer entered my life, I thought had a fairly clear picture of my future.

I had spent my career as a high school English teacher in Switzerland and loved every minute of it. Teaching teenagers kept me young, curious and engaged with the world. Alongside my full-time teaching position, I also worked as a Cambridge English examiner and taught evening classes at a business school during the week. Friends often joked that I was a workaholic, and they were probably right.

Retirement held little appeal. While many of my colleagues were counting down the years, I had chosen to continue working. I still had too much energy and enthusiasm for the classroom. Beyond work, I looked forward to travelling the world again once the COVID-19 pandemic eased and to returning to the mountains where I loved to ski and hike.

Then, at the end of June 2021, everything changed.

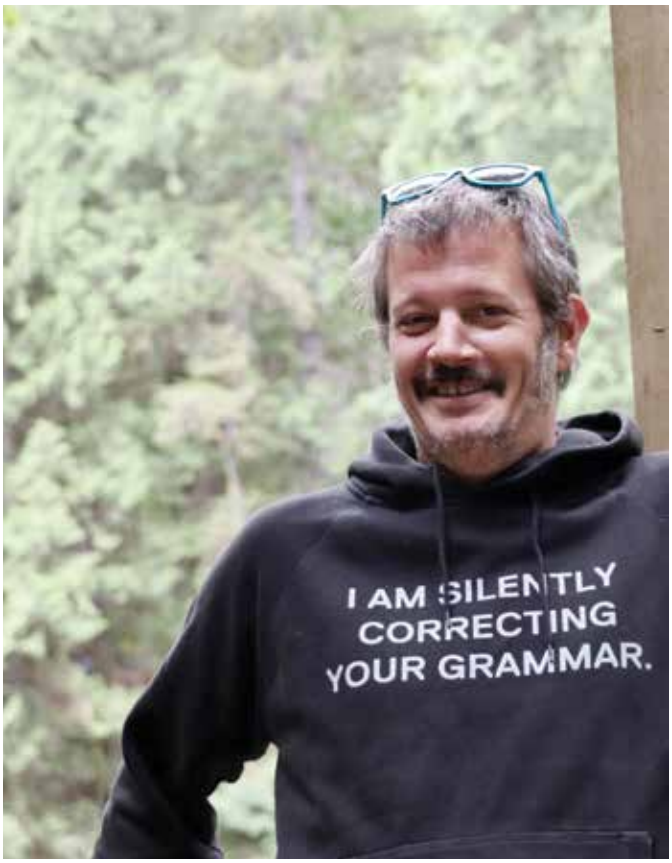
My younger son, Joey, came over and said words that instantly divided my life into a before and an after:

"I've been diagnosed with metastatic testicular cancer."

Nothing prepares a parent to hear those words.

Over the following sixteen months, cancer took over our lives. There were surgeries, chemotherapy treatments, a stem cell transplant, a coma, 150 days in the hospital, and periods of agonizing uncertainty. Anyone who has accompanied a loved one through serious illness will recognize the strange rhythm of those days: moments of hope followed by setbacks, good news overshadowed by bad news, and the constant uncertainty of never knowing what tomorrow might bring.

As Joey's mother, I would have done anything to spare him what he endured. I had always believed that if my children were hurt, I could somehow make things better. Cancer shattered that illusion. For the first time in my life, I was powerless. All I could do was accompany him, celebrate the good days, support him through the difficult ones, and learn that courage is found not only in fighting, but also in simply moving forward together. What amazed me most was the way Joey chose to face his illness – with determination, kindness, and an extraordinary ability to find light even in the darkest moments. While many people in his situation might have withdrawn from the world, Joey did the opposite.



JOEY

Together with his close friend, Andreas, he launched a podcast called Having a Ball – a deliberate play on words. The podcast's purpose was to break taboos and raise awareness of testicular cancer, but it was also a reflection of Joey's determination not to let cancer steal his sense of humor.

The episodes were informative, candid and often extremely funny, filled with social references and self-deprecating wit. Joey spoke openly about his treatments, the side effects, his fears,



ANNEMARIE BARNES
Founder of ***Having a Ball – The Joseph Barnes Association for Testicular Cancer Awareness***
SWITZERLAND



MY BOYS AND I

and frustrations, but he also managed to find reasons to smile in situations where most people would have seen only darkness. The podcasts attracted listeners from far beyond our circle of family and friends. People wrote to him to say that his honesty had helped them, that his humor had made them laugh during difficult times, or that his story had encouraged them to get checked.

Without realizing it, Joey was already creating a legacy that would outlive him.

On 13 October, 2022, my son died at the age of forty-one.

The death of a child goes against the natural order of the universe.

I had always considered myself a resilient person. Throughout my life I had faced challenges and found ways to overcome them. But nothing prepared me for the loss of my son. It brought me to my knees. It devastated me.

For months, I felt as though I was simply existing rather than living. I was drowning. The future I had once imagined had disappeared. Travelling no longer interested me. The mountains I loved held little attraction. Much of what had once given my life structure and meaning suddenly seemed unimportant.

Yet amid the grief, one thought kept returning.

Joey had worked tirelessly during the final months of his life to encourage men to talk openly about testicular cancer. He wanted young men to know that early detection saves lives. He wanted them to overcome embarrassment and consult a doctor quickly if something felt wrong.

His voice had been silenced, but his message remained. I owed it to my son to continue what he had started. It was the only thing I could still do for him.

Eight months after his death, together with my elder son Kevin and his friend Andreas, I founded ***Having a Ball – The Joseph Barnes Association for Testicular Cancer Awareness***.

Looking back, I realize it became my lifeline. It gave me a renewed sense of purpose.

The association did not take away my grief. Nothing can do that. Nor did it somehow transform a terrible loss into something positive. The death of a child remains a tragedy, no matter what follows.

What the association gave me was a reason to keep moving forward.
There were people to meet, events to organize, volunteers to coordinate, and awareness campaigns to develop. Most importantly, there was an opportunity to continue sharing the message that Joey cared so deeply about.

It changed me: from teacher to caregiver, from caregiver to bereaved mother, and from bereaved mother to advocate.

Today, ***Having a Ball*** is the only non-profit charity in Switzerland dedicated exclusively to raising awareness of testicular cancer. We organize information campaigns, speak at universities and companies, and hold free screening days in cities across the country where men can be examined by volunteer urologists.
Every young man who learns to check himself matters.

Every conversation that breaks the silence around testicular cancer matters.

Every person who seeks medical advice because of something they heard from us matters.

Of course, I would give anything to have Joey back. But life did not give me that choice.

Instead, it asked something different of me.

It changed me: from teacher to caregiver, from caregiver to bereaved mother, and from bereaved mother to advocate.

It is not a path I would ever have chosen. Yet it has taught me that even in the darkest moments, purpose can coexist with grief. Not instead of grief, but alongside it.

Joey taught me many things during the final sixteen months of his life. Perhaps the most important was that even when circumstances are beyond our control, we can still choose how we respond.

His story ended in October 2022.
Mine is continuing.
I miss him every minute of my life, and I am so very proud to be his mother.



JOEY & ANDREAS recording the podcast



UICC PHOTO EXHIBITION

The long journey of a free mind

When my father lined up for a 100-mile (160 km) ultramarathon across the Jordanian desert in November 2000, he had already started treatment for advanced prostate cancer that had spread to his bones.

He was 66 years old and had been running for nearly 20 years, completing over a hundred marathons and several ultramarathons since he caught the bug during the running boom of the 1970s. He did not yet feel much pain from the cancer itself and was managing hormone therapy quite well, which was far less debilitating than the chemotherapy he would later receive, and which he would describe as "a constant hangover". True to the motto inscribed on his favorite t-shirt, 'One life, live it', he wasn't going to let his cancer diagnosis get in the way of another ultra-running adventure.

He had also roped me in to participating in the race, with his own particular idea of what 'quality father-son' time meant.

I welcomed the opportunity – not quite realizing what I was getting into, even though I had previously taken part in a few long-distance races – because I hoped that my father would open up about his thoughts and emotions around his disease.

He didn't – not really. He made a few sporadic quips to take the seriousness out of the topic before moving on. Yet while having spent his career in international banking, he had a degree in philosophy, and he did, in spurts, through ultrarunning, communicate his approach to living with cancer.

My father was the stereotype of that generation of men who kept their feelings well to themselves, and proudly adhered to the Spinozian school of Stoicism, often claiming to be "an optimistic pessimist". He also trusted implicitly in his good health and rarely consulted a doctor. The late diagnosis of his prostate cancer was largely due to the fact that he chose to ignore the symptoms, no doubt out of fear of the possible consequences of surgery, such as incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

Throughout his illness, my mother would constantly be telling him "To fight". She had herself been successfully treated for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 1994, and that somewhat tainted her view of my father's prospects; she convinced herself that he could 'win' against his cancer, as she had.

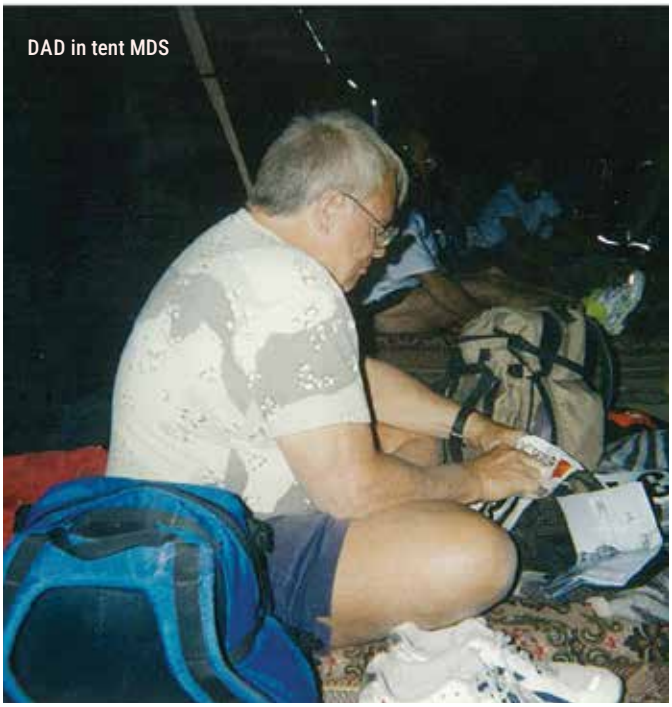
My father developed a completely different approach. Just as there was little chance he'd complete the 100-mile race in Jordan, given his age, health, and past running performance, he knew his prospects of surviving his cancer were bleak. That didn't matter; it was all about the journey.

As with cancer, people often consider an endurance event in terms of a battle to be won or lost, a victory of willpower over the maelstrom of emotions that can often be overwhelming and make you want to cry out "stop!"

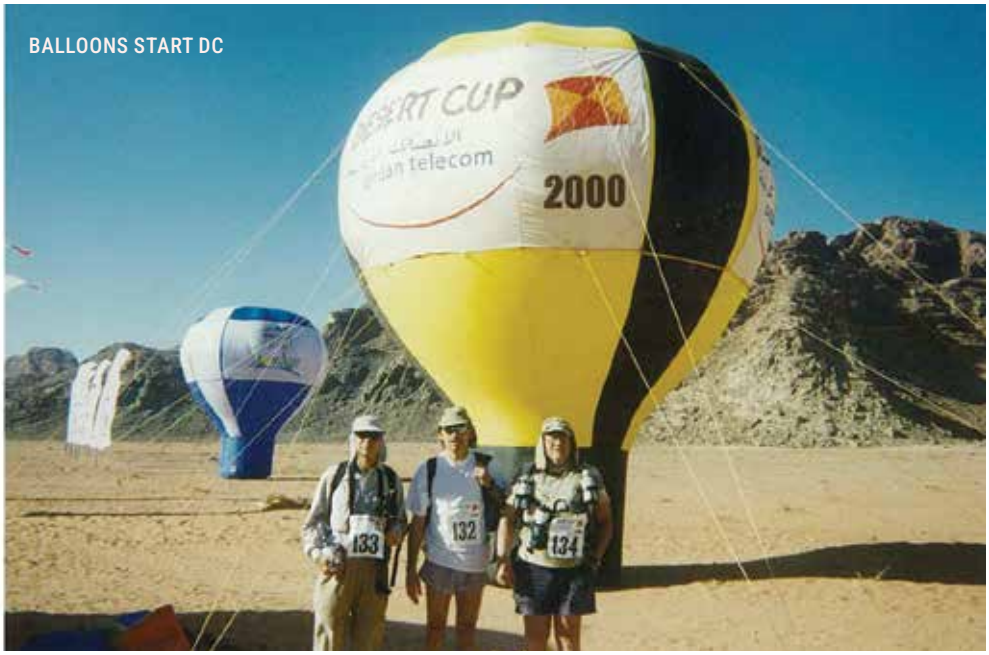
And I understand why many people affected by cancer use – and respect that some need – fighting metaphors. Drawing on his decades of long-distance running, my father rejected these. First, the term 'win' commands its counterpart 'lose', which implies failure, not having 'done enough'. Then, as cancer is an abnormal, uncontrolled multiplication of cells within the body, my father considered casting cancer as a 'fight' as being at war with oneself. And finally, the word 'battle,' when applied to an individual's struggle is misplaced because it suggests personal agency. A battle involves armies moving in tactical formations under the direction of a commander. My father felt that, at his level, he ultimately had little control over how his cancer might unfold, no matter what he believed or tried – even though we now know that effective psychological support, which he never received, can contribute to better outcomes.

Rather than seeing his experience with cancer as a struggle, my father saw it as a journey, one of accepting these moments as part of the process until the emotions passed.

If a cancer diagnosis isn't a fight, then willpower actually has little part to play, far less than one may think. Constantly exerting only willpower to overcome fears, doubts, and inevitable feelings



DAD in tent MDS



BALLOONS START DC

of denial, anger, grief, despair, even guilt, would be exhausting, physically and mentally, because one moment of 'weakness' and you 'lose'.

Rather than seeing his experience with cancer as a struggle, my father saw it as a journey, one of accepting these moments as part of the process until the emotions passed. Just as he did when he had a 'bad patch' in ultrarunning, he faced the long periods of suffering, doubt, euphoria, and depression with equanimity, letting go of any thoughts of 'giving up', trusting in the process, that if he put one foot in front of another, he would ultimately reach the end.

Of course, my father knew that this extended analogy between ultrarunning and the cancer experience had obvious limits. A long-distance run is a voluntary journey that can be ended at any time, generally with little more than a bruised ego. A cancer diagnosis is a curveball, a brutal shot out of nowhere that can upend your life and the lives of those around you completely, with all the sense of injustice that often comes with it. The gamut of emotions you experience is intense and shifts wildly, often many times a day. It's not just a few ups and downs, however severe, over a few hours or a couple of days at most, as in an ultramarathon.

So rather than 'soldier on through the emotions' my father stripped them of their power by surrendering to his inability to force change. This was not surrender in the sense of 'giving up' and waving the white flag, but of letting go, of accepting what, ultimately, he knew he had no control over. And I realized this wasn't weakness but the highest expression of strength.

"The body suffers, but the mind is free," he would say.

By considering his life with cancer as a 'journey' – taking one step at a time, one day at a time – he transformed it into an experience much like ultrarunning, stretching from the 'starting line' of diagnosis to a nebulous and uncertain 'finish'. Along the way, he transmuted fear and dissolved doubt into a sense of peace – however fleeting, and however many times he had to repeat the process.

Over the years, through both personal experience and my work in cancer control, I have met many people who embody that same approach. They exhibit extraordinary qualities of patience, resilience, adaptability, and an ability to focus on what can be done today rather than becoming overwhelmed by everything that may or may not happen tomorrow. And it never fails to impress and touch me, because it must be one of the most difficult and counterintuitive things to do.

What I have also come to realize is that this concept of 'journey' extends beyond the individual. Each person's experience with cancer is unique, but many challenges, feelings, and aspirations are shared. And this applies to the cancer community as a whole – not just patients, caregivers, nurses, and doctors, but also cancer organizations, patient groups, hospitals, research centres, and public health officials.

It is also not a journey that is taken alone, just as nobody completes an ultramarathon alone: behind every finisher is a network of organizers, volunteers, and fellow runners, and sometimes family members and friends.

A person experiencing cancer is, or should be, similarly surrounded by family, friends, and a team of health professionals. Yet the network extends much further, even if imperceptibly. Their journey is – or has been made possible – by investments in technology and health workforce, medical innovation, the policies and health systems that make care possible in the first place, and the organizations that advocate for them, plus much more.

The thousands of people working in cancer control may appear to operate in silos, separated by geography, area of work, or income setting. In reality, their work is far more interconnected. Each thread strengthens a tapestry that ultimately improves outcomes for everyone affected by cancer – a collective journey measured not in miles, but in lives.



ERIC GRANT
UICC
SWITZERLAND



KAREN INSIDE "JUST JANE", a Second World War Lancaster bomber at RAF East Kirkby in Lincolnshire, in 2022. Funds raised through tours and taxi rides go towards the restoration of the aircraft, with the hope that it will one day take to the skies again.

Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

A life in learning, leadership and listening

Dr Karen Niven, former Global Head of Product Safety at Shell and an experienced coach for individuals and teams, has built an international career on product stewardship, organizational development and strategic change. Her work has taken her from the laboratory bench to the executive boardroom, with coaching becoming a defining thread in the way she leads, learns and helps others to realize their potential. Here, Karen reflects on the unexpected opportunities that shaped her path, the value of staying curious in moments of change, and the leadership lessons she has gathered along the way.

COULD YOU TALK US THROUGH THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER?

Looking back, my route into science was not carefully planned. I was a bit of a wild teenager and left school at 16 with a few ordinary and a couple of higher grades, which I think disappointed my parents but, fortunately for me, they didn't push it. The qualifications I did have were science-based, and I had always been interested in science, so my mother, who was a nurse, encouraged me to apply for a job in a medical laboratory. That was where my career started; I completed an HNC in medical laboratory science but, over time, I realized that while I liked the scientific environment, I was really interested in occupational



KAREN NIVEN
Retired from Shell
SCOTLAND

health and safety. I liked going out and seeing people's workplaces, understanding the environments they worked in, and thinking about how they could be made safer.

WHAT DREW YOU TO OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENE, AND HEALTH AND SAFETY?

I moved to a different department in the research institute where I was working and started looking at a career in occupational hygiene. Unfortunately, I hit what felt like a glass ceiling; I couldn't become professionally qualified as an occupational hygienist because I didn't have a degree or HND; an HNC wasn't enough. That was frustrating because I was really interested, but I couldn't progress in the way I wanted. A team leader role came up so I thought I would try the management route instead and, during the interview, I was asked why I wanted the job.

I explained that I honestly felt stuck and the next day, I was told that I hadn't got the job but that they had been really interested in my story. They were starting a Master of Science programme with the University of Aberdeen and offered me a place, allowing me to keep my job while taking time off to attend the modules. It was completely unexpected.

HOW DID THAT MSC CHANGE YOUR PATH?

The MSc, which I completed between 1991 and 1993, became one of the first major turning points in my career. It was like somebody pulled back a curtain and I realized that I loved academia. In many ways, the timing was also right. If I had gone to university when I was younger, I don't think I would have appreciated it, but I was just a little bit older and ready to love learning. That opportunity opened doors, allowing me to move into a role within the NHS occupational health and safety department, and later pursue a PhD. I pitched my project idea to the Scottish Executive, received a grant and completed the PhD part-time over seven years while continuing my job. It took a lot of support, especially from my husband who took on so much at home, leaving me the time and space to complete it. It was hard, but it became another important step in the journey.

WAS THERE A MOMENT THAT CHANGED THE WAY YOU THOUGHT ABOUT LEADERSHIP?

One of the most important shifts in my leadership style came through coaching. In the early 2000s, I was in a leadership role, but I was still a bit of a rough diamond. I was proud of having a quick mind and being no-nonsense, but I was also quite black and white in how I approached things. My boss at the time decided that our leadership team should have a coach. I was very sceptical; I thought it was mumbo jumbo, and we clashed quite spectacularly over it. Rather than sidelining me, he did the opposite and brought in a one-to-one coach just for me. Although the experience was uncomfortable at times, it became transformational.



KAREN NIVEN'S approach to coaching is grounded in curiosity, openness and a willingness to listen.

Pushing through, I slowly began to see that there was another way to lead. It was more about listening, being present, and understanding that leadership didn't have to be about having the quickest answer or the strongest view. From that point on, coaching became an important part of how I understood leadership and personal development. I continued to have a coach available at different points in my career, and I came to see coaching as something that could help people to think more clearly, understand themselves better, and grow into their potential.



KAREN AT HOME in 2022 with her Porsche 981 Spyder, a car she describes as her pride and joy, and which gives her a much-loved sense of freedom on the road.

HOW DID THIS LEAD YOU TO BECOME A COACH YOURSELF?

By the time the opportunity at Shell came along, I had built a good career in occupational health and safety within the NHS. The role was secure, there was a pension attached to it and, at 50, I was being asked to consider a one-year contract in The Hague with no guarantees. Although it was a big decision, I knew I would always wonder what might have happened if I hadn't taken the chance. The initial experience was even harder than I had expected. I was travelling back and forth, feeling homesick, and soon realized that the arrangement was not working. After six months, I told my boss I was miserable and thought I would return to the UK. To my surprise, he offered me a permanent contract and a regional commuting arrangement, which meant I could work from home in the UK on Mondays and Fridays, fly to The Hague on Tuesdays and return on Thursdays.

That changed everything. It allowed me to regain my home life, my family and my friends, without giving up the opportunity to work internationally with an amazing group of people. Over the 16 years that followed, my roles at Shell became increasingly rewarding as my leadership style continued to mature. In my final assignment, I became global head of product safety, leading a team of around 300 people across the company. It was a big job, and I absolutely loved it.



Sometimes an opportunity appears that you didn't expect, and you don't know where it will lead. But if you are open to learning, willing to have honest conversations, and prepared to walk through the door, those moments can change everything.

WERE THERE DIFFICULT MOMENTS THAT SHAPED YOU AS MUCH AS THE SUCCESSES?

Definitely. Sometimes the hard knocks are the most valuable when you look back. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Shell was going through a downturn and needed to reduce the workforce. I saw an opportunity to bring together two departments that I felt had strong synergies. However, looking back, I don't think I handled it as well as I could have. It was a difficult time, made harder by the fact that some relationships I cared about were damaged along the way. When something doesn't work out as you intended, especially when people are affected, that can be very hard to sit with. For me, it comes back to authentically doing your best, being honest, and learning from the experience.

WHAT CHANGES DID YOU SEE FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP DURING YOUR CAREER?

When I started at Shell, it was certainly more male-dominated than it was by the time I left; I saw a big change. There were many bright women engineers, chemical engineers and scientists moving into senior leadership roles. I also think developing talent is incredibly important and Shell's strong graduate programme provided the kind of long-term investment that really matters. Bringing in the next generation of talented people, giving them opportunities, and helping them to develop is hard work, but it pays dividends. At the same time, experience takes time. Bright young people may have high expectations, and that ambition is valuable, but careers are shaped by experience as well as potential. A few knocks along the way are not necessarily a bad thing.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING THEIR CAREER TODAY?

Don't be too quick to judge. Keep an open mind and trust your instincts. Sometimes things feel like the end of the world, and that is when it can help to take a step back and hold things a little more lightly. I would also say stick with it. Some of the most difficult periods in my career turned out to be the most valuable, although I didn't always see that at the time. There is a balance between being persistent and being realistic, and you also have to give yourself permission to step back when you need to. Looking back, my career has been shaped by curiosity. Sometimes an opportunity appears that you didn't expect, and you don't know where it will lead. But if you are open to learning, willing to have honest conversations, and prepared to walk through the door, those moments can change everything.



ASTRID GREVE SPENCER BIOGRAPHY

Astrid Greve Spencer, Emmy-awarded TV News Executive Producer, and CEO and founder of About Us Media LLC, has embraced the many twists and turns of life's journey, from leaving her home country and changing careers to returning to education and eventually starting her own business. In hindsight, what once felt like a series of separate journeys actually formed a coherent path, with every decision adding another piece to the puzzle. Driven by curiosity rather than certainty, she discovered that growth often begins by stepping beyond what feels familiar.

Continuous learning and the courage to travel unknown paths

I've recently reached the point in my life where everything makes sense. For years, I have felt like I was collecting puzzle pieces without knowing what the final picture would actually be. There were moments when I wondered whether I'd ever use some of the things I'd learned again. Had I spent too long studying? Had I changed direction too many times? Looking back now, I can see that nothing was wasted. Every experience, every challenge, and every unexpected turn taught me something I still use today.

A CURIOUS CHILD

I grew up in Munich, Germany, in a family who believed if you wanted something, you had to make it happen yourself. My parents never suggested life would simply work out on its own. Instead, they taught my brother and me that we were responsible for our own destiny. If there was something we wanted to achieve, we had to figure out how to get there. My mother, who taught math and physics, is a lifelong learner, always exploring a new language or developing a new skill. My father, a medical doctor and a passionate reader, encouraged that same independence and, together, they created an environment where curiosity was celebrated and making your own way was simply expected. Even as a child, I found myself asking questions that most children probably don't ask. Why am I here? What's my purpose? I was endlessly wondering about the world around me and wanted to understand how things worked, including the people living in it.

This is what led me to the University of Missouri-Columbia to study broadcast journalism. I had heard about the programme through family connections, but what really appealed to me was its practical approach. Students weren't simply sitting in lectures; they were working in a commercial television station, producing a newspaper and contributing to a city magazine. We

were learning real journalism by doing it, and that suited me perfectly. I also discovered something else very quickly: I wanted to be the one in charge and calling the shots behind the scenes, bringing everything together, rather than being in front of the camera.

A NEW COUNTRY, A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Moving to the United States was a big culture shock. I arrived speaking textbook British English, only to discover that understanding everyday American conversations was a challenge. Rather than feeling discouraged, I treated it like any other problem to solve. I read my coursework aloud to improve my English and worked in the university dining halls to learn 'everyday' language. Most importantly, I chose to immerse myself in American culture rather than staying within familiar circles.

Aside from the cultural differences, I also discovered a very different philosophy of journalism. In Germany, when I was young, television news felt as though the audience was expected to keep up; in America, we were taught the opposite. If your audience didn't understand the story, you hadn't done your job properly. That lesson has stayed with me: communication isn't about showing people how clever you are; it's about helping them to understand.

COVERING EVERY ASPECT OF STORYTELLING

Television journalism turned out to be the perfect career for me – someone who always wanted to ask questions. I spent around 15 years in this sector in the United States, moving between roles and working on live broadcasts. I often describe being a television producer as being the captain of the ship. You're coordinating reporters, making editorial decisions, solving problems in real time, rewriting scripts and somehow keeping everything moving, without letting the audience see the chaos behind the scenes. Looking back, I wasn't just developing my journalism skills; I was also building my leadership, resilience and project management capabilities, while learning how to stay calm under pressure.

During this time, I developed a fascination with how words and visuals work together to make complex ideas engaging and accessible, and decided to return to graduate school to study magazine design. Later still, I completed an MBA and an MSc specializing in management and public relations because I wanted to understand how businesses think, communicate, and build relationships. In isolation, these themes probably seem disconnected but, to me, they all answered different parts of the same question. Journalism taught me how to uncover stories, TV and magazine design taught me how to present them, and business helped me to understand and manage organizations. Together, they gave me a much broader perspective, one that got me to where I am today.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL CHAMELEON

When I moved from television news into PR and corporate communications, many people wondered how I could leave journalism behind and move into industries as diverse as insurance, manufacturing and professional services. But, for me, it wasn't so much about the industries as the people, so every new role was another opportunity to understand a different world. I threw myself into learning the language, the technology and the challenges of each organization. I sometimes joked about being a professional chameleon, as every unfamiliar environment became another opportunity for me to learn and grow.

The moment I realised that no experience had been wasted came just weeks into a new role, when I was tasked with organizing a week-long global virtual event despite barely knowing the company or my colleagues. Suddenly, it dawned on me that I'd already spent years preparing for exactly that challenge. Producing live television had taught me how to coordinate people, manage moving parts and stay calm under pressure. In a pivotal moment, I could clearly see how the skills I'd developed in one career translated seamlessly into another.

DARING TO FAIL

Throughout my career, mentors have encouraged me to trust my instincts. One piece of advice in particular changed everything. I'd talked for years about starting my own business, but fear kept holding me back. Then someone simply asked me, "So what if you fail?" That question completely changed my perspective.

Starting my own business finally allowed me to bring together all the knowledge and experience I'd gathered over the years. I now work with founders, executives and business leaders to shape their legacy by uncovering the stories that have shaped who they are and how they lead. Rather than helping people to create polished corporate messages, I help them to find the authentic stories behind them, uncovering the experiences, values and defining moments that people genuinely connect with.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize I'm still doing what first attracted me to journalism all those years ago. I'm still asking questions and searching for what's under the surface. I'm still helping people to make sense of complex ideas and communicate in a way that others can understand. The audience has changed, but the purpose hasn't. When I look back now, I no longer see separate careers; I see one continuous journey driven by curiosity, lifelong learning, and a desire to understand people. Every qualification, every career move, and every challenge became another piece of the puzzle. It just took me a while to realize what picture those pieces were creating.

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LOLA



ESPERANZA identifies her photographs with the help of her granddaughter.



MARI PAZ writes down the names of the people who appear in her photographs; these will be her clues for recognising them later on.



ROSARIO First portrait



ESPERANZA First portrait



MARIA DOLORS **Her expression changes as the image appears; she lifts her head and manages to offer a slight gesture of approval and contentment.**

I'm still here.

When I bought my first camera, I wasn't looking to become a photographer. Major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder had kept me confined within four walls for several years. The prolonged stress had affected my cognitive abilities. I lost my short-term memory, concentration, sense of direction, and vocabulary. Reading a text, holding a conversation, or making simple decisions had become almost impossible. I also gradually lost my self-confidence.

I bought a camera as a pastime during that period of confinement, never imagining that it would end up becoming one of the most important tools in my recovery. I didn't take photographs to remember what I saw. I took photographs to regain the abilities I had lost and to venture back out into the world.

I needed a place where I felt safe. Swimming pools had been part of my life since childhood because of my years as a swimmer, and they remained one of the few places where I still felt at home. I started with sports photography. Every competition became a form of cognitive training. When it ceased to be a challenge, I realized that my brain needed new challenges. I switched from sports photography to street photography, a much more demanding form of expression.

When I regained the ability to read, I decided to investigate what had happened in my brain and which cognitive processes had supported my recovery. Understanding that process would ultimately shape everything that followed.

Years later, I supported my mother throughout the progression of her Alzheimer's disease. What struck me most was seeing her lose her sense of identity and belonging, stop recognizing people and places, and experience anxiety, panic, hallucinations, and long sleepless nights.

I wondered whether photography might help her in the same way it had helped me. I knew it wouldn't restore her memory or cure the disease, but I was searching for something that might bring her comfort.

I didn't succeed.

In the later stages, reminiscence therapy using old photographs was no longer enough. The images were still there, but they could no longer sustain the narrative that accompanied them. She understood what she was losing, and that caused her great distress. At that point, I abandoned the project.

Then, one day, I read an interview with the film director Wim Wenders. In it, he spoke of instant photography and the kind of magic that occurs as an image slowly appears in the hands of the person holding it. He explained that during those moments of waiting, not only is the photographed moment captured, but also the emotions, conversations, people, and the atmosphere surrounding it. Years later, when looking at that photograph again, a person recalls not only the image itself but also the experience that accompanied it.

That interview gave me the clue I had been searching for.

I began to think that the tool I had been looking for all those years might not be conventional photography, but instant photography.

That hypothesis led me to search for scientific evidence. Because I could not find any previous studies linking instant photography with Alzheimer's disease, I had to start from scratch. I reviewed research on emotion, memory, attention, and Alzheimer's, looking for evidence that would either support or refute my hypothesis.

That search led me to understand the role of emotion in memory consolidation. If my hypothesis was correct, the emotional response had to arise right from the very beginning of the process, as the image slowly appeared in the person's hands.

I then realized that my goal to offer a new experience lived in the present moment, one in which the person remained the protagonist. I wanted to work from the present. It wasn't about asking who they had once been. It was about giving them reasons to recognize who they still were.

After considering different approaches to instant photography, I realized I needed a simple tool that any family member or care-



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MARI PAZ spontaneously shows her first portrait once the experience is over.

Although they would forget the activity within a few minutes, that renewed sense of identity and belonging seemed to bring them calm and well-being that often lasted for hours.

giver could use. The aim was to eliminate technical barriers. I replaced the camera with a smartphone and an instax printer. The phone allowed for natural, spontaneous photography, while the printer preserved the element I had considered essential from the beginning: the waiting period as the image slowly appeared in the hands of the person viewing it.

I began the first trials in a care home with people living with moderate and advanced Alzheimer's disease. The project had to fit naturally into the daily routine of the care home and depend on the collaboration of family members and caregivers.

What I witnessed there profoundly affected me.

Many people did not immediately recognize themselves in the photograph. Rather than rejecting it, they examined their clothing, the chair, the table, the colors, and the objects in the image until they reached a conclusion entirely on their own:

"That's me."

Others, who were more agitated, changed noticeably after receiving the photograph. They would study it quietly for several minutes, and it often helped calm them.

There is one gesture that continues to repeat itself. When they receive the still-blank sheet of paper, they look up for a few seconds, searching for my eyes. Then they lower their gaze and watch intently as the first shadows appear, until a smile or a fleeting expression reveals that they have recognized what the image is showing them.

One man, who at first could not recognize himself, began fanning the photograph to help it dry as soon as he received it. No one had told him to do so. It was a spontaneous reaction rooted in an emotional memory that remained intact.

Those observations led me to revisit the scientific literature. I had discovered something I needed to understand.

Although many of these individuals could no longer access their recent memories, they still retained the ability to analyze the information presented to them and relate it to their surroundings. The photograph did not bring back a memory for them. Instead, it provided enough clues for them to construct an interpretation of what they were experiencing in that very moment.
They're still here.

Although they would forget the activity within a few minutes, that renewed sense of identity and belonging seemed to bring them calm and well-being that often lasted for hours.

If a photograph taken in the present could help them orient themselves in that moment, what would happen if those photographs were always within reach? What if sessions were held regularly, alternating between taking new photographs and reviewing what had happened throughout the week?

I don't mean taking large numbers of photographs, as too much information would likely be counterproductive. Rather, I envision a small collection of meaningful images that can reinforce familiarity and orientation over time.

My hypothesis is that this repetition could help maintain a sense of calm, familiarity, and belonging with the people around them and within their environment. It is not intended to recover the past. It is intended to make the present feel less overwhelming.

Using everything I have learned, I prepared an initial draft and shared it with Cochrane, an international organization that evaluates scientific evidence while recognizing the value of patients' and caregivers' lived experience in dementia research. I wanted to test my ideas against independent expert feedback before moving forward.

My draft was very well received. I was encouraged to make it public and to give it its own identity under the name ***InstaMindSync***.

The name captures exactly what I had hoped to achieve from the beginning: using instant photography to strengthen the connection between the image, the mind, and the present moment.

The project continues to evolve while awaiting formal evaluation through future research protocols.

That remains my goal.

Not to recover the past.

But to help people navigate this stage of life with greater well-being and to reinforce – even if only for a few minutes – the feeling that they are still here, fully present.



LOLA >
A sequence of facial expressions from the moment she receives the blank photograph until she recognises the image.



ROSARIO identifies her photographs using small written clues.

Advice to my younger self





CATHERINE LA FRANCE
HR Business Partner, European HR Department
FUJIFILM Sonosite
THE NETHERLANDS

IF YOU COULD GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF SOME ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

As I was preparing a group icebreaker for an upcoming event, I came upon this hypothetical question in a funny self-reflection book I had bought in 2016 while travelling in Australia. And my answer back then? ***"Never forget yourself. I have value. My opinions and my own journey are as important as those of others."***

My story started in the French-speaking province of Québec, Canada. Through the snowy winters and hot summers, I grew up as a little red-headed girl, with a fairly normal childhood, filled with ups and downs. My parents were always present, sometimes perhaps a bit too much.

During my teenage years, I developed an eating disorder in the form of anorexia. Through therapy, I came to understand that it reflected an intrinsic need to be in control of my life by controlling and limiting what I ate. From that moment on, all important milestones or events that shaped my life became part of my search to rediscover my true self. Not an easy task for someone like me who always wants to help others and tends to put the wellbeing of others above mine.

It's that desire to help others that shaped my career choices. During my studies, I was profoundly attracted by how the brain reacts so differently from one person to another and how it shapes our emotions and behavior. In an ideal world, I would have become a psychiatrist, but math and science have never been my strength. So I ended up becoming a social worker, specializing in helping people with severe mental disorders.

Helping others to overcome the consequences of their diagnoses was sometimes exhausting and dangerous (try sitting at a table with a psychotic person saying to you they are armed and voices are telling them you're bad), yet very interesting and stimulating. It can be highly rewarding to be able to create meaningful therapeutic relationships with others – some might say it was the perfect role for someone like me, with a savior mentality. But it did help me understand that life is not just about big achievements and failures. There are obstacles that we might not overcome, but we can learn from them and create some small successes.

At the end of 2015, after being in a long-term relationship for many years, I started to have this underlying feeling that some-







thing was not right. I started to wonder whether I was really happy or simply stuck in my comfort zone. I felt like I was lost. So, for the first time in a long time, I decided to make a decision for myself. I ended the relationship, moved back to my parent's house and decided to get fully involved in our hospital works council. I did not completely lose the savior mentality, but I toned it down. I started to travel, challenge myself, learn to be on my own, and enjoy my life. It was not always comfortable or easy, but it felt very liberating. Because I wanted to be able to remind myself of that feeling and how I came there, I got a tattoo of a phoenix. To me, it was the perfect symbol that reminds us we can rise from the ashes and not be afraid to be born again.

Then, a little over a year later, life threw me a curveball. I met this French guy, through a dating app, who was visiting my Canadian home town for the week. He was living in the Netherlands, so our relationship was only supposed to last a few hours, or at most a few days. Yet here we are, nine years later. I took a two-year sabbatical from work, rented out my house, gave my cat to my mom, and moved across the world to live with him after only four months of knowing each other. My parents thought I was crazy. We got engaged after one year, married after two, and now we are the parents of a little four-year-old energetic tornado. It's not always easy. Motherhood has exacerbated that tendency to always want to help others and put their needs above my own. I often struggle to find time for myself, and will almost always plan things with my son's needs in mind. But I'm working on it.

For work, after moving to the Netherlands, I transitioned into HR because I found it to be the perfect combination of my desire to help others and my interest in employee relations. I have now been working as an HR Business Partner for Fujifilm Sonosite in Europe for six years. And I love it. I believe that my HR style is centered on listening and caring for our employees. I see people as our greatest resource, helping the company achieve its full potential. We might not be able to meet all their requests and needs, but it's important to let them have a voice.

Overall, I would say that I am happy today and enjoy my life in the Netherlands. There are some things that I still miss, which would make me feel more complete. Of course, being closer to my family – and having the opportunity to shop at a Costco or Walmart (oh, how I miss the Canadian shopping experience!) – are at the top of the list. But I miss the opportunity to be involved and make a difference in my community (yes, again the savior mentality), which can be very hard when there is a language barrier. I have started to take some steps towards this in the past year. I now volunteer with a foundation called Thuisgekookt, cooking a meal once per week for a neighbor in need. But it's not enough. I think I can contribute more to the community that has become my home, and I want to continue finding ways to share what I have to offer.

Because I wanted to be able to remind myself of that feeling and how I came there, I got a tattoo of a phoenix. To me, it was the perfect symbol that reminds us we can rise from the ashes and not be afraid to be born again.



I do not know what the future holds. I do not think I will ever become a selfish person or stop wanting to help others. But I strongly hope I never forget myself and continue to fight for the things I enjoy. Life can be very short, so it's worth figuring out ways to be happy and be me.

If I were to ask myself today what advice I would give my younger – and perhaps even my older – self, my answer would still be the same:

Never forget yourself. I have value. My opinions and my own journey are as important as those of others.





Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

Beyond the odds:
A journey built on belief

For a long time, I understood the odds before I had the language to describe them.
I came from a low-income background and grew up in a family shaped by complexity and uncertainty. There were things I learned early: how to observe, how to adapt, how to keep moving, and how to make sense of uncertainty even when I did not always understand it. On paper, I was not the person people would have pointed to as a future executive, professor, or someone who would earn a doctorate.
I graduated high school with a 2.0 GPA. I graduated college with a 2.0 GPA. Those numbers, for some people, might have looked like limitations. For me, they became part of the story, not because they defined me, but because I refused to let them be the final word.

My journey has never been about a straight line. It has been about a series of people, moments, and decisions that helped me transform. Looking back, I can see the stepping stones clearly. At the time, they did not always feel like stepping stones. Sometimes they felt like survival. Sometimes they felt like chance. Sometimes they felt like someone seeing something in me before I could see it in myself. In high school, a college advisor helped me imagine a future that felt bigger than my circumstances. My pole vault coach taught me discipline, courage, and the strange beauty of launching yourself toward something higher, even when you are not sure you will clear the bar. That metaphor has stayed with me. Pole vaulting requires commitment before certainty. You run, plant, rise, and trust that the work has prepared you for the moment.

At The Ohio State University, that same pattern continued. My political science professor, Herb Asher, challenged me to think critically and helped me see that ideas, systems, and public life were not abstract concepts. They shaped real people and real communities. My rowing coach, Tim Carrigg, taught me another kind of resilience: the discipline of showing up, the power of rhythm, and the importance of pulling with others toward a shared goal. Kristin Bernert was also part of my Ohio State journey. She helped open my eyes to what was possible beyond the classroom and gave me a sense of how early opportunities could become stepping stones. Through Ohio State, I also found my way to the Columbus Crew, where an internship gave me exposure to the professional world and helped me begin seeing a future for myself.

Those experiences helped me understand that ambition is not only about wanting more. It is about preparing yourself to meet opportunity when it appears, and having the humility to learn from every room you enter. Later, when I moved to London to pursue my master's degree, I found myself once again in unfamiliar territory. London challenged me in new ways. It expanded my worldview and pushed me beyond the boundaries of what I thought I knew. At the University of Westminster, Professor Peter Farror helped instill belief in me at a critical stage. At MTV and Viacom, Simon Brown took a chance on me, first bringing me in as an intern and later as a paid consultant. That opportunity became more than a job. It became proof that transforma-



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tion was possible when preparation, mentorship, and courage met at the right time.

These people did not remove the odds.
They helped me see that the odds were not fixed.
That distinction matters.

Resilience is often described as toughness, but for me, resilience has also meant openness. It has meant being willing to listen, to be coached, inspired, corrected, and to keep showing up even when the evidence of success was not yet visible. It has meant refusing to confuse where I started with where I could go. Over time, the journey took me into marketing, brand strategy, digital transformation, and education. I built a career across global organizations, working in roles that required me to connect data, storytelling, strategy, and people.

That progression eventually took me into global brand leadership at Wolters Kluwer, where I helped drive brand consolidation across an 800 plus brand portfolio, before moving into my current role leading Academic Marketing at Digital Science across the Americas, EMEA and APAC.

And even in my 40s, I have learned that network and mentorship still matter. In my last role at Wolters Kluwer, Linda Gharib became an important mentor whose insights, perspective, and genuine care helped propel my trajectory. Her guidance reminded me that growth does not stop once you reach a certain title or stage of life. The right people can still challenge you, sharpen you, advocate for you, and help you see the next version of yourself.



Today, I serve as Vice President Marketing, Academic at Digital Science, leading academic marketing across the Americas, EMEA and APAC. I also serve as Marketing Faculty at Rutgers University, Head Program Instructor for Yale University Executive Education Digital Marketing through Yale School of Management, and Visiting Professor of Marketing at Northeast Normal University in China.

Teaching has become one of the ways I give back. I know what it feels like when someone sees potential in you before your résumé proves it. I know what it feels like when one conversation changes your sense of possibility. I know what it feels like to need someone to say, "Keep going," and to believe them just enough to take the next step.
That is why sharing this story matters to me.
There are people who come from difficult beginnings and assume their starting point has already decided their ending. There are students whose grades do not reflect their imagination, work ethic, or future capacity. There are young professionals who feel out of place in rooms they worked hard to enter. There are people who are ambitious but afraid to say so because they have been taught to expect less.

I want my journey to remind them that becoming is not always immediate. Sometimes it is slow. Sometimes it is uneven. Sometimes it requires failure, reinvention, and people who help you translate your potential into action.

I am still becoming.
That is what motivates me.

Every day, I challenge myself to do more and be more, not because I am chasing a title, but because I know what it means to build a life beyond what seemed likely. The ambition I carry today is not about proving people wrong. It is about honoring the people who believed in me, honoring the younger version of myself who kept going, and creating space for others to believe in what is possible for them.

My journey is not a story of overcoming the odds once. It is a story of learning, again and again, that transformation is built through persistence, mentorship, courage, and the willingness to keep stepping forward.

The odds were part of my beginning.
They are not the measure of my becoming.



Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Margarida Silva:

25 years of courage, growth, and hope

BY MÓNICA CARVALHO

In the heart of Fujifilm Portugal's bustling corridors, where innovation meets dedication, one story stands out – not only for its longevity of over 25 years, but for the profound human spirit it embodies. Margarida Silva's journey with Fujifilm is marked by professional evolution, personal trials, and an inspiring resilience that has touched everyone around her. Her story is a testament to the power of perseverance, the transformative nature of adversity, and the unshakable belief in living fully despite life's harshest challenges.

THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY: MORE THAN JUST A JOB

Margarida's story with Fujifilm began in May 2001, when she joined as Commercial Assistant for the Medical Imaging Systems division. At the time, the division was smaller, but it was the beginning of significant growth. Over the years, as Fujifilm expanded its business areas and integrated new technologies, Margarida's role also evolved – her career trajectory is a powerful narrative of growth and adaptability: Business Support Manager, Medical Systems Business Operations Manager, Medical Systems & Global Service Centre Operations Manager, and today, she serves as the Global Service Centre Director. Each step was more than a promotion – it was a new challenge and an opportunity to learn and contribute.

"I've always been fascinated by learning more and taking on projects that challenge me," Margarida reflects. "I'm not a big fan of routine; I like change and getting involved in new projects. At Fujifilm, there's never a boring moment, because we're always evolving and tackling new challenges." This mindset has been a cornerstone of her professional life, fueling her passion and resilience.

And among the many milestones in her career, Margarida holds the year 2010 especially dear. That was when Fujifilm Portugal became part of Fujifilm Europe, integrating into a broader European team. "This time was special because it connected us with a larger community and a new dynamic," she says. "It was a time of learning and growth, both personally and professionally."

THE PERSONAL BATTLE WITH CANCER

Just three months after starting her journey at Fujifilm, Margarida's life took an unexpected and daunting turn. In August 2001, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. The news came as a shock, but instead of a moment that could have derailed her dreams and ambitions, it became the beginning of a profound personal battle that would test her strength and reshape her perspective on life.

The initial diagnosis led to months of treatment and uncertainty, until the disease went into remission. But the journey was far from over, and in 2009, during a routine check-up, a new tumor was detected in the same location, this time more aggressive. The recurrence led to a mastectomy followed by breast reconstruction, another round of chemotherapy, and a decade-long hormone therapy regimen.

"I always say that prevention, or rather, early diagnosis, is essential," Margarida emphasizes. "I'm proof that catching it early can lead to success." Her experience underscores the critical importance of vigilance and medical care, a message she passionately shares with others.

The emotional toll of cancer is often invisible, yet it is one of the most profound aspects of the journey. Margarida describes the initial diagnosis as feeling like a death sentence, especially when the cancer returned. "You start living through a period of constant fear," she says. "A different kind of pain, a spot on your skin, a shiver – any of these is enough to send you into anxiety until you see a doctor."

This heightened state of alertness became part of her daily life, a shadow that lingered even as she tried to maintain normalcy. The hardest emotional challenge was the uncertainty – never knowing what might happen next. As a mother of two young children, aged ten and seven at the time of recurrence, the fear of not being there to watch them grow was overwhelming.

Yet, through this darkness, Margarida found sources of light. Her oncologist played a crucial role, offering clear, honest information and unwavering hope. "She never made me feel like the 'poor thing,'" Margarida recalls. "She told me my diagnosis wasn't a death sentence and that breast cancer treatment is highly effective when caught early."

EMBRACING LIFE FULLY: A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND STRENGTH

No journey through illness is walked alone, and Margarida's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of community. On the personal front, her family and friends provided indispensable support, especially in managing the logistics of her children's schooling and activities during her treatment. Their love and support became a lifeline.

At work, her colleagues were equally vital. She highlights the exceptional support she received from her team, particularly from Pedro Mesquita, who helped navigate her responsibilities during this difficult time. Remarkably, Margarida chose to con-





MARGARIDA SILVA
Global Service Center Director
FUJIFILM Portugal
PORTUGAL





tinue working throughout her treatment, taking only a month off after surgery. "Keeping up a 'normal' life helped my physical and emotional recovery," she explains.

There were days when her body needed a break, when pain and fatigue forced her to rest. But the very next day, she would return to work, finding strength in routine and purpose. This balance between vulnerability and determination is proof of her resilience.

Through her experiences, Margarida gained profound insights about what truly matters. "We need to focus on what adds to our happiness and let go of what doesn't," she reflects. Life, she acknowledges, is unpredictable and sometimes harsh, but there is always a path forward. "The only thing in life that has no solution is death; everything else does."

Motherhood deepened her sense of responsibility and fear, but also her capacity for love and hope. Her children, now adults, remain her greatest joy and motivation. "My job of raising them and giving them the tools to live on their own is done, but I never stop worrying about them," she admits with a smile.

If Margarida could speak to her younger self, she would offer words of encouragement and resilience: "Obstacles and hardships will sometimes appear, but we must always find ways to overcome them. The one thing that should never be part of the plan is giving up." Integrity, respect, and loyalty are the principles that have guided her through every challenge.

Her story is not just a personal triumph but a beacon for others facing similar battles. She urges everyone to pay attention to warning signs, trust in science and medicine, and face it with a smile – even when it's hard to find the positive.
Sharing real stories, she believes, is vital. "We learn from each other's experiences. There's no single truth, but many examples to draw from." Her openness and honesty offer hope and strength to those who may feel alone in their struggles.

SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE FULLY?

For Margarida, living fully means having health, family, friends, and a fulfilling career. These elements create a life rich with meaning and joy. "What matters is being happy," she says, echoing the wisdom of a colleague and the essence of her own remarkable journey.

Her story is a powerful reminder that life's greatest challenges can also be its greatest teachers. Through courage, support, and an unyielding spirit, Margarida Silva has not only survived but also thrived, becoming an inspiration to all who know her and a shining example of what it means to live fully, against all odds.

In a world where the pace of change can be overwhelming, and where personal battles often remain hidden, Margarida's journey stands as an example of the human capacity for resilience and hope. Her 25 years at Fujifilm Portugal are more than a career – they are a narrative of strength, love, and the relentless pursuit of life's fullest potential.


FUJIFIL



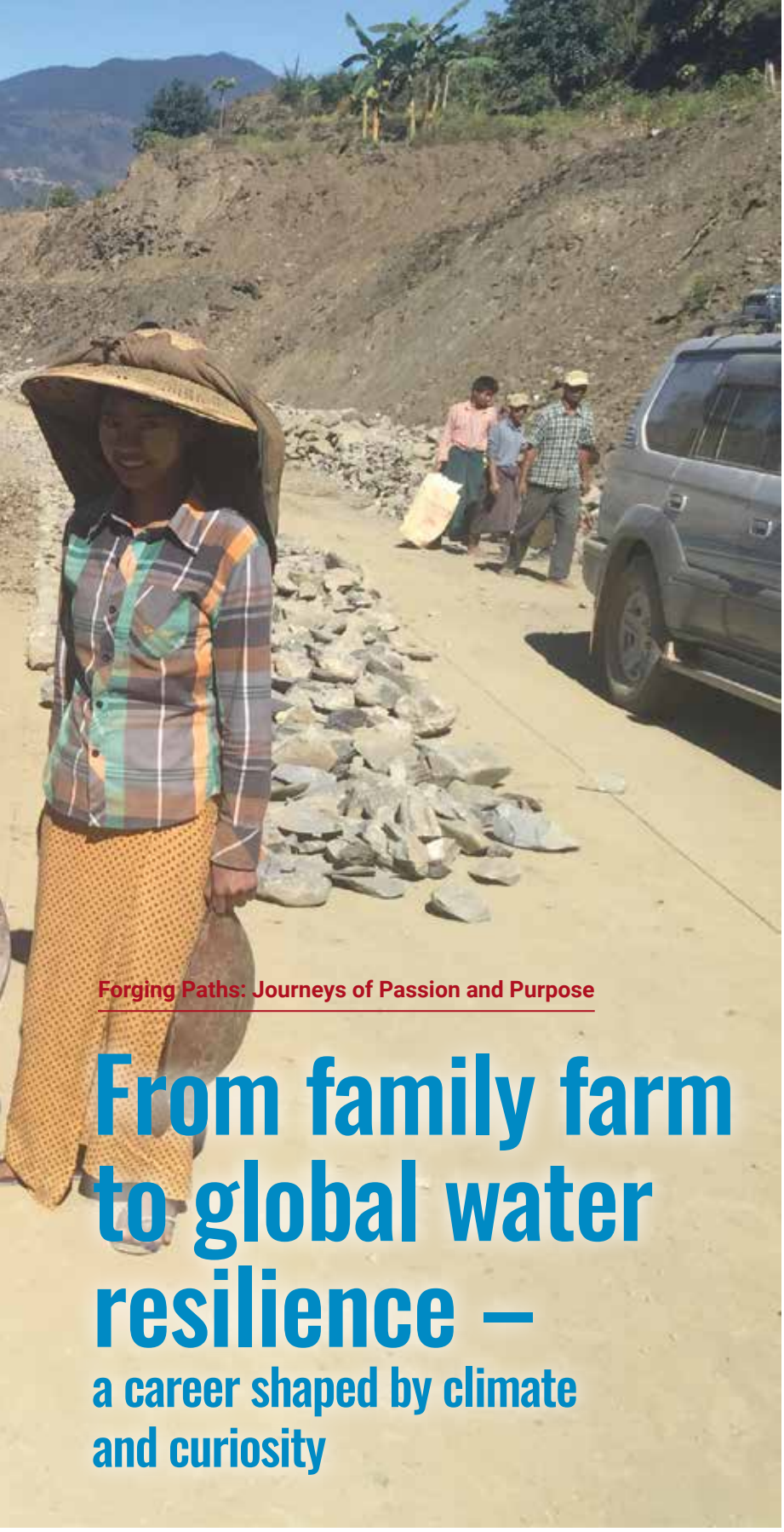




ROAD WORKERS IN CHIN, MYANMAR

WHAT DREW YOU TO WORK ON WATER AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE?

It all goes back to where I grew up. I was born in southern Spain into a family of olive oil producers, and the farm is now run by my mum and aunt, who represent the third generation of women farmers. Water, or more often the lack of it, was always talked about because drought was a constant concern.



Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

From family farm to global water resilience –

a career shaped by climate and curiosity



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One clear memory is from when I was about 12, when we experienced a 'day zero' event and water was rationed for several days.

The domestic water supply was shut off for about 10 hours a day, so we would fill the bath and store as much water as possible. I still remember the anxiety of the adults around me and the feeling of vulnerability. When you have to adapt your daily schedule around the hours when water is available, even the simplest parts of daily life become uncertain.

Growing up, I also saw how water scarcity affected not only our farm, but everyone who depended on it. When crops dwindle, there is a compounding impact on livelihoods, communities, and resilience. This experience made me ask myself what problem I wanted to solve very early in my life, and that question ultimately set me on my career path.



HOUSES ADAPTED TO FLOODING AT INLE LAKE, MYANMAR.



DID THE 'DAY ZERO' EVENT CHANGE WATER MANAGEMENT IN YOUR REGION?

Not immediately, because once a drought is underway, your options are very limited. The main priority is to find water and get through it. The real opportunity for change comes afterwards, when you can step back and ask bigger questions about how the system should work. In Spain, and across much of the Mediterranean, the response has often been to focus on water augmentation – finding or creating more water to meet existing demand. That certainly has a role, but I think the more important question is: how do we build an economy that can thrive within the limits of the land and the water system?

This is a much harder conversation because the answer lies in changes in land use and agricultural practices, rather than simply building new infrastructure. Water scarcity is the normal condition across much of the Mediterranean, punctuated by periods of drought or flooding, and I became interested in the combined management of these events. Instead of treating them as separate disasters, we should be asking how to safely capture excess water during floods so it can be used during droughts. That means increasing our capacity to store both 'blue' water in rivers, lakes, and reservoirs and 'green' water in soils and ecosystems. For me, that's the foundation of a more resilient, long-term approach to water management.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY. WAS IT HARD TO STEP AWAY FROM A FAMILY FARM AND GO DOWN A DIFFERENT ROUTE?

I started this journey after receiving a scholarship to study in the United States, which led to a position at the World Bank in Washington, DC. There, I worked with governments across Latin America on river basin management and climate resilience, providing technical and financial expertise to help them implement their own development priorities.

After a few years, I moved to Myanmar where I continued to work with the bank and spent six years supporting the country's transition towards modern flood risk management and disaster resilience. Myanmar had only recently opened up after decades of military rule, so much of the work involved building institutional capacity, establishing long-term plans, and modernizing public administration. It was also an important personal experience, as my first daughter was only a year old when we moved, and our family grew while we were living there. I was raising two very young children in a completely different culture, while also witnessing first-hand the dramatic impacts of flooding and the challenges faced by vulnerable communities.

Today, I am based in the Netherlands, where I continue to work on water governance and climate resilience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I published a book on flood and drought governance, and I'm currently contributing to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) while pursuing a PhD. Looking back, I feel incredibly fortunate to have experienced such different chapters in life. Curiosity has opened doors to places, people, and ideas I never expected, and each experience has shaped me in its own way, adding new perspectives while allowing me to carry forward everything I have learned.



HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD beside her new flood-adapted home, Myanmar.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO PURSUE A PHD AT THIS STAGE OF YOUR CAREER?

After spending six years in Myanmar, we were ready for change. We had two young children and had been living far from our extended family in Spain and the United States, where my husband is from, so moving to the Netherlands allowed us to be closer to both countries while I continued working in a field I love. I joined a knowledge institute and found myself surrounded by scientists working on applied research. It felt like the right time to reflect and write.

My career has always been rooted in implementation, and I've learned by working with governments, tackling real-world challenges, and seeing what succeeds in practice. My PhD allows me to combine that experience with formal research, bringing an applied perspective to the science. One of the first things I did after arriving in the Netherlands was co-author a book with the World Bank on integrated flood and drought management. My PhD builds on that work and gives me the opportunity to reflect on years of practical experience in a way that others can build on.

ARE THERE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN WATER MANAGEMENT APPROACHES BETWEEN 'WESTERN' AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES? HOW DID YOU ADAPT YOUR WORKING METHODS TO DIFFERENT SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENTS?

There are certainly differences, but they're becoming less distinct as climate change creates new challenges everywhere. In Latin America, governments generally had clear strategies in place, so my role was to help implement them. In Myanmar, the priority was building institutional capacity from the ground up. We focused on practical steps like training staff, improving basic systems, and strengthening early warning capabilities, because successful water management depends as much on implementation and collaboration as it does on good planning.

One project that stands out was the first basin management plan for Myanmar's largest river, the Ayeyarwady. We discovered that the country's most comprehensive groundwater study had been carried out by an Australian researcher in the 1970s, so we invited him out of retirement to update it with the local government. It showed how valuable good science can remain over decades. Although the military coup later halted much of that progress, I hope the foundations will one day be used again.

Working in the Netherlands has presented a different set of challenges. Although the country is renowned for flood management, it is now adapting to increasingly frequent droughts and heat waves. Because much of its water is stored in canals, falling water levels can threaten both water supplies and infrastructure. The Dutch approach to managing these issues is highly collaborative, with extensive consultation between stakeholders. It has been fascinating to experience such a different governance culture.

WHAT KEEPS YOU MOTIVATED WHEN WORKING IN SUCH DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX SITUATIONS?

It may sound like a cliché, but I've been incredibly fortunate to work alongside dedicated colleagues who are committed to improving the lives of their communities, often in very challenging circumstances. One of the most rewarding aspects of working in countries that are still building institutional capacity, such as Myanmar, is that you can see the impact of your work very quickly.

We started with a small local team working with very limited resources and soon established a fully functioning office, provided training, introduced new technologies, and strengthened the systems they rely on every day. Seeing those teams become more capable and confident in a relatively short space of time, and knowing that they're delivering better services to the people they serve is incredibly meaningful.

WERE THERE ANY WOMEN WHO PLAYED A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING YOUR JOURNEY?

I've been very fortunate throughout my life to be surrounded by strong women, starting with my family. From an early age, I saw women who faced adversity with resilience and determination, and that has stayed with me. Water resource management has traditionally been a very male-dominated field with a strong engineering focus, so it has always meant a great deal to me to connect with other women in the sector. We've made a conscious effort to support one another, amplify each other's voices and ensure that we're seen and heard. It's encouraging to see more women entering the profession as time goes on and I hope that continues.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE WANTING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN WATER MANAGEMENT?

My advice would be to focus less on finding the perfect job title and more on the problem you want to solve. If you have a clear sense of the impact you want to make in the world, the way you achieve it can evolve throughout your career – the path will not be linear.

There may be periods when you are driven to explore the world, work in challenging environments and gain practical experience, and others when you feel drawn to reflect, write, and develop new ideas. Those different phases are chapters of the same journey. It's important to recognize those changes and allow yourself to adapt, rather than feeling tied to one single career path, location, or life plan. I also think it is important not to be afraid of trying things that do not work out as expected, since every experience teaches you something.

Looking back, moments of 'redirection' have been just as valuable as the successes; they have helped me to develop a clearer sense of what matters to me, the kind of person I want to be, and the contribution I hope to make in the world.



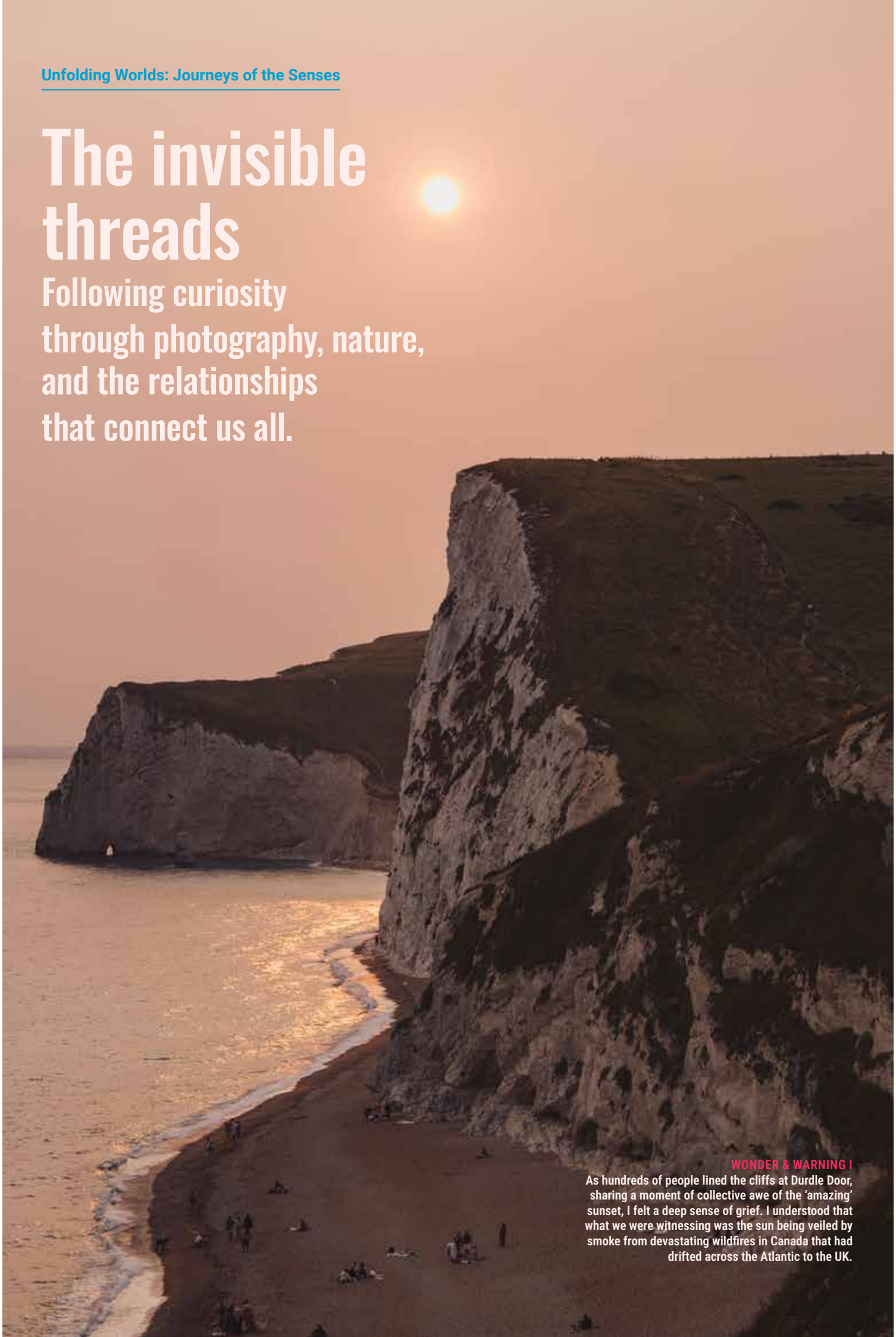
CAMP FOR FAMILIES DISPLACED by floods and landslides in Chin State, Myanmar.



EVIDENCE OF DAMAGE AND LOSS of property caused by floods and landslides in Chin State, Myanmar

The invisible threads

Following curiosity through photography, nature, and the relationships that connect us all.



WONDER & WARNING I

As hundreds of people lined the cliffs at Durdle Door, sharing a moment of collective awe of the 'amazing' sunset, I felt a deep sense of grief. I understood that what we were witnessing was the sun being veiled by smoke from devastating wildfires in Canada that had drifted across the Atlantic to the UK.



REBECCA DOUGLAS
X-Photographer
UK

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What happens when the life you have built falls silent, and you can no longer avoid asking who you are? For Rebecca Douglas, that pandemic pause opened a different path. Her restless curiosity led her to exploring and photographing the natural world; bringing a new self-understanding beyond the expectations she had tried to meet. From tidal pools to distant horizons, this is a story of finding your own way when the old map no longer fits.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.



"Before long, I became completely captivated by jellyfish. They were unlike anything I'd photographed before; ethereal, alien, and endlessly changing with the tides. I found myself returning again and again, not because I had a photograph in mind, but because I wanted to understand them better."



POSITIVE DISRUPTION
Two blue jellyfish in Walpole Bay Tidal Pool. This image made me rethink my entire camera system and change how I shoot at the wild edges of earth, sea, sky, and self as I moved over to Fujifilm.



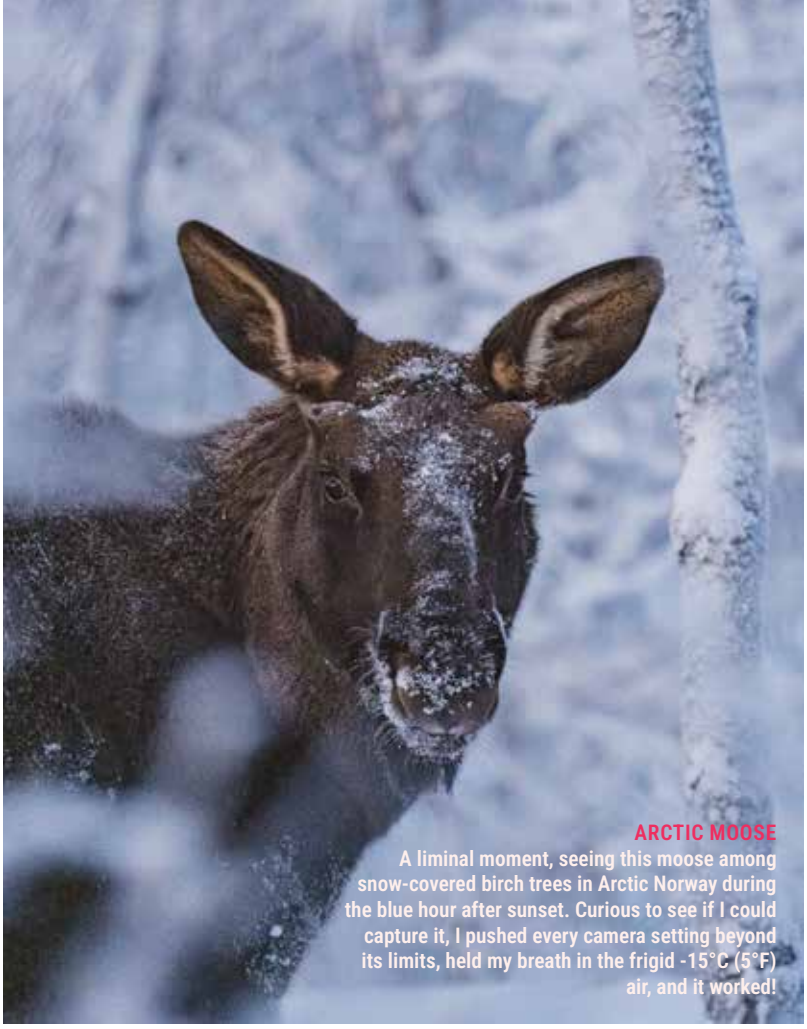
SELF

Standing beneath the aurora, I often think about how many of the most meaningful chapters of my life began by following curiosity rather than certainty. Photography has become a way of translating moments that feel too overwhelming to make sense of as they're happening. There is something so special about being immersed in truly dark places, beneath vast skies that slows everything down and deepens your sense of presence.



UNLOCKING NEW HORIZONS

I often say that photography has become a way of entering into relationship with the natural world. This image represents the moment that relationship deepened. Watching Northern Gannets transform into underwater hunters reminded me that understanding comes through immersion, not observation alone. Some of the most profound changes in my life began not with a plan, but with a single question – and the courage to follow where it led.



ARCTIC MOOSE
A liminal moment, seeing this moose among snow-covered birch trees in Arctic Norway during the blue hour after sunset. Curious to see if I could capture it, I pushed every camera setting beyond its limits, held my breath in the frigid -15°C (5°F) air, and it worked!



GUGA



EARTH
As a geographer, witnessing new land being formed by volcanic eruption felt like watching millions of years of Earth's history compressed into a single moment.
It reminded me that landscapes are never fixed; they are constantly becoming. Perhaps the same can be said for humans too. Photography gives me a way to bear witness to those moments of transformation and share the awe they inspire.





"My own journey has taught me that understanding rarely arrives all at once. It grows through curiosity, through following seemingly insignificant questions, and through allowing ourselves to wander beyond the edges of what we already know."



WE PROTECT WHAT WE LOVE

MIDNIGHT SUN PUFFIN WESTMANN ISLANDS ICELAND



BEARING WITNESS

As President of Whale Wise, I volunteer to help document humpback whales and support long-term citizen science in Iceland. Every fluke is unique, allowing individual whales to be identified and tracked over time. Photography becomes more than an image; it becomes a way to contribute to research, deepen understanding, and help protect the species.



SKY (picture below)
I've never been content simply admiring a landscape; I want to understand it. This Arctic sky held a rare combination of a sun pillar illuminating tiny ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere, lenticular clouds formed as air flowed over mountains, and delicate Kelvin–Helmholtz waves revealing wind shear high above. The more I learned to read the language of weather, the more every landscape became layered with meaning. Photography became not just a way of recording what I could see, but of understanding the invisible processes shaping what I was witnessing.





REBECCA DOUGLAS - NEVIS RANGE



LAURA SINGING AT THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS during the Franco-German Journalism Awards.
Photo credit: Arthur M. Burt, Agence Le Menu

Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

Finding her own voice:

The journey of Laura Kleinas

HI LAURA! THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME TODAY AND FOR SHARING YOUR INSPIRING JOURNEY WITH US. YOU ARE A MUSICAL PERFORMER AND VOICE-OVER ARTIST. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AND YOUR JOURNEY IN A FEW WORDS?

I would describe myself as a Franco-German artist with an unconventional path, guided above all by intuition and curiosity. I come from a background far from the artistic world, but music has always held an essential place in my life – as a refuge, a means of expression, and a way to connect with others.

My journey has been built step by step, through studies, the stage, voice acting, and a wide range of experiences. I didn't follow a predetermined path; rather, I moved forward by following what made me feel alive. Today, I consider myself, above all, an interpreter: someone who tells stories and conveys emotions through her voice, acting, and stage presence.

THE BEGINNING: A CHILDHOOD DREAM

MUSIC HAS BEEN PART OF YOUR LIFE SINCE A VERY YOUNG AGE. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST REALIZED THAT PERFORMING WAS MORE THAN A HOBBY AND MIGHT BECOME YOUR PATH?

It came gradually. There was a first spark when I sang When You Believe as a soloist in a choir: I realized that my voice could touch others. But at that time, I didn't think it could become a profession.
It was mainly the experiences that followed that confirmed something within me. During auditions, even though I didn't do many at first, I very often made it through the entire process – sometimes becoming a finalist, sometimes coming very close to getting a role. That repetition helped me understand that there was something consistent, almost like a natural direction. Little by little, without it being a sudden decision, I began to feel that maybe this was where I belonged.

LOOKING BACK, WHAT KIND OF YOUNG GIRL WERE YOU? WHAT DREAMS AND AMBITIONS DID YOU HAVE?

I was a very dreamy, rather introverted child. I spent a lot of time alone, and music, cartoon songs, and stories were a powerful form of escape.

I didn't necessarily have concrete ambitions at that time, but I already had a deep sensitivity to emotions, voices, and atmospheres. I could become completely absorbed by a song or a scene, and that's probably where it all started.

EARLY SUCCESS AND ITS LESSONS

YOU PARTICIPATED IN DEUTSCHLAND SUCHT DEN SUPERSTAR AT A YOUNG AGE AND SUDDENLY ENTERED A VERY COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT. WHAT DID THIS EXPERIENCE TEACH YOU ABOUT YOURSELF?

This experience exposed me very early to pressure and to the reality of a highly competitive environment. I discovered a world where everything moved very quickly, sometimes at the expense of artistic exploration and authenticity.

But above all, it taught me to know myself better: to understand what was right for me and what wasn't, and to learn how to set my limits.



LAURA KLEINAS
Singer, Actress, Voice-Over Artist & Performer
FRANCE

IG: @laurakleinas



LAURA KLEINAS
at *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*, 2013.

MEETING SUCCESSFUL ARTISTS AND DISCOVERING THE REALITY OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY CAN BE BOTH EXCITING AND CHALLENGING. WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST LESSONS YOU TOOK AWAY FROM THAT PERIOD?

The main lesson is that the artistic industry can be very different from the image we have of it. Everything that appears to be external success is not necessarily aligned with who we are.
But I also take something positive from that experience: the ability to stay true to my intuition, even when the surrounding environment is very powerful.

STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF

AT ONE POINT, YOU REALIZED THAT THE ARTISTIC DIRECTION PROPOSED TO YOU DID NOT FULLY REFLECT WHO YOU WERE. HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO STEP BACK AND QUESTION A PATH THAT MANY PEOPLE WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED A SUCCESS?

Yes, because when you're young, it's easy to confuse opportunity with alignment. There was a sense of external recognition, but deep down, something didn't fully align with who I was.

Taking a step back was a real choice – one that was sometimes uncomfortable, but necessary to remain true to my artistic identity.

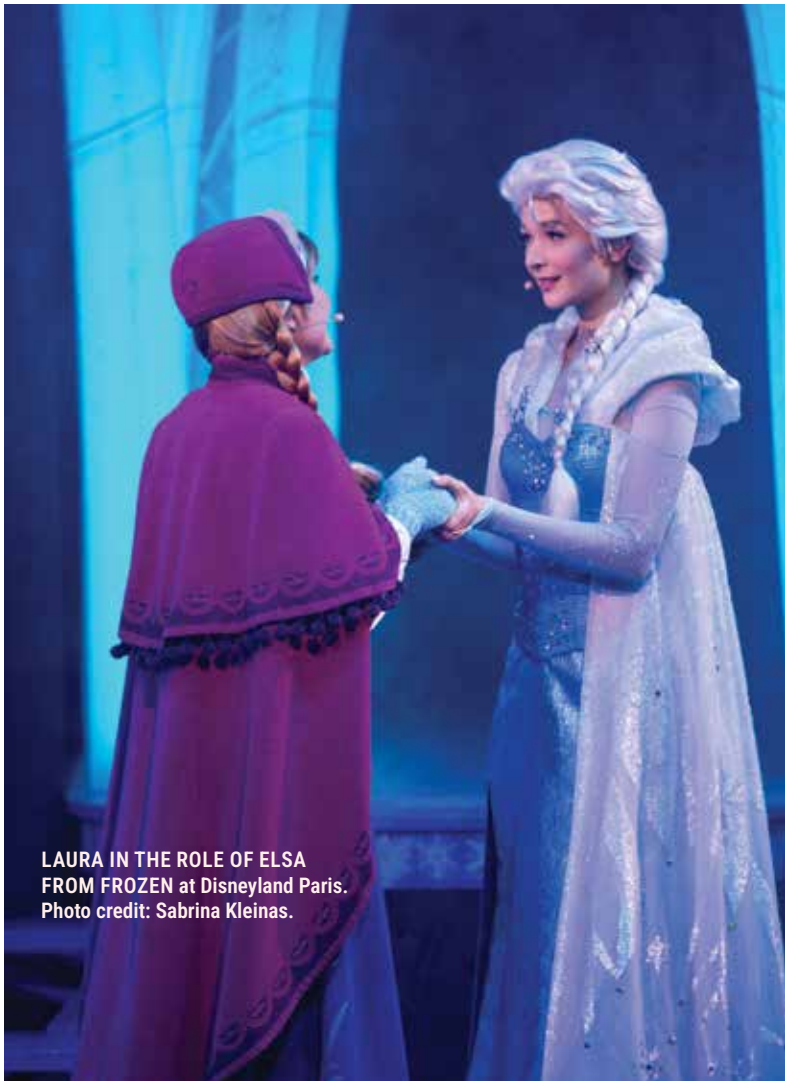
WAS THERE A MOMENT WHEN YOU UNDERSTOOD THAT BEING SUCCESSFUL AND BEING FULFILLED ARE NOT NECESSARILY THE SAME THING?

No, not necessarily a moment, but I understood that visible success does not guarantee inner fulfillment.

For me, flourishing means feeling right, feeling that you are in the right place, even if the path is slower or less linear.

IF YOU COULD SPEAK TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF DURING THAT PERIOD, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL HER TODAY?

I would tell her to trust her sensitivity, even when it seems too strong or too different. And I would tell her not to be afraid to slow down, because every step has meaning, even when we don't understand it yet.



LAURA IN THE ROLE OF ELSA FROM FROZEN at Disneyland Paris. Photo credit: Sabrina Kleinas.



For me, flourishing means feeling right, feeling that you are in the right place, even if the path is slower or less linear.

LAURA RECORDING
for a voice-over project in a studio in Paris

CHOOSING A DIFFERENT PATH

YOU DECIDED TO PURSUE STUDIES IN FRENCH GERMAN MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSES, A VERY DIFFERENT DIRECTION FROM THE ARTISTIC WORLD. WHAT MOTIVATED THAT CHOICE?

After that period, I needed stability and perspective. I chose a Franco-German master's degree in management and international business that gave me structure, practical experiences, and an international outlook, while still allowing me to stay connected to the creative world through internships.

Deep down, I always felt that this path wasn't quite right for me. Although the international aspect of my studies resonated with me, I never truly felt in my element. Yet, pursuing this degree provided a sense of stability – something the unpredictable world of art could not guarantee. I don't regret this chapter of my life; it introduced me to incredible women (the program was predominantly female) and opened my eyes to the power of female solidarity and support. It was also during an internship connected to this master's program, at a sound identity agency in Düsseldorf, that I discovered the fascinating world of voice-over work.

DURING THOSE YEARS, WHAT MADE YOU REALIZE THAT MUSIC AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION WERE STILL ESSENTIAL PARTS OF WHO YOU ARE?

Even when I was following a more academic path, music always found a way back into my life. Through covers, recordings, and eventually discovering voice acting, I realized that artistic expression was part of my deepest identity.
Social media also played an unexpected role. They allowed me to be noticed for different projects, including one that was particularly meaningful: participating in a short film directed by an animator and director who had a long history of collaborating with Disney. I performed one of the last songs written by the Sherman brothers in both French and German – the iconic composers behind many Disney classics.

This project held a very symbolic meaning for me. I grew up with their songs, and finding myself years later performing one of their final works was a deeply moving and almost surreal experience.

STARTING OVER REQUIRES COURAGE. WHAT GAVE YOU THE CONFIDENCE TO RETURN TO THE CREATIVE WORLD?

It wasn't a single moment, but rather an accumulation of small experiences: voice-over work, early projects, positive feedback, and meaningful encounters. All of these gradually showed me that I had a place in this universe.

FINDING YOUR PLACE IN MUSICAL THEATRE

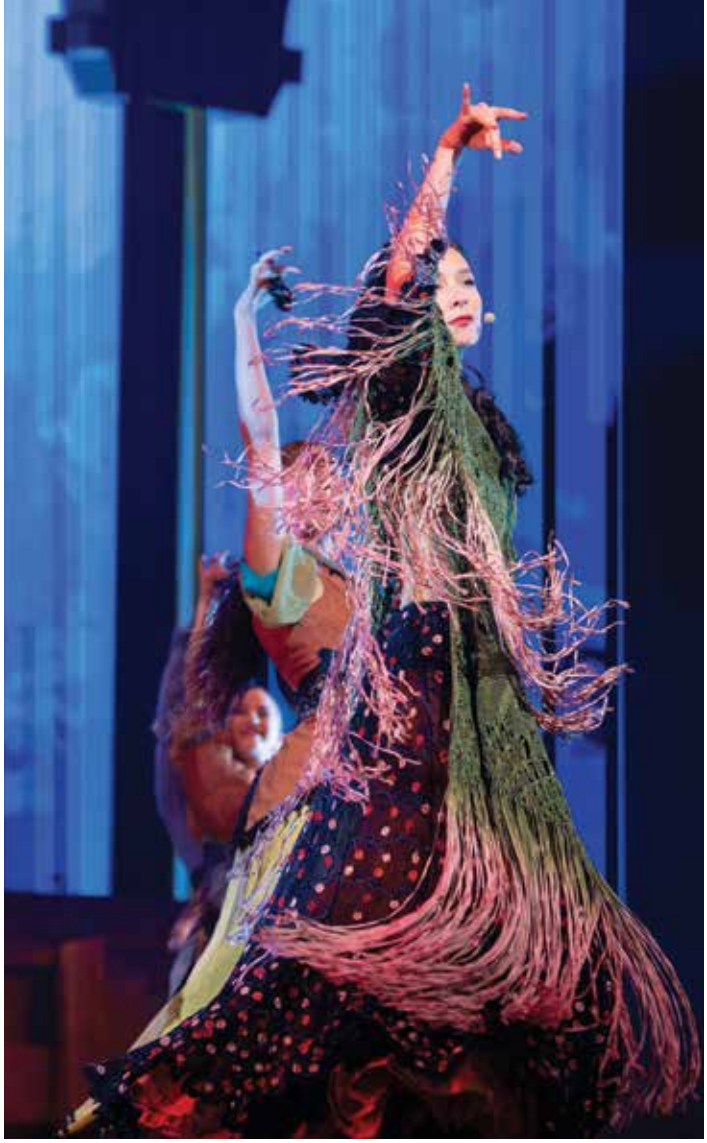
VOICE-OVER WORK BECAME ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS OF YOUR RETURN TO THE ARTS. WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS PROFESSION?

Voice-over work attracted me because the voice becomes the sole tool for conveying emotion. You no longer rely on the body or image, but only on intention. For me, there is something very pure about that.

LATER, YOU FOUND YOUR PLACE IN MUSICAL THEATRE. SINGING WAS ALREADY FAMILIAR TO YOU, BUT ACTING AND DANCING BROUGHT NEW CHALLENGES. WHAT DID LEARNING THESE DISCIPLINES TEACH YOU ABOUT YOURSELF?

Musical theatre taught me rigor, endurance, and versatility. It is a complete art form that requires combining singing, acting, and movement in the same moment of truth.
I had to step out of my comfort zone, especially through dance and physical work on stage. This allowed me to gain confidence and discover abilities I didn't know I had.

My experience as an alternate was also incredibly formative. We often have less rehearsal time and fewer opportunities to



LAURA IN THE ROLE OF ISABEL FROM DON JUAN
Photo credit: Yue Qms

perform on stage than the main cast, while still needing to be prepared to cover multiple roles at a very high level. This requires great adaptability, strong discipline, and constant preparation. In hindsight, these demands were one of the best possible forms of training.

WAS THERE A ROLE, A PRODUCTION, OR A MOMENT ON STAGE THAT MADE YOU FEEL YOU HAD FINALLY FOUND WHERE YOU BELONG?

My first professional projects were particularly memorable, especially when I played Elsa at Disneyland Paris. It was the first time I truly experienced the reality of performing on stage in front of an audience, with all the responsibility and magic that it involves.

Later, international tours represented a real turning point in my journey. Playing in South Korea, Eastern Europe, and China allowed me to discover different cultures while seeing how deeply music and emotions can transcend borders. These experiences were demanding, but they helped me grow enormously, both artistically and personally.

LAURA IN THE ROLE OF ELVIRA FROM DON JUAN
Photo credit: CDHT CPAA Grand Theatre, Chengdu (China)





Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

The journey nobody sees



KATARZYNA GAJEWSKA
HRIS Team Leader
FUJIFILM EUROPE BUSINESS SERVICE SP. Z O.O.
POLAND

Why am I writing this?

Not because I believe my story is extraordinary.
I'm writing this for one person.
Someone who may be carrying an invisible weight. Someone who smiles, goes to work, achieves goals, travels, and appears to have everything under control while quietly fighting battles no one else can see.
If even one person reads this and feels a little less alone, or finds the courage to take one small step toward themselves, then writing this will have been worth it.

When I saw the theme of this magazine, I immediately started thinking about journeys.
Many stories are about places, careers, or milestones.
A journey around the world.
A promotion.
A life-changing project.
Parenthood.
Recovering from illness.
Those are beautiful stories.
Mine is different.
The greatest journey of my life happened somewhere nobody could see.

When I was twenty years old, I boarded a plane to the United States on my own.
I barely spoke English.
Only months before, after moving from a smaller city to Kraków for university, I would cross the street if I heard people speaking English because I was afraid someone might ask me for directions.
Yet somehow, I found the courage to spend three months working in the United States.
It wasn't easy.
It was exciting, lonely, overwhelming, and sometimes frightening.
When the summer ended, my friends continued travelling.
I flew back to Poland alone from Las Vegas, changing planes a few times, trying to understand airport announcements in a language I hardly knew.
At twenty, I thought that was the bravest thing I had ever done.
Years later, I realized I was wrong.
The hardest journey of my life wasn't across continents.
It was the journey inward.





That journey continues today.
It didn't begin with a mountain.
Or a plane.
Or a promotion.
It began the day I decided to meet myself.
Therapy didn't magically change my life.
It changed me.
And because it changed me, everything else slowly began to change too.
It changed the way I build relationships.
The way I travel.
The way I lead people.
The way I communicate.
The way I experience success.
And, perhaps most importantly, the way I experience difficult emotions.

For years I believed that being strong meant always coping.
Working harder.
Pushing through.
Never asking for help.
Today, strength looks very different.
Sometimes strength is saying no.
Sometimes it is admitting that something hurts.
Sometimes it is allowing yourself to feel disappointment instead of immediately trying to fix everything.
Sometimes it is recognizing anger instead of hiding it behind the need to understand everyone else.
Sometimes it is simply saying,
"I don't know."
Or,
"I need help."
I used to think vulnerability was the opposite of strength.
Today, I believe it is one of its purest forms.

I have fears.
I make mistakes.
And honestly, I hope that never changes.
Because growth isn't about becoming someone else.
It's about becoming more fully yourself.

One of the greatest gifts of this journey has been learning how to build real relationships.
Not perfect ones.
Real ones.
Relationships where I can be honest.
Where I can ask for help.
Where I can disagree without fear.
Where I can apologize.
Where I can simply be myself.
I had to learn how to be with myself before I could truly be with someone else.
Today, building a healthy relationship is one of the achievements I value most.
Not because it simply happened.
But because I now understand what it takes to nurture it every single day.



People often celebrate visible achievements.
A new job.
A diploma.
A marathon.
A mountain climbed.
Looking back, I'm convinced that if I truly wanted to, with enough training, I could run a marathon or climb a much more ambitious mountain.
Those goals feel achievable with time, discipline, and commitment.
What turned out to be far more challenging for me was learning how to build a healthy relationship, communicate openly, recognize my emotions, allow myself to feel them instead of avoiding them, and create the kind of life I had never experienced growing up.
That took years of inner work, self-reflection, learning and consistently choosing to grow, and today I consider it one of my greatest achievements.

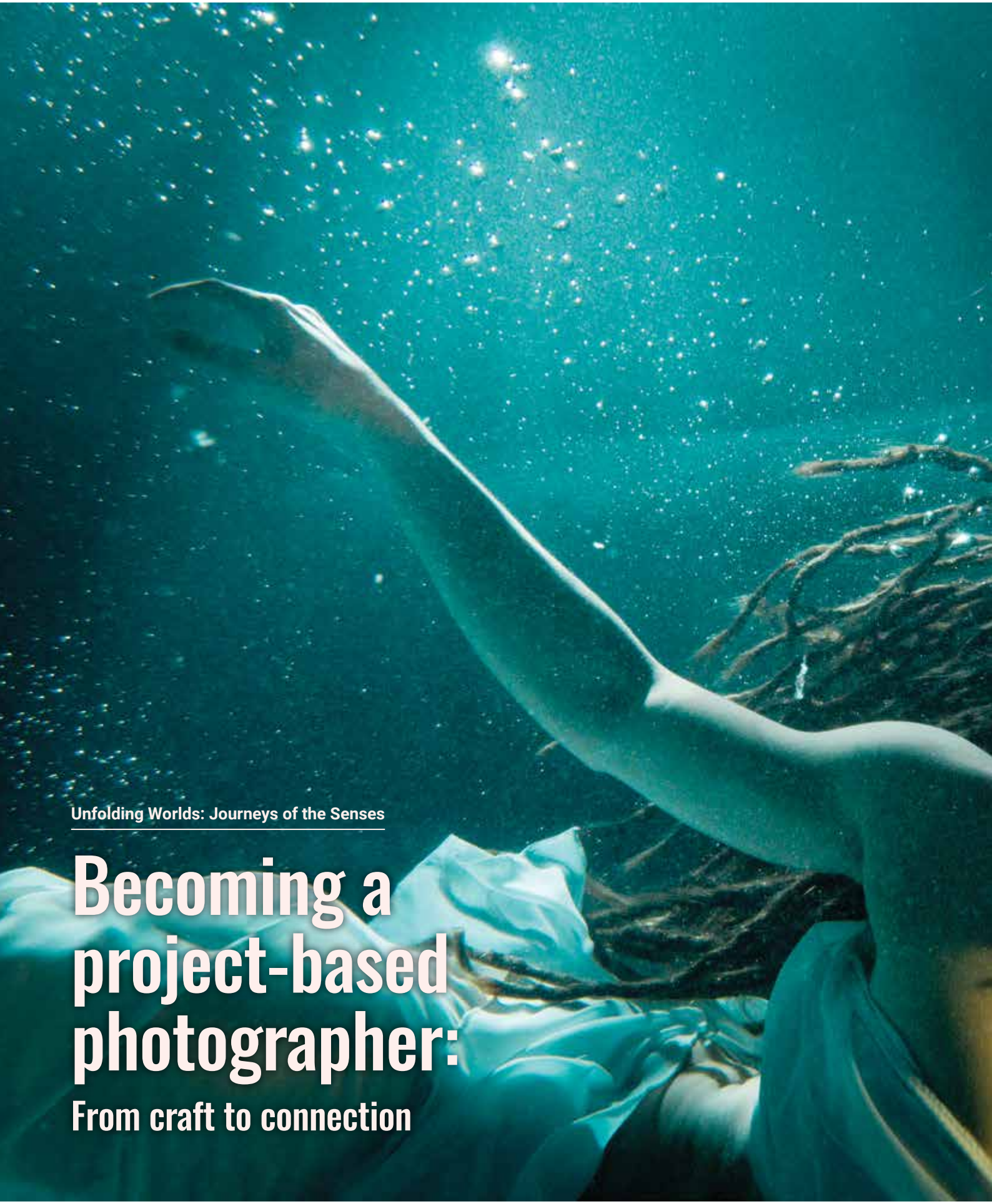
I also see myself as a lifelong learner.
At some point, I realized that growth doesn't happen because of one breakthrough moment.
It happens when you commit to learning, reflecting, and changing over and over again.
That mindset has shaped both my personal life and my career.
The quiet journey changed every visible one.
Travelling became richer.
Relationships became deeper.
Work became more meaningful.
Not because the world changed.
But because I did.



Today, I have a life that twenty-year-old me could never have imagined.
I enjoy my work.
I continue travelling.
I keep learning.
I have people in my life who know the version of me that nobody else sees.
Not because life became easier.
But because I slowly became more present in it.
Today, I don't have a perfect life.
I simply have a life that I'm finally able to experience fully.

I don't think this journey ever ends.
I still discover things about myself.
I have fears.
I make mistakes.
And honestly, I hope that never changes.
Because growth isn't about becoming someone else.
It's about becoming more fully yourself.

If you're reading this while walking a path that nobody else can see...
Please remember that not every important journey leaves footprints.
Some happen quietly.
Inside us.
And although the world may never notice those steps, they might become the ones that change your life the most.
If today you're taking one small step on that quiet journey, I'm quietly cheering for you.



Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

Becoming a project-based photographer:

From craft to connection





BERT STEPHANI
Photographer - Film Maker - Instructor
BELGIUM

IG: @bertstephani
LI: bert-stephani
YT: @bertstephani
Website: www.bertstephani.com

What if a portrait asked you to meet a person before you knew their story? In the project Being Seen, Bert Stephani brings together people touched by poverty and exclusion, volunteers and neighbours, without telling us who is who. The invitation is simple; the encounter is not. Behind his journey from mastering photography to using it for connection lies a deeper question: what changes when we give someone the dignity of our attention?

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.

BERT STEPHANI BIOGRAPHY

Bert Stephani is a Belgian photographer who prefers to work on a project basis, creating personal and commissioned work rooted in curiosity, human connection, and storytelling. His photography often explores what lies beneath the surface, with a strong focus on people, atmosphere, and the transformative power of the photographic encounter. Alongside his photographic practice, Bert shares his experience through workshops, talks, and educational content. He has been a proud Fujifilm X-Photographer since the very beginning of the X Series system.

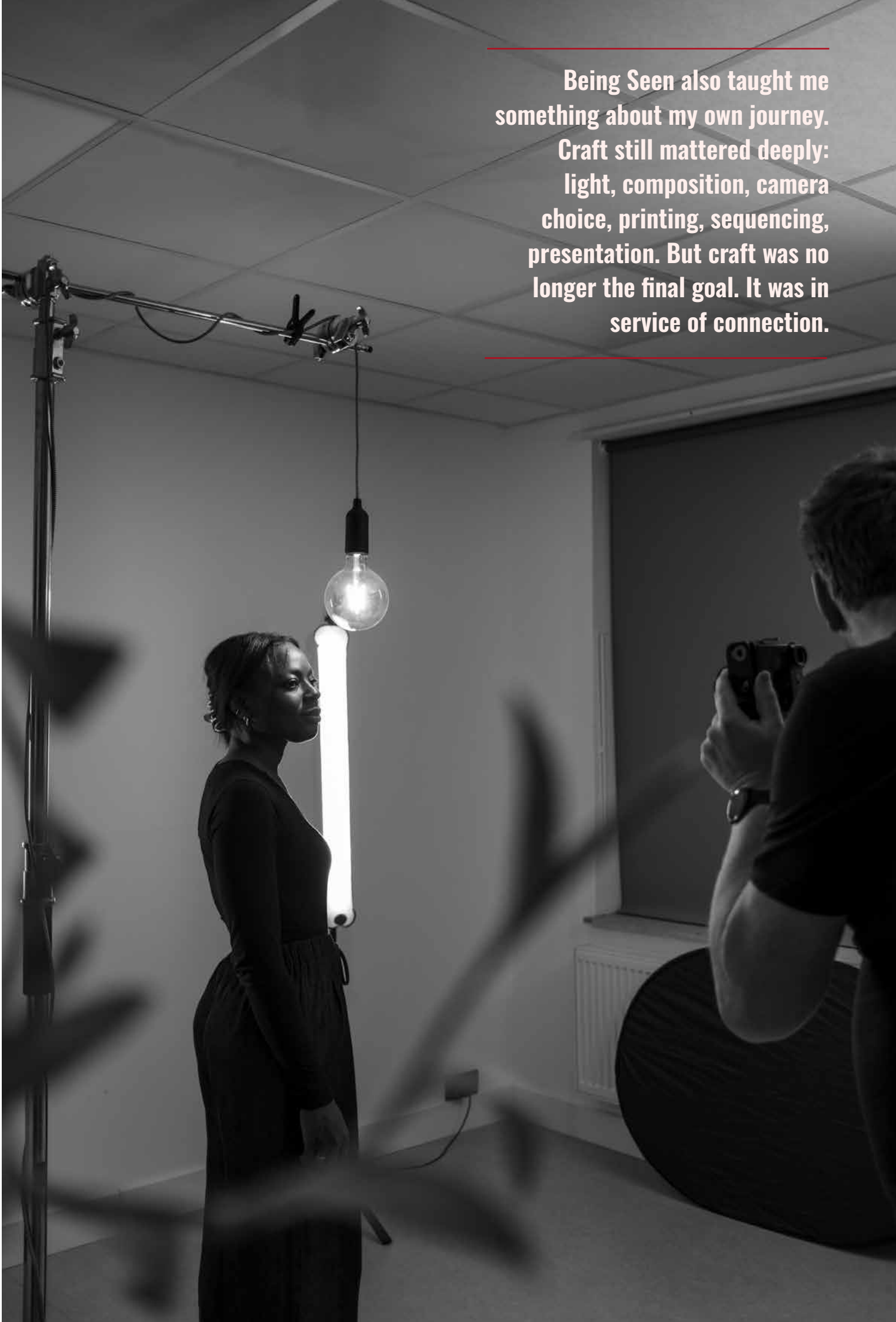








"That choice was essential. Too often, we think we know what poverty looks like. But people are never that simple. A person is not a label. A portrait should not reduce someone to a problem. I also wanted to make visible something that is still too often forgotten: poverty is not a choice, and it is not simply someone's fault. It is connected to systems, circumstances, health, opportunities, luck, and the way society includes or excludes people."



Being Seen also taught me something about my own journey. Craft still mattered deeply: light, composition, camera choice, printing, sequencing, presentation. But craft was no longer the final goal. It was in service of connection.







"In an ideal world,
I would dedicate all
my working time and
energy to personal
and socially relevant
projects. But the ideal
world does not exist.
So the journey is about
balance.
A part-time job outside
photography and
a carefully chosen
selection of client work
help pay the bills.
That peace of mind
creates creative
freedom."











Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Health, citizenship, and inclusion in riverside communities of the Amazon

For 25 years, the organization Voluntários do Sertão has brought together volunteer professionals from various healthcare fields to provide free medical, dental, legal, and social services to people living in regions of extreme social vulnerability.

For the 2026 edition, the territory chosen for the initiative was Parintins, a Brazilian municipality located in the state of Amazonas, situated on the island of Tupinambarana.

This region is known for its cultural richness but also for the logistical challenges posed by the great distances and the complex geography of the Amazon region. The city is world-famous for hosting the Parintins Festival, a folkloric competition between the boi-bumbás (traditional oxen characters). This grand spectacle celebrates

Amazonian culture through legends, indigenous rights, and regional figures, told to the sound of toadas (traditional songs) and showcasing allegories of Brazilian culture.

This initiative brought together more than 200 volunteer professionals from various fields to establish a comprehensive healthcare structure, together with partner companies such as Grupo Fleury, Fujifilm do Brasil, EMS, and Unimed. We also partnered with the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), with equipment, supplies, and teams transported to the region to enable a true humanitarian operation.

Fujifilm do Brasil, in partnership with Grupo Fleury, provided the initiative with an FDR Xair, a Sonosite M-Edge II, and a Dri-chem NX600, enabling X-ray, ultrasound, and biochemical testing, supporting diagnosis and clinical decision-making throughout the initiative. This was especially important considering that, for many families, travelling to the nearest healthcare centre requires hours of river travel, making consultations, examinations, and treatments distant from their daily reality.

In total, our partnership enabled 2,174 people to receive care through the delivery of 3,718 diagnostic and laboratory services, including:

- **402 patients received 1,693 laboratory tests.**
- **1,331 patients underwent 1,584 diagnostic imaging procedures, including X-rays, ultrasounds, mammograms, and electrocardiograms (ECGs).**

Across the entire initiative, a total of 45,890 consultations and healthcare services were provided.

The numbers are impressive, but it is the stories behind them that truly reveal the scale of the initiative's impact. Many of the patients we treated travelled for hours by boat to reach the treatment site. In some cases, it was their first opportunity to undergo laboratory examinations, consult a specialist, or investigate symptoms that had accompanied them for years. Access to a diagnosis – something so common for those living in large urban centres – represented a real opportunity for these people to improve their quality of life. By bringing access to healthcare, quality care, and better health outcomes to these communities, the initiative demonstrated its positive social impact.

During the days of the initiative, city schools were transformed into fully functional field hospitals. Classrooms gave way to consultation rooms, laboratories, diagnostic imaging areas, and welcoming spaces for the population, and local partnerships enabled the use of surgical centres in the city. What is normally an



environment dedicated to education became home to a broad healthcare network, prepared to serve thousands of people.

Participating in this large-scale project was one of the most remarkable experiences of my professional and personal journey. More than a healthcare initiative, the project represented a powerful demonstration of solidarity, collaboration, and commitment to human dignity, bringing specialized healthcare to communities that face daily challenges in accessing basic healthcare services.

I had the opportunity to participate in this mission as the person responsible for laboratory services. My role involved supporting biochemical testing that informed diagnoses, clinical decisions, and patient follow-up throughout the initiative.

Working in a laboratory inside a field hospital brought challenges very different from those found in the routine operations of a healthcare facility. Each process needed to be carefully planned to ensure quality, safety, and agility, even amid the limitations imposed by the temporary environment and the characteristics of the region. Still, the dedication of volunteers and the integration among teams allowed the work to be carried out efficiently.

Being among so many dedicated professionals who worked side by side to provide this comprehensive and integrated care was undoubtedly the key to the project's success. This multidisciplinary approach demonstrated that caring for people goes far beyond treating diseases. It also means contributing to access to rights, information, and opportunities that promote a more dignified life for all.



BRUNA CORAZZA
Sales Executive IVD
Fujifilm do Brasil Ltda (FSAO)
BRAZIL

Letter to young Vitoria



As I was writing this letter, at first, I remembered many good moments from my past. But slowly, memories of difficulties and insecurities started to come back too. It made me think about how life might have been different if I had taken other paths or made different choices. Honestly, trying to figure it all out hasn't given me clear answers – but it has brought me peace.

It took me a long time to understand why I had to start working at 15 while my friends were still enjoying their free time after school. Why my parents couldn't afford all the toys other kids had, or why I had to leave my old school and switch to a public one so different from what I was used to. I don't think we ever truly know the reasons behind our struggles, but what matters is what we learn from them.

So far, I've learned that chasing my dreams is always worth it. I've learned to care deeply for the people I love and to cherish special moments. Most importantly, I've learned to stay present – because you never know when a special moment will happen. It could be something as simple as a family lunch or the sound of birds singing on a sunny day.



Writing this letter reminded me of the little girl I once was – the dreams she had, and the fear she carried about making new friends at a new school. That fear stayed with me for a long time, but now it seems small and even a little silly. Yet, it made me think about the fears and doubts I am facing today:

Am I doing the right thing?
At 35, should I focus on having a baby or building my career?
Am I really good at what I do, or did I just get lucky?
Should I buy a house first, pay the bills, save for retirement, or travel the world?

It seems that fear and doubt will always be a part of our lives, no matter what we do or how hard we try to run from them.

I remember travelling to Scotland to volunteer and work with children and young adults with disabilities.

I was afraid my rubbish English wouldn't be enough, afraid to be away from my family and friends for so long, afraid that something bad would happen back home in Brazil and I wouldn't be there, afraid I had taken a bigger step than I could handle at the moment... But afraid or not, I took the chance, closed my eyes, and jumped into this new adventure and opportunity. It was a challenging journey, but it brought me wonderful friends, helped me improve my English, and gave me the chance to explore Europe – something little Vitoria had always dreamed of but never, even in her wildest dreams, thought would become a reality.

Today, I know that everything I've faced has shaped the woman I am. There's still so much to learn, to grow, and to achieve – but honestly, I'm proud of who I've become.
And I'm excited to see all the new adventures that lie ahead.

My family didn't give me all the things I wanted as a kid, but they gave me love, they showed me how to believe in myself, and always encouraged me to take chances and pursue my dreams.

And that is definitely the greatest thing they have ever done for me.



VITORIA RIBEIRO DA SILVEIRA ROMANO
E-commerce Coordinator
Fujifilm do Brasil Ltda (FSAO)
BRAZIL

LI: vitoria-ribeiro-da-silveira

Hi Kiddo,

You're still just a kid. You don't know me – or yourself – very well yet, but to be very honest with you, I'm 35 right now, and I'm still trying to figure things out. And that's totally okay.

You're probably trying to take your first steps, stumbling, grabbing everything around to keep walking, falling, getting frustrated, and starting all over again. I'm coming from the future to tell you to keep going, keep trying, and never give up. All the steps we've taken so far have led us to some amazing experiences.

I'm not gonna lie to you, it's been a really challenging journey, but it's been worth it too.

Well, spoiler alert…

Sorry to disappoint you, but you weren't born into a wealthy family.

You're going to need to start working at a very young age, try lots of different things, and you'll also need to study hard to catch up with the real world…

A GOOD EDUCATION is our main goal: take note!

But despite that, we're one of the lucky ones!

Really…

Be thankful for the family we have. They don't have a lot of money, but they're full of LOVE.

They'll support you through every tough path and celebrate every victory, even the smallest ones!

FAMILY is one of our most PRECIOUS treasures!

Enjoy every single second with them. Time passes too fast, and we don't want to regret not spending enough time with them while they were here.

Don't be afraid of life – go for it!

Don't let others tell you that you're not capable of something... YOU ARE!

Don't rush to grow up – childhood is one of the most magical moments of our lives.

Never lose your kindness and empathy, even in places where people try to bring you down. Those are some of the greatest things about you.

You must help others on your way to the top.

Trust me, you don't need to break anyone down to achieve your dreams!

Never lose your curiosity, we're going to learn so many different things because of that… Really, some will be pretty weird, and others will be amazing.

Dream big… and as soon as you hear about Scotland, be prepared – that's definitely the moment that your life is going to change. Trust me on that.

You're going to find someone very special to love, and you'll be loved back.

Life will bring you very special people – keep them close to your heart and nurture those friendships. They'll become your family! ✦

And last but not least - Have FUN!!

Take care of us, and try to be kind to yourself. ♥

With love,

An older version of you.









Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

Standing for purpose:

Ghiwa El Khoury's journey through reinvention, motherhood, healthcare, and the courage to find her voice

There is an image that Ghiwa El Khoury returns to when asked to describe her journey.

It is not a formal portrait, nor a moment on stage, nor a carefully framed professional milestone. It is a memory from the COVID-19 years: Ghiwa at home, laptop open, camera turned off during a call, holding a newborn in one arm while trying to contribute to urgent healthcare solutions with the other.

Around her, the world was uncertain. Offices had closed. Homes had become classrooms, nurseries, meeting rooms and kitchens all at once. Healthcare companies were working at speed to respond to a crisis that changed how people lived, worked, and accessed care. And in the middle of it all, Ghiwa was doing what so many women know how to do, even when the world does not always see it clearly: holding several realities together.

Motherhood. Work. Responsibility. Innovation. Care. "It was this image of juggling," she recalls. "The image that you can do it all." Not perfectly. Not without compromise. Not without some parts of life receiving less than others at different moments. But with determination, with adaptability, and with the quiet conviction that different roles do not have to cancel one another out.

That image has stayed with her because it captures something essential about her path. Ghiwa's journey has never been a straight line, but it has always carried a sense of purpose. From childhood memories of community work in Ghana to a decade in advertising and corporate communications in Lebanon, from restarting her career in Dubai to building her voice in healthcare marketing, each chapter has brought her closer to the same question: how can work create value beyond itself?

Today, as part of FUJIFILM Healthcare Middle East, Ghiwa works in a field where marketing is not only about visibility, positioning, or product communication. It is also about trust, access, aware-

ness, and impact. Healthcare is not an abstract industry. It touches people's bodies, families, fears, and hopes. A product can support a diagnosis. A screening can change the course of a life. A message can bring someone closer to care.

For Ghiwa, this is where purpose becomes tangible. "When you work in healthcare, you are not just working on a random product," she says. "You are working on something that can touch people's health and people's lives." It is a powerful realization, especially for someone whose earliest understanding of community was shaped far from the corporate world.
Ghiwa grew up in Ghana from the age of three until her mid-teens, before completing the final years of high school in Lebanon. Her memories of childhood are rooted in a strong sense of community. At the time, humanitarian work was part of the world around her. Adults she knew were involved in aid initiatives, and children were often included. They would visit villages, spend time with elderly people, and bring supplies, medicine and support. It taught her something early: that life was connected. That people did not exist in isolation. That giving back was not a grand gesture, but a way of participating in the world.

She would later move into advertising and corporate communications, building a career in Lebanon over nearly ten years. It was a world of messaging, creativity, structure and influence. She grew professionally, gaining experience and moving up the ladder. But the idea of meaningful work – work that not only generated profit but also contributed to something human – remained with her.

The turning point came in 2016, when she moved to Dubai with her family. Unlike many relocations, this was not a move built around a specific professional role. She arrived determined to find her place again. After almost a decade of experience, she entered a new country, a new market, and eventually a new industry. Her first opportunity in Dubai came in healthcare, through a business development and marketing role in a Swedish company.

It was not a simple transition. She knew marketing, but she did not know healthcare. She understood communications, but not yet the highly specialized language, pace and responsibility of the medical sector. She knew the Levant, but not the full complexity of the Middle East and Africa region. In many ways, she had to go back a few steps to move forward. For someone who had already built expertise and seniority, that kind of restart can feel unsettling. But it also became one of the most defining chapters of her journey.

She had been searching for work that would give meaning to the long hours spent away from home. Healthcare offered that. She could see that a business could grow while also serving a wider purpose. She could see how solutions, devices and technologies were connected to patients, hospitals, communities, and outcomes. It was not only about selling. It was about understanding the story behind the solution.



At FUJIFILM, that sense of purpose has deepened. The company's philosophy of "Value from Innovation" resonates with her because it connects progress with contribution. Innovation, in this context, is not only about creating something new. It is about creating something useful, relevant and capable of improving lives.

In her role, Ghiwa works across the Middle East and Africa, a region of vast contrasts, opportunities, and needs. Africa, in particular, represents an important area of growth and impact. She speaks about healthcare initiatives that bring screening closer to remote communities, including vehicles equipped with portable X-ray devices that deliver imaging services to areas where access would otherwise be limited. In the case of tuberculosis, early screening can be critical. The technology matters, but so does the ability to deliver it where it is needed. She also refers to breast cancer awareness and early detection campaigns, another area where communication and healthcare meet in a meaningful way. A campaign can encourage someone to act. A message can make early detection feel less distant. A story can make a medical priority feel personal.

For Ghiwa, marketing in healthcare must therefore carry more than a commercial function. It must help translate innovation into understanding. It must bring visibility to impact. It must support sales,



GHIWA KHOURY
Marketing Manager
MIDDLE EAST

LI: ghiwa-khoury

Purpose, for Ghiwa, is not found in one defining moment, but in the decision to keep connecting work with impact, ambition with care, and leadership with humanity.



yes, but also trust, education, and access. That is why the next chapter of her journey is focused on building a stronger, more cohesive marketing vision for the region – one that brings together marketing, CSR, PR, storytelling, and sales under a clearer, more unified voice. It is about adapting global innovation to the specific needs of the Middle East and Africa, while recognizing the diversity of the markets she serves. In many ways, it is also about consolidation: bringing different pieces together so the message becomes stronger, more human and more effective.

But Ghiwa's journey is not only professional. It is also deeply shaped by the realities of being a woman, a mother and a leader. Her typical day begins with school drop-offs. She leaves the house early, takes her children to school, then continues to the office, where breakfast often happens at her desk. Before the day begins in full, she makes lists. Work lists. Personal lists. Tasks carried over from the day before. Emails to check. Meetings to prepare for. Things to order for the children. Activities to coordinate. Pick-ups to confirm. Her day moves between office priorities and home logistics, strategy and school clubs, meetings and meal times. She is usually back home before dinner, moving into the evening rhythm of children, showers, bedtime and family life. It is a routine many women know intimately. The visible work and the invisible work. The professional calendar and the family calendar. The mental load that moves quietly beneath the day.

When asked about the challenges women face, Ghiwa does not reduce the answer to one thing. It is the juggling. It is motherhood and the questions that come with stepping away, even briefly. It is returning after childbirth and wondering how absence will be perceived. It is the pressure of being in male-dominated spaces, particularly earlier in her career when her role included business development and negotiations. She recalls many moments of respect, welcome, and professionalism, but she also recognizes the subtle sense of feeling different when most people in the room are men, when casual conversations, celebrations or negotiations unfold in ways that do not always naturally include women. It is not always about exclusion. Sometimes it is about atmosphere. Sometimes it is about having to find your place in a room that was not designed with you in mind.

Finding her voice took time. Earlier in her career, Ghiwa often questioned whether she had the right to speak up. If there were people in the room with more experience, why would her opinion matter? What could she add that experts had not already considered? That insecurity kept her quiet. The change came gradually, through training, reading, listening, learning, and taking on assignments beyond her immediate role so she could understand other departments and perspectives. Knowledge gave her confidence. Experience gave her substance. Motherhood, unexpectedly, gave her a different kind of authority. At home, she realized her voice mattered deeply. Even when it was soft, it was the voice her children followed. It shaped routines, values, decisions, and emotional safety. That recognition began to shift something in her. If her voice could matter so profoundly in one part of life, perhaps it could matter elsewhere too.

She was also shaped by managers who understood how to create space. Some deliberately stepped back in meetings so she could speak. At first, she wondered why they did not answer when they clearly knew the response. Later, she understood. They were giving her the room to practice her voice. Today, she tries to do the same for others. When she mentors younger women, she remembers her own early hesitation. She encourages them to enter the meeting room, to listen, to contribute, to learn from mistakes earlier rather than later. She believes women can support one another not only through formal pro-



grammes, but through small gestures: making space, offering encouragement, giving a compliment that is genuine, checking in on a colleague after maternity leave, asking what support is needed, or simply making another woman feel seen.

To find her voice, Ghiwa first had to understand what she stood for – and where she would no longer compromise her values.

For Ghiwa, this is what Women4Women means. It is the understanding that no one knows what a woman is navigating quite like another woman. Women may be at different stages – some building careers, some raising children, some trying to have children, some studying, some managing homes, some leading teams – but many of the pressures overlap. They know the weight of expectation. They know the balancing act. They know the questions that are not always spoken out loud. When women support each other, she believes, their different strengths can become collective strength.

Her own guiding principle is clear: "If you don't stand up for something, you will fall for anything." It is more than a quote she admires. It is a philosophy she applies across life. Values, for Ghiwa, are not abstract. They shape the people one chooses to be close to, the relationships one accepts, the causes one supports, the work one does, the boundaries one sets, and the integrity one brings into professional decisions. She admits those values are not always obvious from the beginning. They are often discovered through experience: through what feels right, what feels uncomfortable, what energizes, what drains, what one can tolerate, and what one can no longer accept. Part of her journey has been learning where those lines are.

That awareness is now shaping the leader she wants to become. Looking ahead, Ghiwa sees growth not only in terms of title or responsibility, but in leadership maturity. She is interested in developing the traits that allow someone to manage larger teams, empower others, avoid micromanagement, and continue learning. Leadership, for her, is not a fixed identity. It is another phase of self-discovery. At the same time, she is looking ahead to the evolution of marketing itself. The tools are changing constantly: digital platforms, influencer marketing, AI, data-driven approaches, new ways of connecting with audiences. In a company built around innovation, she sees marketing as part of that same spirit. Innovation cannot live only in products. It must also live in how those products are understood, communicated, and brought closer to the people who need them.

This is where Ghiwa's journey feels particularly compelling. It is the story of a woman who has rebuilt herself across countries, industries and life stages without losing the thread of who she is. A child shaped by community work in Ghana. A communicator formed in Lebanon. A professional who restarted in Dubai. A mother who worked through crisis with a newborn in her arms. A healthcare marketer who sees beyond products to the lives they can touch. A leader still learning how to make space for her own voice while creating space for others.

The journey, for Ghiwa, is not about arriving at one final version of herself. It is about integration. Bringing together ambition and care. Purpose and performance. Business and impact. Motherhood and leadership. Innovation and humanity. And perhaps this is what makes her story resonate so strongly: she does not pretend that women can do everything perfectly, all at once, without compromise. Instead, she shows something more honest. That life unfolds in chapters. That some seasons ask more of us than others. That we may have to start again, step back, speak up, let go, relearn, and define what we stand for along the way.

Her journey reminds us that purpose is not always found in one dramatic moment. Sometimes, it is built quietly, through every decision to keep going, every value we refuse to compromise on, and every space we create for ourselves, and for the women walking beside us.





MAHER TABCHY AND ERIC ROBERTSEN
swimming around the Dubai World Islands March 2025

Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

The Courage to be seen

Yana Tsi's journey from corporate certainty to photography, reinvention, and the quiet power of honest storytelling



YANA TSI
Photographer
MIDDLE EAST

Leaving a familiar career is one kind of courage. Learning to trust yourself without its structure is another. Yana Tsi's journey begins with a film camera and grows into a life shaped by creative freedom, uncertainty and responsibility.



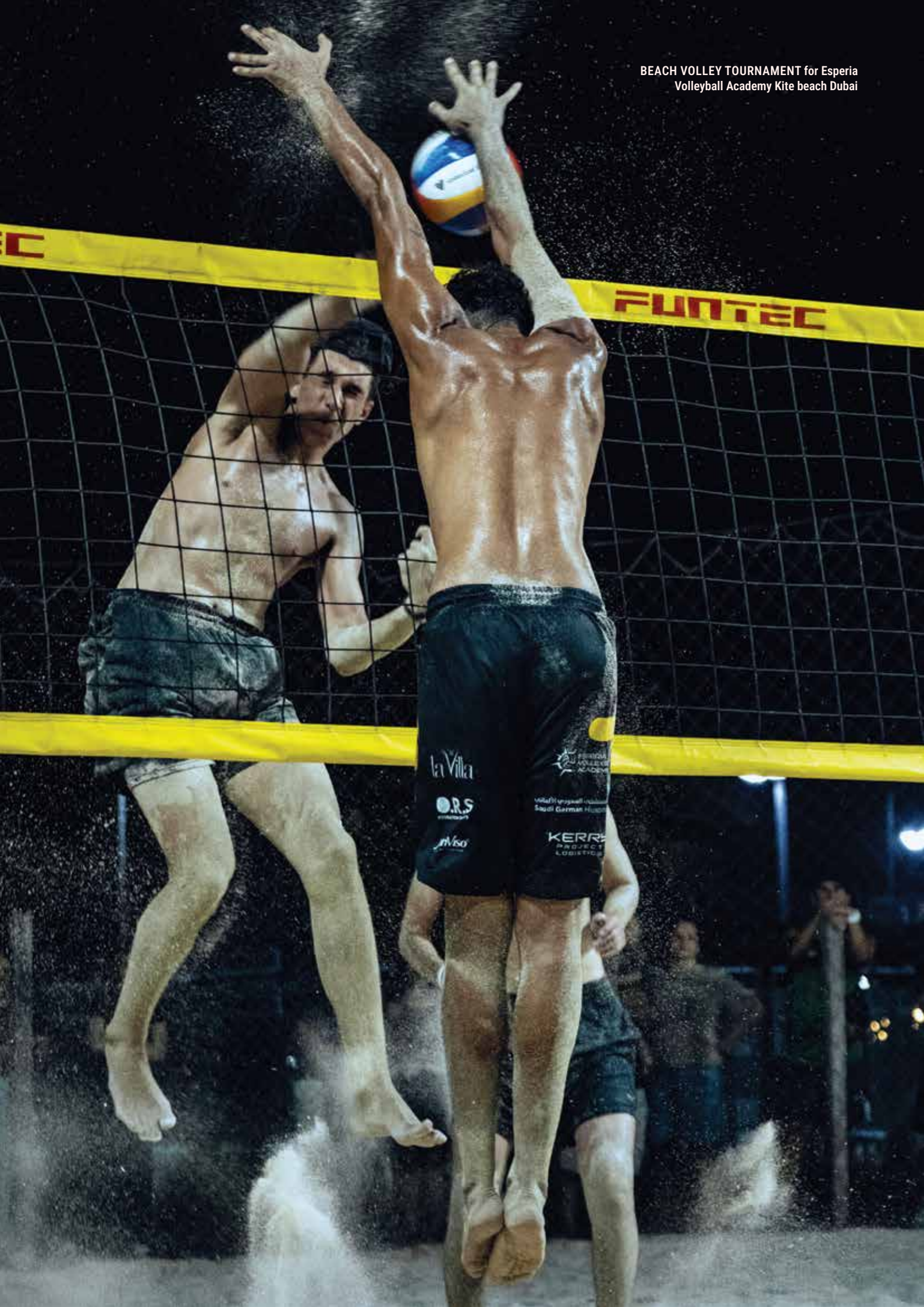
Whether following swimmers through hours of exhaustion or helping someone feel at ease before her lens, she returns to the same commitment: to make room for a story that deserves to be seen.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.

"Before every shoot, Yana prepares with discipline. Mood boards, shot lists, outfit plans, visual references, equipment checks, battery charging, and memory card preparation. She imagines the shoot before she arrives. She thinks about the people, the atmosphere, the story, the key moments she cannot miss. But preparation, for her, is not only technical. It is emotional."



BEACH VOLLEY TOURNAMENT for Esperia Volleyball Academy Kite beach Dubai



BEACH VOLLEY TOURNAMENT for Esperia Volleyball Academy Kite beach Dubai



UNDERWATER PHOTO Fujeirah UAE

"Underwater photography, another passion, has given her a different way of seeing. It combines two things she loves deeply: diving and photography. The first time she was able to take her camera underwater, she wanted to photograph everything: the ripples in the sand, the movement of water, small fish, larger marine life, the details of a world most people never see. She then discovered macro photography and the hidden, delicate world revealed only when one learns to look closely."



YANA TSI at her curated stand at Armenia Art Fair

The more she studied art, the more she understood that creation was not only about beauty. It was about perception. Artists were not simply making objects; they were interpreting the world, translating questions, discomforts, observations, and emotions into visual form.



YANA TSI ART PROJECT



YANA TSI ART PROJECT Sand castle



Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

Factory of hope

FROM SHEEP IN THE FIELDS TO A FACTORY OF HOPE

When I first drove out to the greenfield site outside Hillerød 25 years ago, there were sheep in the fields and more skepticism than support. The idea that a foreign company would invest in large scale pharmaceutical production in Denmark was, for most people, unthinkable.
I didn't share that view. And I started placing bets.

FROM PUBLIC SERVICE TO A CALL THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

My journey began in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and later at Copenhagen Capacity, helping companies wishing to invest in Denmark. One day, the phone rang. It was Biogen, considering a European manufacturing site.

What could Denmark offer?

Talent. A strong life sciences tradition. A culture of quality manufacturing for patients with severe diseases. And we had Hillerød. Biogen was looking at several options – perhaps the Netherlands, perhaps Ireland, perhaps Denmark. I was given three days to find suitable sites, hop on a plane to Boston and show them what Denmark – and Hillerød – could offer. When Biogen decided to proceed with its plans in Denmark, I became deeply involved in finalizing the sale.

BETTING ON HILLERØD

At the time, production was being moved to Asia and elsewhere. People could well imagine research and small biotech companies in Denmark, but not large scale production. Almost nobody believed it.
I made plenty of bets. I also bet a bottle of red wine with the then chief executive of Hillerød Municipality. He didn't believe it either. I won that bet.

Biogen's decision to buy land in Hillerød in 2001 – one of the largest greenfield investments ever in Danish life sciences – proved that a different future was possible for the town and for Denmark.

A SECRET BEGINNING AND A NEW ROLE

From the time I first contacted Hillerød Council in February 2000, it took a year before they realized there really was a company behind all the questions I was asking. Everything went through me, and they didn't know which company was involved.

In February 2001, I was finally able to arrange a meeting at which the local council met Biogen's management and learned who was behind the many enquiries. A few months later, the purchase agreement for commercial land in Hillerød was signed.
Just before the board was due to approve the sale, Biogen's management asked if I'd be up for the job. I said yes – and ended up becoming the first employee at Biogen's site in Hillerød.

BRICK BY BRICK, BATCH BY BATCH

On paper, Biogen had purchased a plot of land. In reality, it was a commitment to build capability, credibility, and capacity in Denmark. Brick by brick and batch by batch, a site took shape that would serve patients far beyond our borders.
For the first five years, I was practically the only employee. One of my first tasks was to arrange for a postbox and ensure that Post Danmark could deliver our mail.
The site turned out to be contaminated, and Hillerød Municipality undertook to clean it up. Once the ground-breaking ceremony had finally taken place, Biogen merged with Idec to become Biogen Idec, and the Hillerød project was put on hold for about a year.

In 2004, construction began in earnest, and in 2006 we were able to move to a different site, where the factory and administrative building were ready. My responsibility was to ensure that we recruited the right people and defined a corporate culture that was our own.
Until 2013, Biogen worked on getting the factory up and running and securing the necessary approvals. By then, production – primarily of the multiple sclerosis drug Tysabri – was in full swing. Biogen had invested more than four billion kroner in building the factory, and the site had become one of Hillerød's largest employers.

A NEW CHAPTER FROM JAPAN

Some years later came the next chapter – this time from Japan. FUJIFILM set out to build a future in biologic medicines. Since then, we have invested, expanded, created new jobs, and strengthened Hillerød as a central part of a global organization with ambitions for patients.

Biogen had started building yet another factory in Europe, this time in Switzerland. Once construction was well under way, it turned out that Biogen would not need quite so much production capacity after all – and so the factory in Hillerød was put up for sale.

I became Biogen's representative in the sales process and was responsible for hosting potential buyers when they visited undercover to view the factory. There was considerable interest: an original equipment manufacturer, a private equity fund, and another contract manufacturer similar to FUJIFILM all came to see the site.

Throughout this process, I was the only person on site who knew that Biogen in Hillerød was up for sale. In August 2017, I received a phone call and was told: "We know you've been classified at the highest level by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so we know you can keep your mouth shut."
Among other things, I had to answer 1,800 questions from FUJIFILM's bank, and I needed information from the staff to do so. Fortunately, nobody asked what I actually needed it for. After eight months, management in Hillerød was informed, but it was only after two years of working in secret that FUJIFILM's acquisition of the factory was announced.
It was a very long process. I'll never do it again. I had to work afternoons and evenings to accommodate the time difference with the US and Japan, and people couldn't understand what I was doing. I found myself making all sorts of good – and not-so-good – excuses.

STEEL, PEOPLE, AND PATIENTS

The takeover was completed in August 2019. FUJIFILM did not merely acquire a large scale production facility. The acquisition also included the workforce, which had grown to approximately 800 by 2019, and it was important to retain these employees.
We've got all this top quality steel in production, but if you don't have the right people who can put it into operation and manage production – which is incredibly complex, time consuming, and sensitive – then the steel isn't worth a thing. So it's the way you've built your organization that's crucial.
Hardly anyone left the company when Biogen became FUJIFILM. My own role changed: at Biogen I was part of the executive board and responsible for communications and liaison with the authorities; at FUJIFILM I work on strategic projects and support the management.

FROM SHEEP IN THE FIELDS TO A FACTORY OF HOPE

What began as Biogen is now FUJIFILM Biotechnologies, one of Europe's largest contract manufacturers of biological medicines and one of Hillerød's biggest employers. The small handful of employees who, together with me, helped get the whole thing off the ground has grown to 1,900 – more than 1,000 of whom have joined since the takeover.

It's fun and exciting to be a small organization. You shouldn't assume that's scalable to a large organization. You have to do things differently there. I think it's been exciting to be part of that process and work out how to do it without losing that cultural identity.

And it's been great fun to be part of building something up. There were sheep in the fields when I first arrived in Hillerød. And look at what's there now. The company has managed to grow into a huge organization and is currently undertaking major expansion projects.
For me personally, it's extremely meaningful to be part of a company that supports customers whose patients depend on what we do. No matter where you are in the organization, you play a part in ensuring that patients receive the medicine that is vital to them.

Our focus is clear: continue building Europe's leading CDMO here in Hillerød. Not big for its own sake, but big in quality, patient focus, and impact – a factory of hope.

I'm incredibly proud of that. And I'm most proud of the fact that I won all those bets on this journey.



BIRGITTE THYGESEN
Fujifilm Biotechnologies
DENMARK



GEORGINA PEREIRA
Photographer
MIDDLE EAST

LI: georgina-pereira

Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Following the unseen:

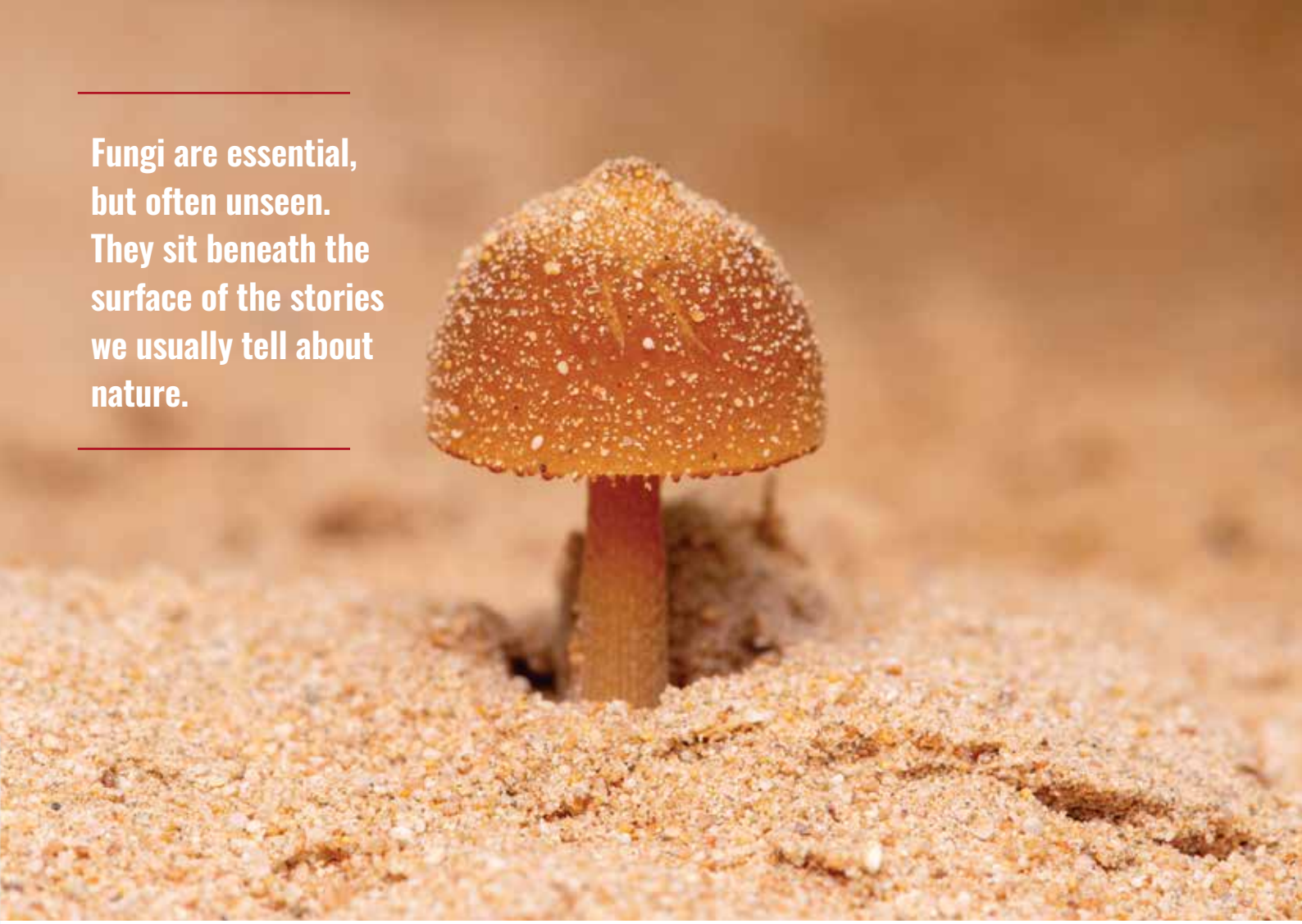
Georgina Pereira's journey from law to desert ecology, fungi, and finding purpose beneath the surface

A childhood curiosity returns in the monsoon rain. A life in law begins to turn towards the living world. Today, Georgina Pereira searches the desert floor for fungi that others walk past, following a purpose that was there long before she could name it. Her journey is about more than changing careers. It is about doubt, belonging and the patience to protect something whose importance is not always visible.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.



Fungi are essential, but often unseen. They sit beneath the surface of the stories we usually tell about nature.







"Play. Go outside. Connect with the natural world. Notice what moves. Watch what grows after rain. Let curiosity return before turning it into a career plan or a mission statement."

"The strongest journeys are not always the ones that follow a clear path, but the ones that bring us back to what has been calling us all along."



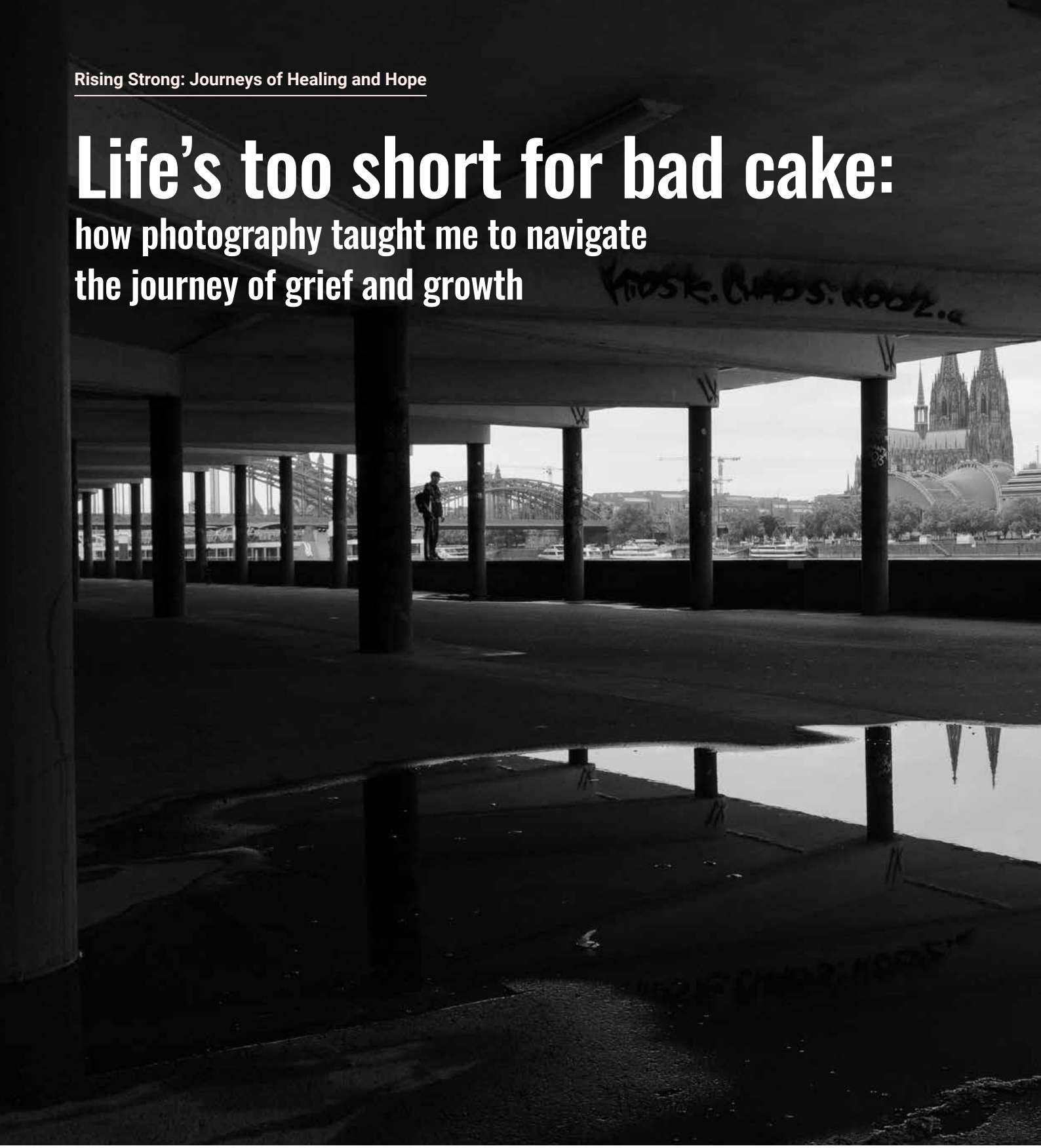






Life's too short for bad cake:

how photography taught me to navigate the journey of grief and growth



"Life is too short for bad cake."
I don't remember exactly when I said those words out loud for the first time. It was probably on a completely ordinary afternoon, staring down at a bone-dry piece of cake I just bought. But over the last few years, this spontaneous remark has evolved into a profound life philosophy for me.





ANNETT LEITGEBEL
Senior Global Mobility Specialist
FUJIFILM Europe GmbH
GERMANY

IG: @annett251
LI: annett-leitgebel

For me, preserving those moments happens through the lens of a camera.

When you experience how radically and without warning life can change its direction – first with the sudden passing of my mother, and then with my father's cancer diagnosis – you learn to grant yourself permission. The permission to refuse what doesn't serve you, to speak your mind (in diplomatic or, if the situation requires, non-diplomatic ways), and to say a resounding yes to the moments that deserve to be preserved forever. For me, preserving those moments happens through the lens of a camera.

THE PORTAL ON THE LIVING ROOM WALL

Growing up in the former GDR, my physical world was bordered. Still, people showed me that it was not always black or white – you can work together with what little you have. I was ten years old when the Berlin Wall fell – just old enough to begin to grasp the magnitude of what was happening around me. But long before the concrete walls were shaken, a small, manual slide projector in our living room had already started to crumble those borders for me.





My father worked as a mechanic on vessels travelling to Cuba and the Mediterranean in the early 1970s. He brought back worlds captured on film with his old Soviet-era camera. While the reality outside our house felt less exciting and sometimes rather watched, our living room walls would light up with deep blue seas, palm trees, and vibrant foreign street scenes. For me as a young child, it was an invitation to dream.

Looking back, those slides taught me a fundamental truth that I would only fully understand years later: it is entirely natural for the world to look different, and it is beautiful to live alongside people of all backgrounds. Photography didn't just capture exotic places; it normalized a diverse world.

We talked about travelling to Cuba together one day or, more precisely, I wanted to convince him to go there again. Sadly, after my mother passed away in 2005, my father lost all interest in long-haul flights. We never made it across the Atlantic. But Cuba never left him. Until his passing, he would regularly tell stories about his time there, his eyes lighting up with fondness; he boasted that he saw Fidel Castro with his own eyes. His memories were frozen in time, preserved by the very medium that eventually inspired me to buy my first Canon camera and start capturing my own journey.

LEARNING SOMETHING 'PROPER'

Despite the inspiration from his slides, my path into photography wasn't a straight line. Like many hardworking men of his generation, my father was stubborn and pragmatic: "Das Kind muss was Ordentliches lernen" – the child needs to learn something proper, he would say. So, I listened and did not pursue my wish of becoming a photographer. I took the practical route, stepping into the corporate world of structures, numbers, and eventually human resources.

But the creative fire he had accidentally lit on our living room wall couldn't be put out. During my training and throughout my career, I used my hard-earned money to buy my own photography equipment and fund specialized courses. I wanted to learn every aspect of photography. I went on to explore everything from street, food, and portraiture to the raw vulnerability of nude, and self-portraiture. I tried different camera systems and landed on my first Fujifilm X-T10, later switching to my beloved X-T3, which is still my trusty companion to this day. Over the past five years, I also rediscovered manual photography – shooting 35mm, or instant film. I even have almost a full shelf reserved in my fridge just for film.

My father and I didn't always see eye-to-eye creatively. While I found immense joy and self-discovery in the artistic expression of nude photography, he simply couldn't relate to it. He preferred my architectural and landscape shots. He liked my pictures of New York more. Yet, even when we disagreed on style, photography itself remained our unspoken bond. It became the tool through which I shaped my own identity, separate from expectations, built entirely on my own terms.

A SHIELD MADE OF GLASS AND STEEL

In October 2023, the world as I knew it fractured (again). The cancer diagnosis came on a rainy day. I remember walking through the streets of Cologne, past the Cologne Cathedral, and heading towards the Rhine, with the earthy smell of wet asphalt and cold rain filling the air, filling my heavy mood. Stunned and confused, I tried to clear the chaos in my head. The shaky, blurred photos I took with my phone that evening are a reminder how messy everything felt.



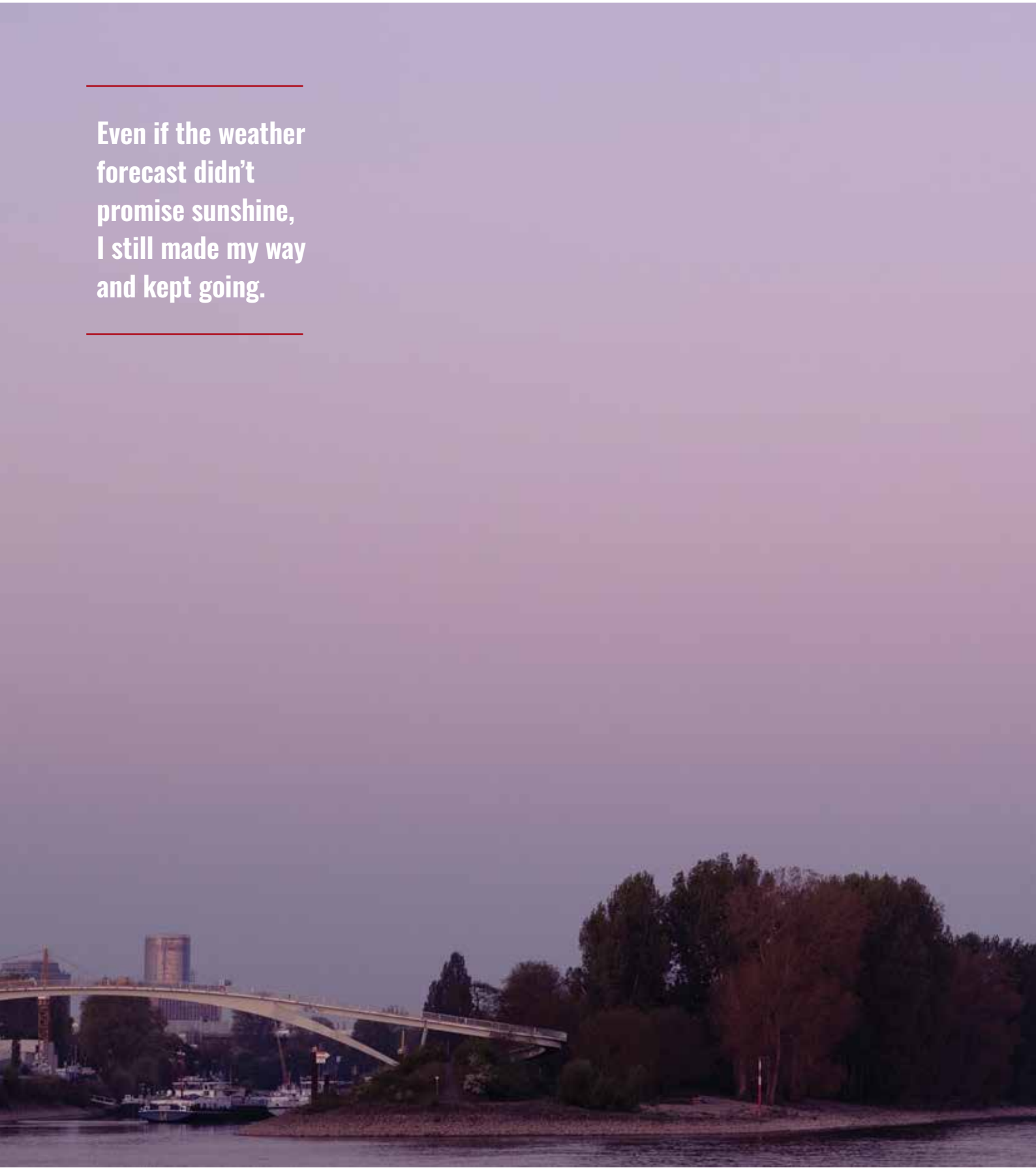


The doctors held back on a definitive prognosis about how much time my father would have. Palliative chemotherapy began, and for a while, it gave us hope. He was, again, stubborn. He did not bend to the three months indicated by the doctors. Almost eight months after the diagnosis, the hospital's palliative care unit eventually became his final home. It was a unique place where regular rules ceased to exist – we were allowed to enter at any hour of the day or night.

That ward had a very specific, unforgettable smell: a sterile blend of sharp chemical antiseptics combining heaviness with a strange, quiet warmth. Everyone knew where this was heading; still, everyone working there made us feel light in those heavy times. Seeing my father in that bed was very painful, but we made a conscious choice not to let the darkness pull us under completely. We still laughed. We still let him call us out on small things. We still took photos together.

When the end was near and past, I took a few photos with my camera; inside the hospital, I used my phone. In those tough moments, the camera was my safe space. It was a literal shield between my eye and a reality that was sometimes too sharp to bear. It gave me the distance I needed to process the grief, while at the same time allowing me to capture reality in a way that helped me deal with it. Today, looking back at those pictures doesn't bring me just sadness – it also gives me strength and joy.

Even if the weather forecast didn't promise sunshine, I still made my way and kept going.





CHASING THE SUNRISE

Healing is rarely a linear path.
It doesn't come from a grand, pre-planned project. For me, healing began with a rather spontaneous spark. On a quiet Sunday morning in January 2025 – months after my father had passed – I woke up much too early. It was still pitch black. I had the option to get back to sleep, but I thought: "If I'm already awake, I might as well take my camera and go shoot in the freezing cold."

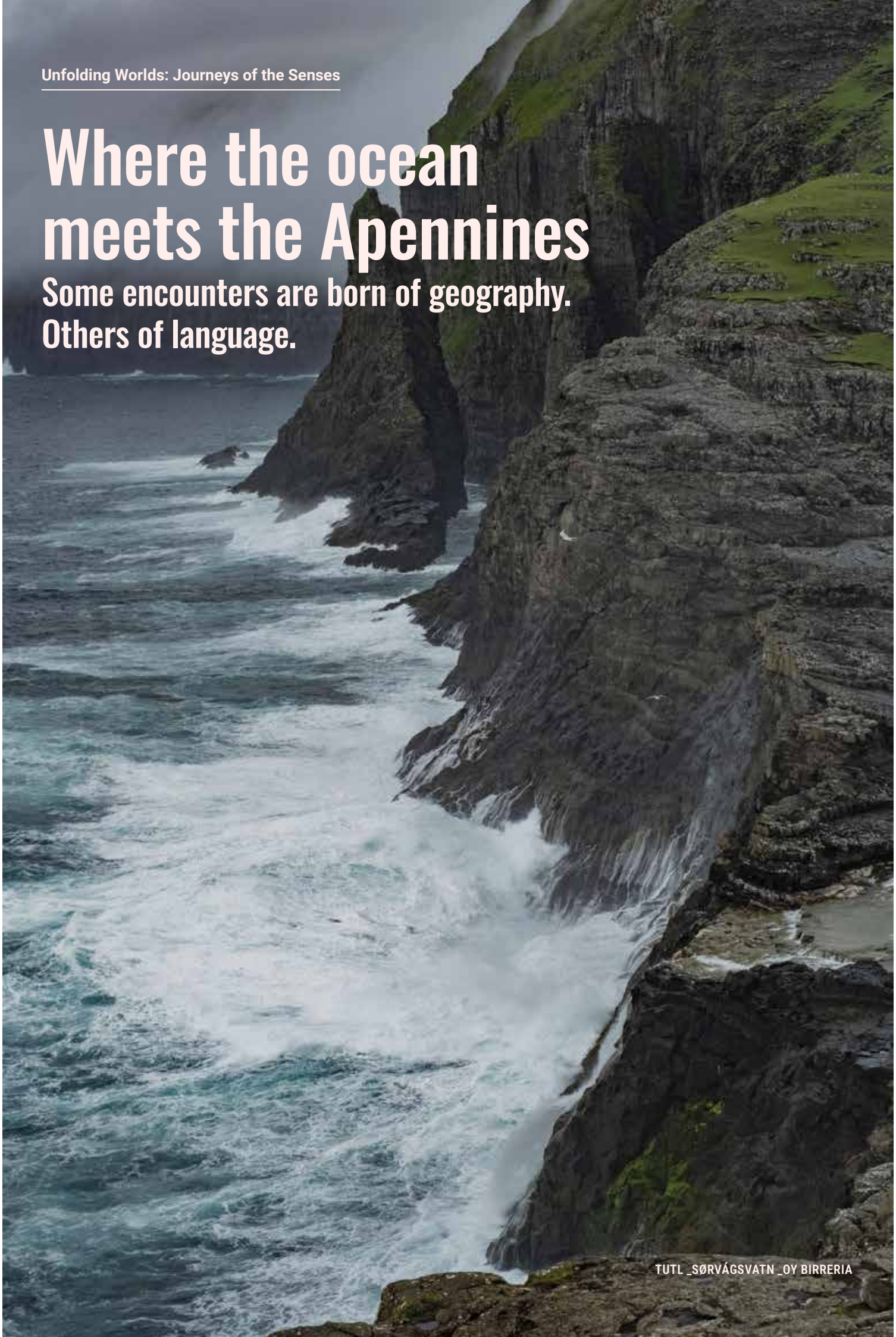
I mapped out a new and unfamiliar route to experience something new while catching the dawn. It wasn't intended to be anything major. But three months later, I realized I started something very meaningful for me. This accidental morning walk evolved into a year-long journey across four seasons, tracking the exact same route as the sun rose. It became my way of navigating through changes and grief, capturing the light returning to the world, step by step. Even if the weather forecast didn't promise sunshine, I still made my way and kept going.

FULL CIRCLE AND A SHARED SMILE

Joining Fujifilm in August 2025 brought my journey full circle. Long before becoming an employee, I loved the precision and look of their cameras. Today, I work in the European HR Global Mobility team, helping colleagues navigate the sometimes-strict rules of cross-border moves. My goal is to simplify these challenges and bring a smile to their faces. Photography didn't just guide me along the way; it also taught me to find light in chaos. Whether capturing a sunrise or guiding a colleague, the mission remains the same: making the complex beautiful, and creating a world with more smiles.

Where the ocean meets the Apennines

Some encounters are born of geography. Others of language.



TUTL _SØRVÁGSVATN _OY BIRRERIA



VALENTINA TAMBORRA
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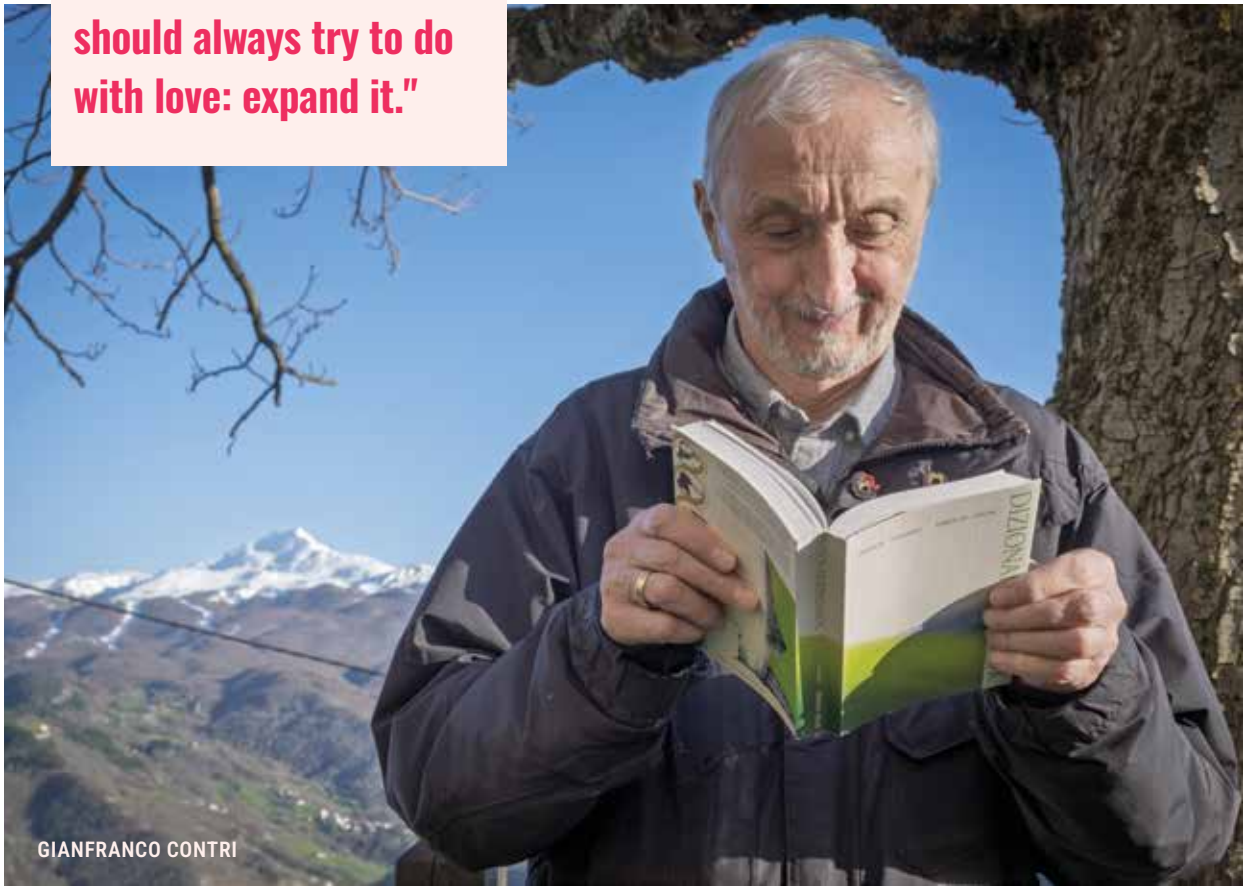
It began with islands on a map and a journey on a green motorcycle. It became a friendship carried across an ocean through words, songs and open doors. Valentina Tamborra follows the unexpected bond between an Apennine village and the Faroe Islands, where a language learned out of love finds new life in another generation. How can places so far apart make people feel so completely at home?

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.



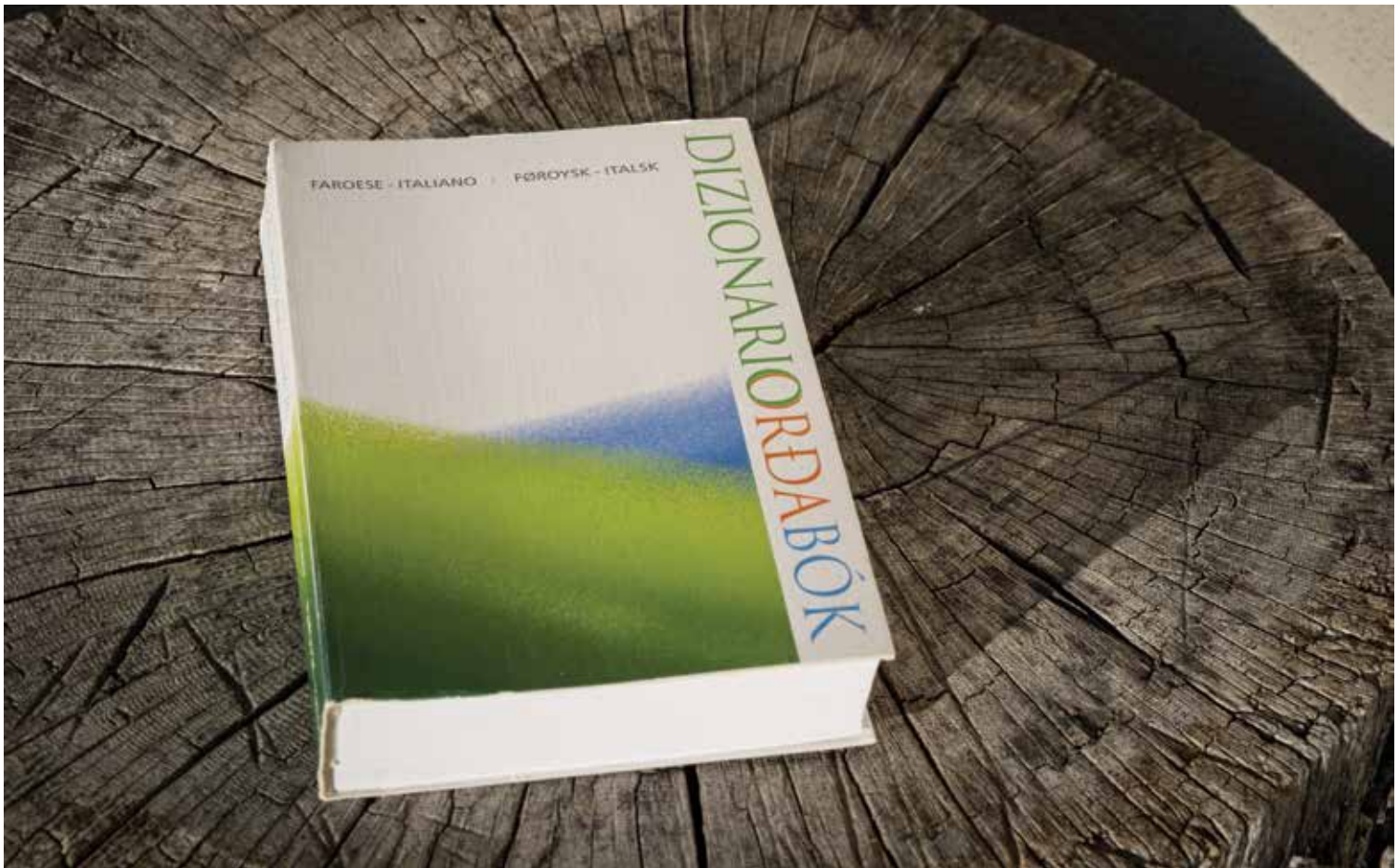
TUTL _SØRVÁGSVATN _OY BIRRERIA

"Gianfranco decided to stay not for a few weeks or months, but for years. When he returned, he chose to do what one should always try to do with love: expand it."



GIANFRANCO CONTRI





RIO LUNATO





TRÓNDUR PATURSSON



"Tróndur works with glass, iron, drawing, and sculpture, changing materials without ever abandoning what he learned at sea: dynamic light, colour that shifts with the sky, a horizon that never remains the same."





TRÓNDUR PATURSSON
AND HIS SON BRANDUR



"Among them stands twenty-one-year-old Ilaria with a dream: to work with horses. She first arrived on these islands about three years earlier, together with Gianfranco and the Maggiolanti, and was spellbound by them."





On this page:
SKASUN FARM





NÓLSOY_VIÐAREIÐI



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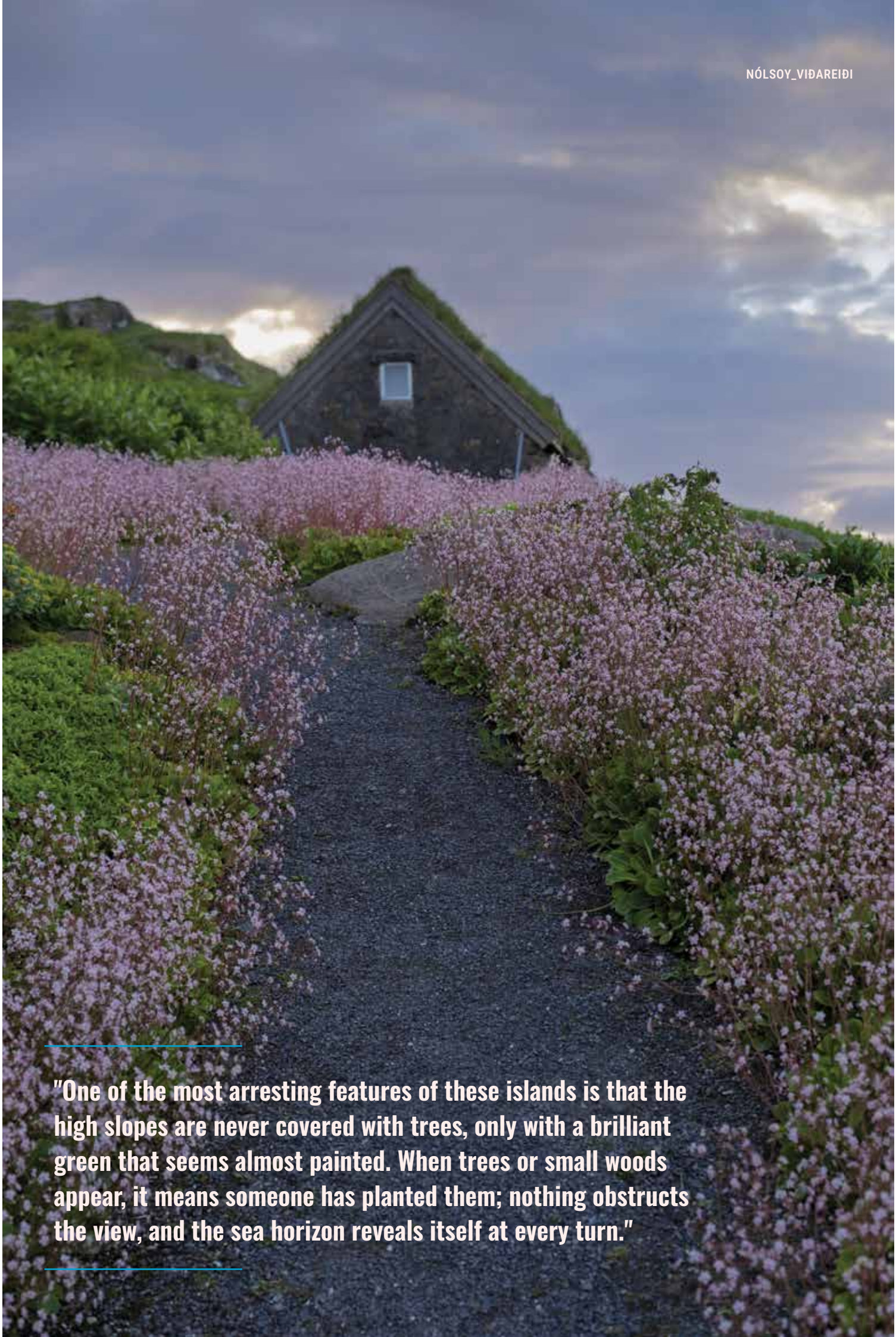

"One of the most arresting features of these islands is that the high slopes are never covered with trees, only with a brilliant green that seems almost painted. When trees or small woods appear, it means someone has planted them; nothing obstructs the view, and the sea horizon reveals itself at every turn."



Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Solo woman travel to Central America

WHAT DO YOU DO? WHAT EXPERIENCES SHAPE YOUR STORY?

I work in a corporate environment, where I manage databases of different systems on a daily basis. In my free time, I love staying active – you can usually find me at the gym, the swimming pool, dancing salsa, or travelling. My story is shaped by my need to explore new things and live on my own terms. Travelling solo through Central America was a big part of that, as it forced me to step completely out of my comfort zone and rely entirely on myself.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SHARE THESE STORIES?

I think it's really important to share these kinds of stories because women are still too often held back by other people's fears. When I was planning my trip, almost everyone was full of doubt and anxiety. By sharing my journey, I want to show that we are much more resourceful and resilient than people think. I want to inspire other women to trust themselves and not let anyone else define their limits.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN YOUR WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE?

What motivates me most, both in my job and in my personal life, is independence and finding solutions to challenges. Above all, I am driven by curiosity and by the great feeling you get when you face a stressful situation in a foreign country and manage to solve it entirely on your own. That's what keeps me growing.

SOLO WOMAN TRAVELS TO CENTRAL AMERICA

What do you feel when you think about a solo woman travelling to Central America? Probably a mix of admiration and concern. This is exactly what I heard from almost everyone when I told them about my plans to travel alone to Guatemala and Panama. "Aren't you scared?" was the question I heard time and again, even by my closest family.

When most people think of a vacation, these are definitely not the countries that come to mind. When you hear 'Guatemala,' you probably think first of travel advisories or general safety warnings. I'm not saying that's completely wrong, but most of us simply don't know how many amazing things Guatemala and Panama can offer visitors. The reality is that people there care deeply about travellers and really want them to feel welcome in their country.



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What helped me not to give in to all those negative thoughts and comments? I had to work hard to stop myself from worrying, and I kept reminding myself of the facts. I told myself: "I speak Spanish well, and I can easily communicate with the locals in their own language."

It wasn't my first trip to this part of the world – I had already been to Cuba, Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico. The only difference was that during those trips, I had travelled with a friend. This time, however, it wasn't possible for us to go together, so I had a choice: stay at home or go alone.

Of course, I didn't just pack my bags and leave without a plan. I prepared for this trip by reading many travel blogs and texting my Mexican friend, who loves travelling to Guatemala and knows the country well. He gave me some really practical tips on how to feel safe there.

And indeed, his advice worked. Staying in the city centres and using transport designed especially for tourists (which is very popular in Guatemala) made me feel comfortable and secure while travelling alone. I also realized that there are quite a lot of solo travellers, both women and men, so it's actually quite easy to meet someone and travel together for a while if you want to.
For my peace of mind and safety, I also kept regular online contact with my friend in Poland, who also speaks Spanish. Every day I told her what my plans were for the next few days. Simply knowing that, if something happened, someone knew exactly where to look for me made me feel much calmer. It allowed me to relax and enjoy the trip.

WHAT DID I GET FROM THIS SOLO EXPERIENCE?

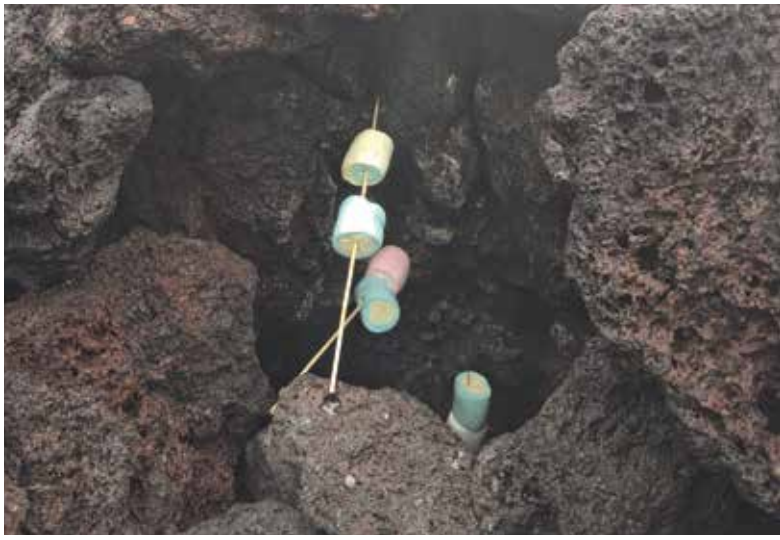
First of all, I gained far greater self-confidence. I did it, I managed everything on my own, and I came back home safe and sound.
Every little success on the road gave me a boost of energy. I passed the immigration controls using my Spanish, successfully got to my hostel, and bought a local SIM card to connect to the internet.

I experienced things that I will never forget: I hiked up the active Pacaya volcano and cooked marshmallows directly on the hot volcanic rocks; I celebrated Halloween in the beautiful streets of Antigua Guatemala; and I went to an amazing concert by my favorite band in Guatemala City.

In Panama, I had the chance to watch the incredible Independence Day parade in Panama City, and I spent two unforgettable days on a paradise island in the San Blas Archipelago. All these moments made me feel truly independent and alive.

DID I HAVE ANY SITUATIONS OF STRESS?

Yes, definitely! My biggest test happened just after that great concert.



I left the venue a few songs before it ended because I wanted to avoid the crowds, but it turned out I wasn't the only one with that idea. I didn't expect such heavy traffic at midnight. The street was completely blocked, with huge numbers of cars going in both directions. To make things worse, there was no response from any Uber.

The clock was ticking, and I started to panic. I needed to get to the other part of the city to pick up my luggage and then quickly get to the airport for my flight.

I was very stressed, and that situation forced me to ask for help. There was a lot of police around, so first I went to them. They were very kind and really wanted to help me, but they had no idea how I could skip that crazy traffic.

Then, I quickly contacted a guy I had met through Couchsurfing (he was looking after my luggage) to ask if he had any advice. He told me about a local 'Uber-like' app where you negotiate the price directly with the driver. I had no other choice. I downloaded the app, found a driver, and walked a bit in his direction to get out of the worst traffic jam. In the end, I managed to collect my luggage and get to the airport just in time.

On solo trips, situations like these push us completely out of our comfort zones. When you are alone, you can't just sit and cry. You need to do something, use your language skills, and ask for help.

Of course, these things don't happen every day, and with good planning, we can avoid many stressful situations. But we can't assume that there won't be any problems at all. Dealing with these challenges on my own showed me how resilient I am, and that was the real transformation I experienced on my journey.

Faithful design begins with hands-on creation



REASONS FOR PURSUING A CAREER IN DESIGN AND MY FOUNDATIONS

I have loved to draw since I was a child, but I never studied it professionally. Until just before graduating from high school, I was completely absorbed in my club activities and had no idea what I wanted to do with my future. Around that time, I became deeply fascinated by mid-century modern furniture, which was frequently featured in fashion and culture magazines. I remember sitting in front of the only computer we had in our living room – back in the days before we owned smartphones – trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my future.

I applied to an art university, but my wish did not come true, so I went on to a design vocational school instead. There, I was fortunate to be in an environment where I studied a wide range of disciplines, including product, spatial, graphic, and fashion design. Initially, I majored in spatial design and I hoped to pursue chair design, but ultimately, I was most drawn to product design. Since many of my closest colleagues were also in that field, I chose to pursue that path.

After graduation, I joined a product design firm run by a former instructor from my school. For about 15 years, I worked on countless design proposals while meeting the diverse needs of various clients. When I first joined the firm, I quickly realized the huge gap between being a student and being a professional. In a demanding environment where we were expected not only to meet but exceed our clients' expectations, I was able to build a strong foundation as a product designer.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY – THE DESIGN PROCESS WHICH I VALUE

If I had to sum up what I value most in the design process in a single phrase, it would be 'getting my hands dirty.' This was considered a fundamental part of the job, so shortly after joining the design firm, I learned it through rigorous training under the guidance of senior colleagues.

It all starts with rough sketches. Even if the image in my head is still vague, I begin by simply drawing it out on paper. When I share these visual ideas with my colleagues, small flashes of inspiration can lead to unexpected discoveries, or they give me the opportunity to take a fresh, objective look at a concept that I thought was 'perfect.' Little by little, several potential directions begin to emerge.

In the next step, I always create a 'form' with my own hands. Using scrap materials, paperboard, Styrofoam, etc., I repeatedly

I believe one of the most important roles of an in-house designer is to translate customers' voices into business value.

rebuild simple models. By turning them into three-dimensional objects and examining, touching, and moving them, I thoroughly verify whether they truly have appeal as products. In recent years, thanks to improvements in computer performance, CAD and 3D printing have become indispensable skills in educational settings. If you aspire to be a designer, mastering these tools as part of the design process is naturally expected. On the other hand, if you start out with CAD and a 3D printer right away – before you have a clear design intention – you can easily create a 'reasonably polished form' with the help of the computer. The less experienced you are, the more likely you are to be satisfied with that result.

That is precisely why I always start by 'drawing' first, before building a model with my own hands. Only through that process do I truly feel, 'This is my design.' I also constantly imagine what the finished product will look like. What kind of impression will it make on users, and what value can it provide? I continuously refine and polish the design and concept by moving back and forth between my thoughts, sketches, and models, always considering the impression the product will leave on users, the value it can provide, and whether it truly embodies the philosophy of the company behind it.

CAD and 3D printing are, of course, extremely valuable and essential tools in product development when refining detailed designs. Yet, I believe that this process of continually sketching, shaping, and creating with my own hands is the true starting point – the foundation that continues to support my journey as a designer to this day.

MY WORK AT FUJIFILM BUSINESS INNOVATION

My work at a design firm was exciting and rewarding, but opportunities to be involved in every phase of a product's journey to market were relatively limited. Over time, I became increasingly drawn to the idea of working as an in-house designer – someone who could take responsibility throughout a product's lifecycle, from initial planning and development through mass production and ultimately its reception in the marketplace. I had also long admired the idea of working in Minato Mirai, and through a fortunate opportunity, I was able to join the Design Centre of FUJIFILM Business Innovation.

What I experience every day as an in-house designer is the direct voice of users. Feedback and requests from customers who actually use our products can be surprising, and they are often a rich source of new insights. I believe one of the most important roles of an in-house designer is to translate those voices into business value, reflecting them in our products and services in ways that enhance both the company's value and its success.
To achieve this, close collaboration with a wide range of departments – including engineering, procurement, and manufacturing – is essential. Working alongside colleagues who bring different perspectives on cost, quality, and productivity, I engage in continual discussion to find the best possible balance. It is a different kind of challenge from my previous experience, but one that brings its own sense of purpose and keeps me motivated in my daily design work.

CREATING PRODUCTS FOR THE FUJIFILM BRAND

The Fujifilm Group operates across a wide range of business fields. In the Business Innovation division, we help customers address management challenges by providing products and services that support workplace transformation and digital transformation. While the products and users vary significantly across businesses, we share a single design philosophy to ensure consistency as the Fujifilm brand: ***Faithful Design***.

The industries, work environments, and cultures of our users differ greatly from one product category to another. For that reason, creating consistency is not simply a matter of applying the same colors or forms across all products. What truly matters is staying close to the people who use them.

As designers, we begin by visiting the workplace itself and listening carefully to users. Above all, we place great importance on uncovering needs and challenges that users themselves may not yet be able to articulate. We then translate those insights into tangible actions, features, and product forms, testing them in scenarios that reflect real-world usage. Is the product truly intuitive to use? Does it create additional operational burdens? How will it affect productivity? By examining these questions together as a design team and continuously refining our prototypes, we gradually improve the quality and precision of the design. Through this process, we begin to see whether a product can become something people genuinely need.

There is rarely a single 'right answer' in design. That is precisely why I believe it is our responsibility as designers to follow this process carefully and engage sincerely not only with the products and services themselves, but also with the environments and constraints that shape them. By doing so, a natural and authentic consistency emerges. To me, that is the true embodiment of Fujifilm's design philosophy – ***Faithful Design***.
While my journey as a designer is still a work in progress, I will continue to move forward with the spirit of ***Faithful Design***, striving to create things that are truly needed by people and society.



MASAHIKO YAMAMOTO
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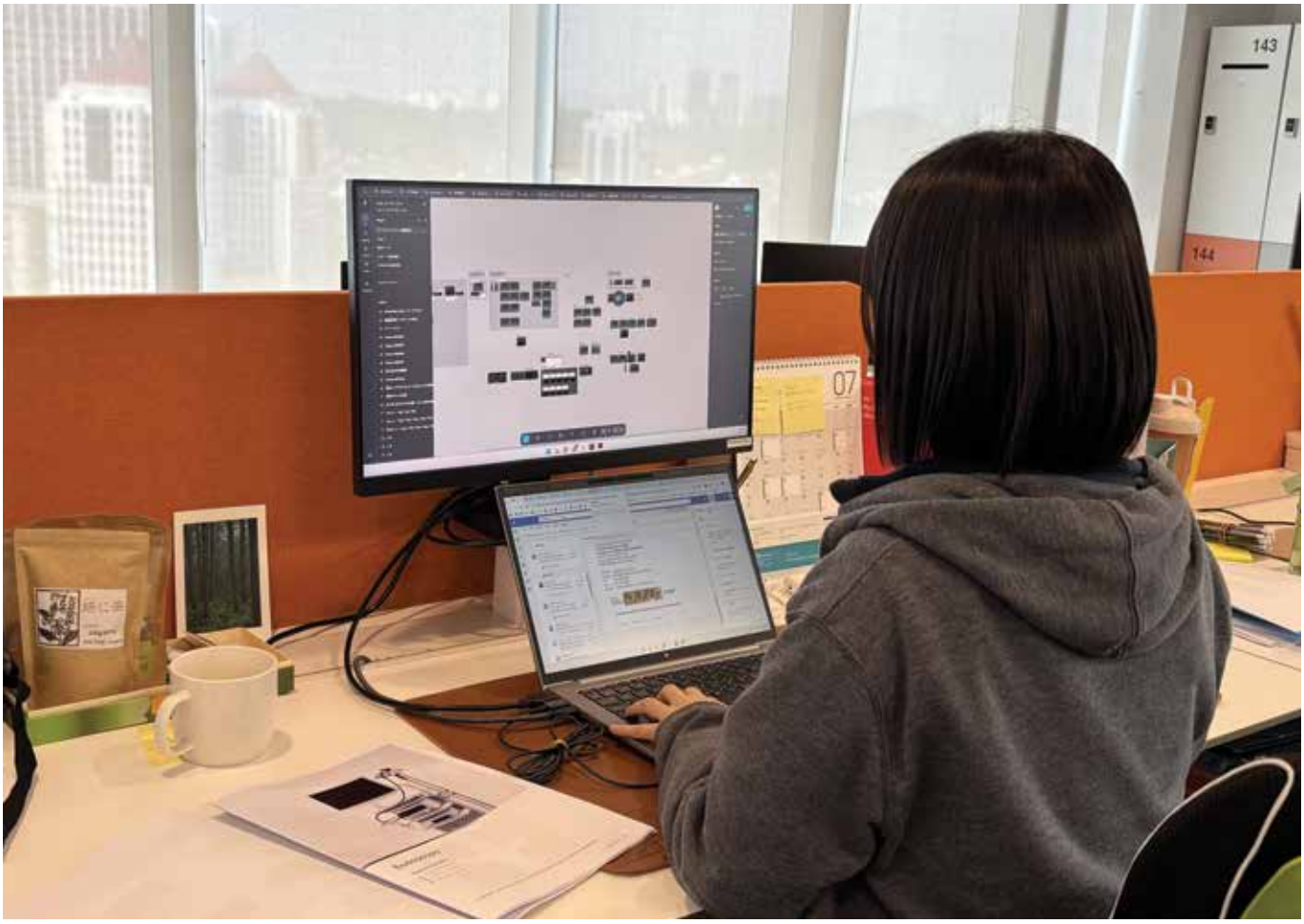
JAPAN

Designing across borders:

my journey as a medical product designer in Malaysia



I joined Fujifilm in 2020. Since then, I have been part of the FTYO Design Centre, where I am responsible for the interface design of medical products. My job is to make the screens and usability of the medical devices that healthcare professionals use every day easier to understand and more intuitive. In 2025, I moved to Malaysia to join my husband, who was also employed by Fujifilm, on his assignment there. It has now been exactly one year since we moved.

Thanks to the support and understanding of my company, I have been able to continue in my previous role even while living in Malaysia. I now continue my work as a medical product designer from Malaysia, making full use of remote work and digital collaboration tools. Amid significant changes to both my home life and working environment, I spend my days both grappling with challenges and finding joy in my work as a designer. In this article, I'd like to share my 'journey' as I've experienced it here in Malaysia.

A NEW SIDE OF MY COMPANY I DISCOVERED ACROSS BORDERS

Before beginning my life abroad, I naturally had many anxieties. I had no family in Malaysia other than my husband, and I didn't know a single friend or acquaintance there. Before leaving, I worried whether I would be able to get by without feeling lonely.

However, the members of our Malaysian subsidiary (FMAL) went beyond being mere 'colleagues' and welcomed me warmly as if I were a friend, quickly putting those fears to rest.

They invited me to join them in various activities outside of work. On weekday evenings and weekends, we'd get some exercise together playing badminton or pickleball (a sport that's a cross between tennis and table tennis), or we'd all get together for a durian party. One memory stands out in particular. We gathered at 7:00 a.m. to watch the FIFA World Cup match between Japan and Sweden. The moment Japan scored, everyone let out a tremendous roar that echoed through the room, and I couldn't help but laugh at the excitement and the passion with which everyone celebrated.

Back in Japan, it was common for everyone to draw a clear line between work and personal life, and there was generally a culture of respecting one another's personal lives after work. Because of that, I was initially very surprised to see how different the company atmosphere could be just because we were in a different country, even though we were both part of the Fujifilm Group. I've been with Fujifilm for around seven years now, and I thought I understood the company's atmosphere and culture. However, working across national borders like this made me realize that there's still a warm, powerful new side to Fujifilm that I hadn't known about.

HANDS-ON RESEARCH GAINED BY VISITING THE FIELD

Professionally, moving to Malaysia also gave me a new perspective. I'm responsible for designing endoscopes – a type of medical device – but until then, I had only ever visited endoscopy examination departments in Japan. As a result, my approach to design had been shaped primarily by the Japanese healthcare environment.

However, Fujifilm's endoscopes are widely sold and used not only in Japan but around the world. I've always believed that to create truly excellent products on a global scale, I need to see with my own eyes the environments in which people use endoscopes and the people who use them. While I was in Japan, opportunities were inevitably limited, so I had no choice but to rely on desk research.

Since coming to Malaysia, I've been taking advantage of this opportunity by actively reaching out to local sales team members and asking them to take me to actual medical settings. By directly observing endoscopy procedures outside Japan – which I had previously researched only from my desk – I've been able to conduct research with a real sense of the differences in hospital structures, healthcare professionals' work styles, and workflows compared to Japan.

What I strongly felt after visiting these sites in person is that going there myself and seeing things with my own eyes expands my ideas many times over, far more than developing ideas based on information found online or secondhand accounts from others. I've learned that seeing these environments firsthand gives me a much deeper understanding of the challenges users face, allowing me to create designs that are more practical and valuable for the people who use them every day.

THE ESSENCE OF DESIGN, AS TAUGHT BY THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Another profound lesson I learned while working in Malaysia was a new perspective on language. When I was in Japan, I would explain my designs by showing them while providing various verbal explanations. In Japanese, I could explain my ideas in detail, drawing on the full richness of my native language. However, while in Malaysia, I naturally found myself in more

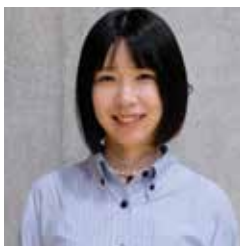


situations where I had to communicate in English, and I often struggled to convey the subtle nuances that came so easily in Japanese.

At first, I found it frustrating that I couldn't express my ideas as precisely as I could in my native language. But through that struggle, I realized that 'truly good design' transcends language. Even if I can't provide a perfectly satisfying explanation in English, if the design is truly good, its values and usability will be clearly conveyed to the viewer without any explanation at all. In fact, I've come to believe that 'good design' in the truest sense is when all the elements I previously had to supplement with verbal explanations are instead embodied in the design itself, without the need for any explanation.

Furthermore, Fujifilm's Design Centre follows a philosophy called ***Faithful Design***, which aims to capture the feelings users hold deep within themselves – even those they cannot put into words – and translate them into design. This philosophy, too, involves capturing those feelings not by relying on words, but by carefully observing users' actions, gestures, and demeanor; language was never the starting point. Through my struggles with language in Malaysia, I came to keenly realize that when designing by capturing the essence of things, that value is reflected in the design itself, regardless of language.

Over the past year since moving to Malaysia, I've encountered language and cultural barriers at times, but every one of these experiences has led to new discoveries and has become a vital part of who I am today. Looking ahead, I hope to continue embracing new experiences that broaden my perspective and help me grow as a designer.



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Rising Strong: Journeys of Healing and Hope

Where are mum and dad?

The story behind Fabio Rao's story



FABIO RAO
Writer and Director
ITALY

Two young people wake to a world without adults. Behind that imagined silence lies a real childhood uprooted by war.
Fabio Rao returns to the fear that gave his film its beginning: the sudden loss of everything that makes the world feel safe. This is the story behind the story, where cinema becomes a way to give shape to what is hardest to say, and to search for a point of light in the darkness.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.









"Perhaps the key isn't where we think we'll find it. Perhaps the boundary between what is human and what isn't is less defined than we'd like to believe. This is the mystery I wanted to leave open, like a window without a curtain."

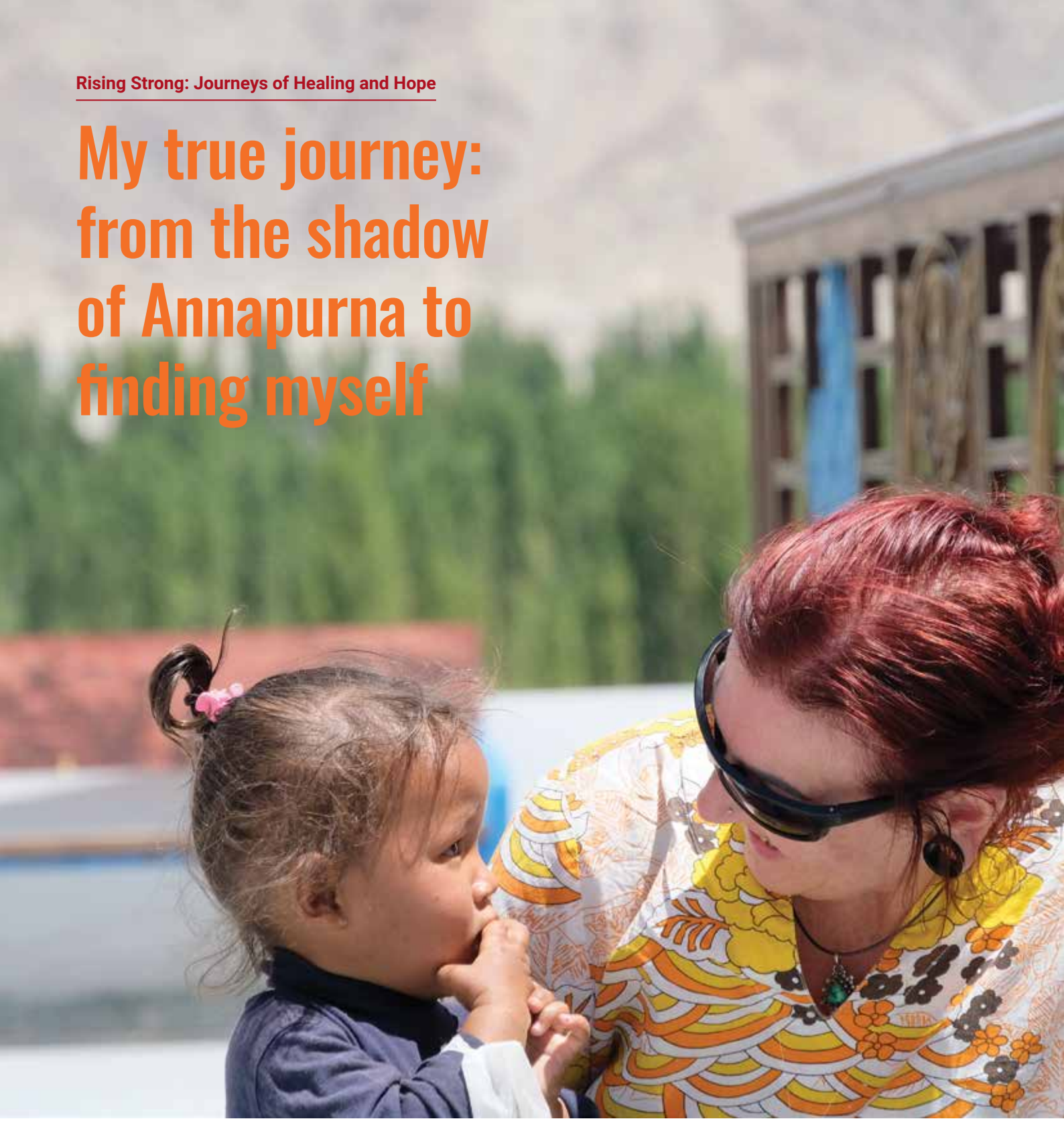
"What I hope for is a question. Or perhaps a feeling: that strange and precious combination of fear and trust you feel when you realize you're not alone, even when it seems you are. That someone – a person, a story, an image – can give you a point of reference even in the darkness."







My true journey: from the shadow of Annapurna to finding myself





MARGHERITA D'ALESSANDRO
Logistics & Procurement Specialist
ITALY

THE BEGINNING OF IT ALL: FROM RIMINI TO ANNAPURNA

If you'd met me thirty-five years ago and asked me what my idea of a holiday was, I would have replied, without hesitation: Rimini, a hotel with full board, if possible, deckchairs and a parasol in the front row!

For me, the world ended more or less there, between the reassuring confines of routine and the beaches of the Adriatic. But then, Luca came into my life.

Luca wasn't just the man who would become my husband and life partner for the next 35 years – he has always been a driving force, a constant urge to look beyond the horizon.



MARGHERITA D'ALESSANDRO BIOGRAPHY

Margherita D'Alessandro was born in 1967 in Milan.
She has been part of the Fujifilm family in Italy since 1992, where she currently works in the Sales Administration & Purchasing Office for the healthcare business.



So our honeymoon was my first real leap of faith: 20 days of trekking in Nepal, along the classic Annapurna Circuit.
No wheeled suitcases, no resorts, just a rucksack, our own two feet, and a whole new world opening up before my eyes.
It was there that I realized that travelling wasn't just about moving from one place to another, but about transforming oneself. That experience redefined my mental map, teaching me deep empathy and a profound respect for the places I visit and for the communities that welcome me as a guest – a stranger in their world.
Note: By the second day of walking, I wanted to go home, get a divorce and book a sun lounger and parasol in Rimini!
From that moment on, South-East Asia became our second home: India, Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Little Tibet.
We began to explore and understand the world when things were very different: there were no mobile phones, the internet was a mirage of the future, we travelled with nothing but traveller's cheques to fall back on, and we'd only ring home from a public phone box upon arrival and on our return.
Our third travelling companion?
The ever-present paper copy of Lonely Planet, worn thin by sweat and the kilometres travelled. But that, by now, is history…

LITTLE TIBET AND THE TEST OF THE JOURNEY

Today, I want to tell you about my most recent journey, a journey that took me through Ladakh, or Little Tibet, before plunging into the sacred chaos of India.
Ladakh welcomes you to Leh, its capital, at an altitude of 3,500 metres, and from there, the journey becomes a physical and mental challenge.
The roads climb, passing through passes at 4,000 metres, until they reach the 5,600-metre Khardung La, the highest point in the world accessible by vehicle.
In those moments, the journey itself becomes the destination.
Your body is put to the test by the lack of oxygen. Your head throbs – for me, that meant spending two days bedridden, convinced I was going to die from the pain. Your breath becomes short, and yet, the sense of wonder is unrivalled.
You find yourself immersed in primeval nature, gazing at skies so

It was there that I realized that travelling wasn't just about moving from one place to another, but about transforming oneself.

crystal-clear they seem unreal, surrounded by flavors you've never tasted before and people whose quiet dignity feels as though it belongs to another era.
It's the perfect feeling of being in the right place, at the right time, with the right person, yet completely disconnected from the certainties of daily routine; and in Ladakh, you realize just how small we are in the face of the world's majesty.
In the centuries-old monasteries clinging to the rocks, I witnessed the Tibetan Buddhist monks' morning pujas, heard the sound of the ritual horns and softly chanted mantras in the chill of dawn, and shared in their simple meals and daily routines.
There you experience first-hand how the Buddhist faith translates into a profound, almost symbiotic relationship with the land.

This journey also gave me another great pillar of my life: meeting 'do-it-yourself' travellers, a dying breed – let's face it, travelling with everything organized is convenient, but it's not for me.
'Do-it-yourself' travel forces you to live in the present like nothing else in the world; you never know what will happen in the next two hours; logistical hiccups cease to be a problem and become opportunities, forcing you to develop a more empathetic, human approach to problem-solving that you then carry with you into your work and everyday life.



VARANASI: RETURNING HOME AND RECONNECTING WITH MY TRUE SELF

With the silence of Little Tibet behind us, we returned to Varanasi and the surrounding area.
For many, India is a shock; for us, it is simply home, and Varanasi is the place where I reconnect with my deepest self, where my defenses crumble and I open up completely.

Strolling along the ghats at dawn, as the mist rises from the Ganges and pilgrims perform their ritual ablutions, or watching the spectacular Ganga Aarti in the evening, with its fire, chants and oil lamps dancing in the darkness, is an experience that changes you from within.

In Varanasi, life and death walk hand in hand along the Manikarnika pyres; the scent of incense mingles with that of cremation smoke and marigold flowers.
It is a different approach to the earth and to existence, at times questionable and harsh to our Western eyes, yet one of overwhelming spiritual power.
India cannot be explained in a corporate presentation: you have to experience it to understand it.

TRAVEL AS A LEGACY AND A SOURCE OF NOURISHMENT

This philosophy of life has shaped everything I am.
It has guided the upbringing of our son, who is now 30, as it was essential to us that he grew up without mental barriers: at just five years old, he was with us in Thailand, trekking deep into the jungle, relying solely on a local guide.
That sense of adaptability, respect for diversity, and understanding of one's own limits is the greatest gift we could have given him.

What's more, my travels have always fuelled my great passion for cooking. Wherever I go, I book a local cookery class.
Travelling is inevitably tied to what you eat, to the new flavors that linger on your palate throughout the day, to the scents of spices in the markets that stay with you for months afterwards. Re-creating those dishes at home for family and friends means keeping the journey alive, sharing a little piece of it with those you love.

Another thing that always accompanies me is reading. Every journey begins long before we set off, through books that come to life once we arrive: the lucid and prophetic pages of Tiziano







Terzani; the human adventure of Flash Kathmandu; The Great Journey; and the dignity of the marginalized in Dominique Lapierre's City of Joy. When you find yourself on those very same streets, the books cease to be mere paper and become flesh, faces, and gazes.

CONCLUSION: THE REAL JOURNEY LIES WITHIN

Today, I know that the person I am has been entirely shaped by my travels.
They have opened my mind; they have taught me that the world does not end at the boundaries of where you live, and that we are merely temporary guests on this planet.

But the greatest lesson is another: however far you may travel, whether seeking to change your life, or escape the stresses of daily life, I have realized that the real journey lies within you.

If you are not at peace in the here and now, you will not be at peace anywhere in the world, even if you were 5,500 metres up on the peaks of Ladakh.

I am immensely grateful for every kilometre I've travelled, because every time I return home, I am simply better prepared to continue the most important journey of all: that of my everyday life.







Forging Paths: Journeys of Passion and Purpose

Beyond barriers: a woman's journey in medtech

My journey is one of a mother, marketer, and mentor navigating nearly two decades in a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. When I began, women in MedTech leadership were few and far between. Yet I entered the industry with a simple belief: passion, perseverance, and purpose matter more than gender.

Today, I feel privileged to have witnessed not only the transformation of medical technology in India, but also the growing opportunities for women to lead and shape the future of healthcare.

At the beginning of my career, very few young women worked in sales and marketing roles in India's MedTech industry. My first experience in the operating room did not go as planned. What seemed like a setback turned into a powerful learning experience, reinforcing the value of adaptability, teamwork, and perseverance.

One of the defining moments in my early career made me realize



MONICA PANDEY
Head of Marketing & Endoscopy Accessories Business
FUJIFILM INDIA PVT LTD
INDIA

LI: monica-p

just how male-dominated the medical device industry was. Women often had to work twice as hard to earn credibility and trust.

The experience was difficult. I faced criticism, skepticism, and even suggestions that I should consider a profession more 'suitable' for women. But rather than discouraging me, it strengthened me.
Over the years, through consistency, technical expertise, and commitment to supporting clinicians and patient care, I gradually earned the trust of the very doctors and healthcare teams I aspired to serve. Today, being a trusted partner during critical clinical moments is one of my proudest achievements. I have learned that success is not just about technology or products – it is about trust. Trust is earned over time, and it remains the foundation of every meaningful partnership.

One experience that stayed with me was supporting a surgeon during a challenging procedure when things were not going as planned. While the pressure in the room was high, I chose to stay calm, focus on solutions through technology, and together, we found a way forward and achieved the desired outcome. The surgeon's smile and gratitude, together with the knowledge that we had helped prevent a serious complication through technology, meant more to me than words can express. It reminded me why I chose this profession.

Becoming a mother in 2018 was another turning point in my journey. Along with immense joy came new responsibilities, moments of self-doubt, and the constant challenge of balancing personal and professional commitments. Just as I was learning to balance these two worlds, the world was hit by COVID-19.

It was a time that tested everyone. While I worried about my family at home, my role demanded an even greater commitment to supporting healthcare professionals on the front line. Instead of letting uncertainty take over, I focused on what could be done. Alongside my team, we adapted quickly, and continued supporting doctors and hospitals when it mattered most. Equipped with PPE, we entered operating rooms and supported emergency procedures, doing everything we could to help clinicians care for patients during an unprecedented time.

Joining Fujifilm in 2022, when my son was just five years old, was an important milestone in my career. The support I have received from my leaders, colleagues, and peers has enabled me to grow professionally while mentoring more women entering the MedTech industry. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work is contributing to clinical education and training programmes that help develop the next generation of endoscopists in India. To every young woman considering a career in healthcare: trust your passion. Your technical expertise, resilience, and commitment to supporting patients and healthcare professionals will help you overcome challenges and create a meaningful impact.

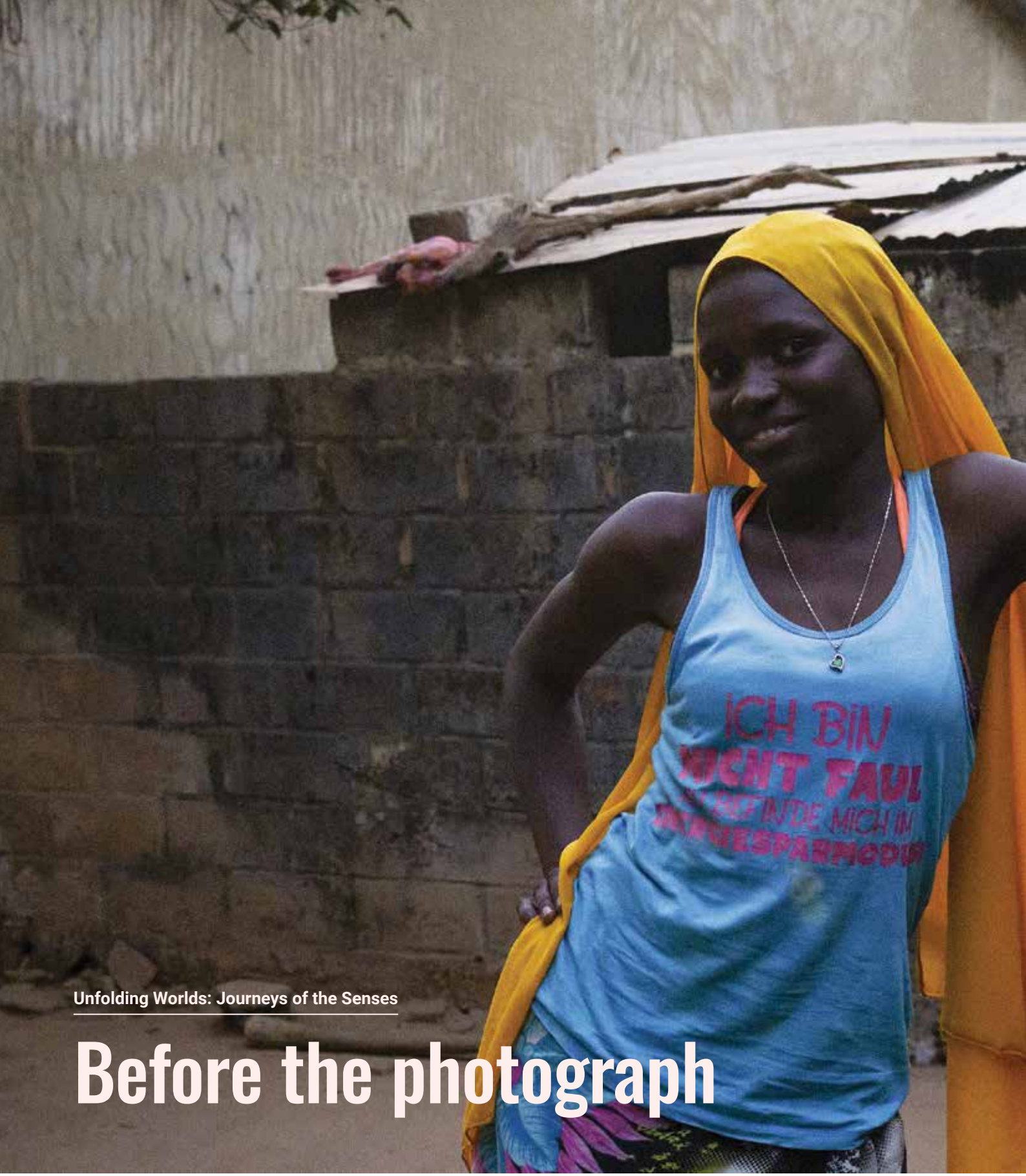
I wrote this short poem during a period when I struggled with the guilt many working mothers experience. It was a reminder that the way I chose to see myself mattered more than the expectations of others. I hope it brings comfort and encouragement to other mothers working in the MedTech industry who travel and experience the same feelings.

Love for you my child
It's love for you,
That keeps me thinking
How blessed I am to have you,
I hustle; I struggle & I go insane
All I can say it's worth the pain,
The random kisses & the beautiful smile
You help me learn to LIVE & LAUGH for a while…
I get judged and I scream
All the time I just dream
When will I learn to be a shield
and be indifferent in this field.
While my mind keeps redefining a 'PERFECT' mother…
Makes its own goals and compare with others.
But who will tell the truth,
Is it really that difficult to choose,
Then I look up and break the thought,
Rekindle the love you have brought.
I smile, I laugh and finally…
get to know the truth.
That it's love of yours my child
It's love of yours,
Which makes me perfect within the chaos.

This is dedicated to my son Vihaan, whose presence has made my life beautiful and whose love and support give me the strength to never give up.

As a mother, I have learned compassion. As a marketer, I have learned innovation. As a mentor, I have learned that true success lies in helping others discover their own potential.

To every young woman aspiring to build a career in MedTech, do not let fear of failure limit your ambition. Every challenge builds resilience and brings you closer to becoming the person you are meant to be.



Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

Before the photograph

Sometimes she arrives without a camera. Sometimes she dances when words cannot cross the distance. For Juanita Antoinette Richards, a photograph begins with the time spent earning trust. From a Senegalese village to women





JUANITA ANTOINETTE RICHARDS
Photographer and Director
UK

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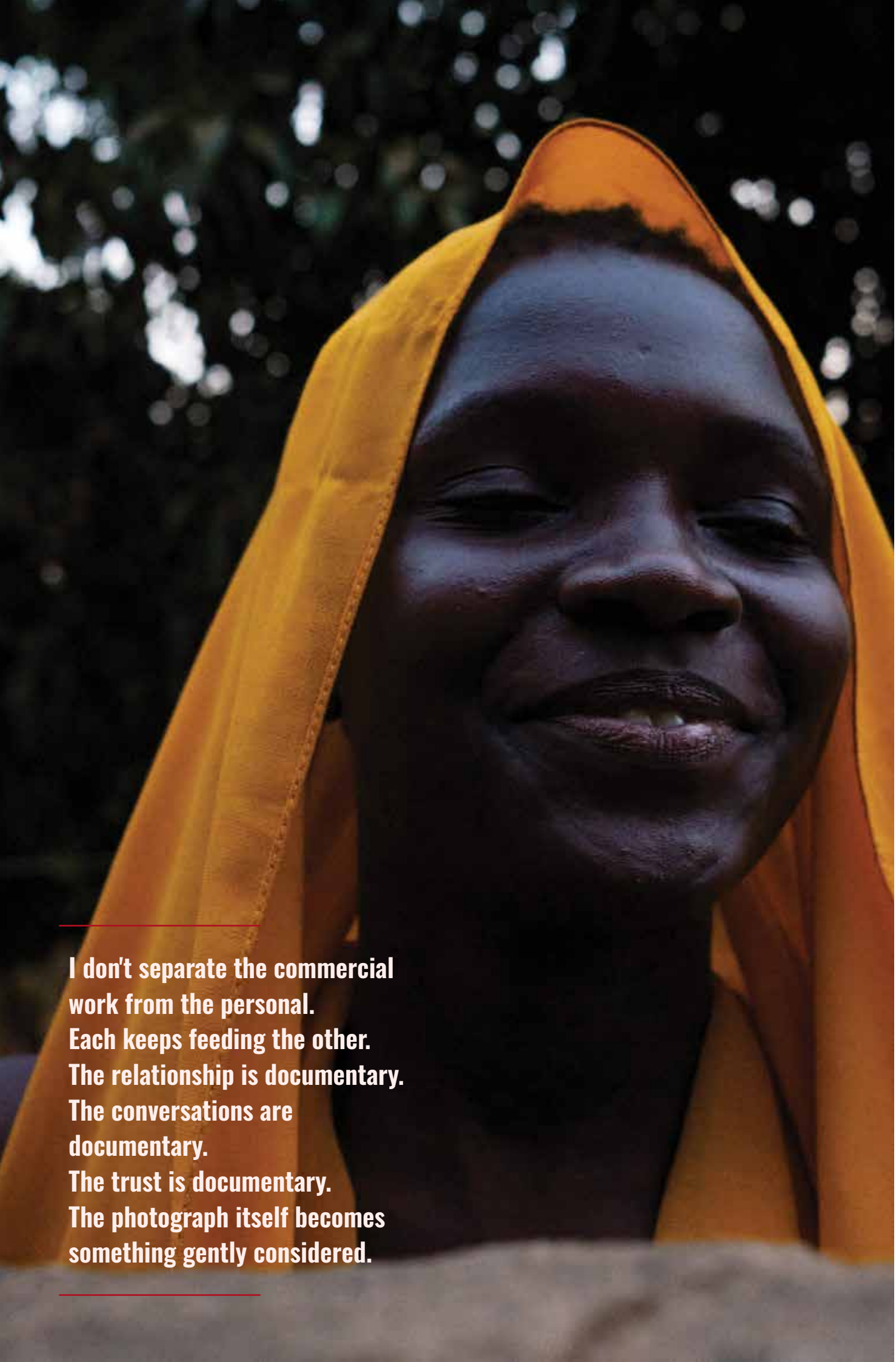
Website: www.juanitarichards.com

claiming space in Caribbean motorsport, her work looks for connection rather than pity, and joy alongside difficulty. What happens before the shutter opens may be the part of the picture that matters most.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.



I don't separate the commercial work from the personal.
Each keeps feeding the other.
The relationship is documentary.
The conversations are documentary.
The trust is documentary.
The photograph itself becomes something gently considered.

"None of it is fiction. Honesty doesn't come from leaving everything untouched. It comes from the eyes, from how someone chooses to present themselves, from whether they trust me."







"The longer I spend with someone, the less I'm trying to make a picture that impresses a stranger, and the more I'm trying to make one they recognize themselves in. The photographs I'm proudest of feel like they belong to both of us."











"Photography has taught me that curiosity is more valuable than certainty. That trust creates stronger photographs than distance ever can. And that the most meaningful images almost always begin long before anyone presses the shutter."



The photograph is only the evidence.
The closeness came first.



TOTAL LUNAR ECLIPSE
Assamstadt, Germany. FUJIFILM X-T20 and XF90F2.0 R LM WR

Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

The power of women in astrophotography



EUGEN KAMENEW
FUJIFILM X-Photographer
GERMANY

IG: @kamenewphotography
Website: www.kamenew.net

A lantern held in the darkness. A moonrise worth waiting for. A ring of sunlight appearing just as the clouds threaten to close. Eugen Kamenew takes us behind photographs where the vastness of the sky meets the intimacy of human stories. Patience, unexpected

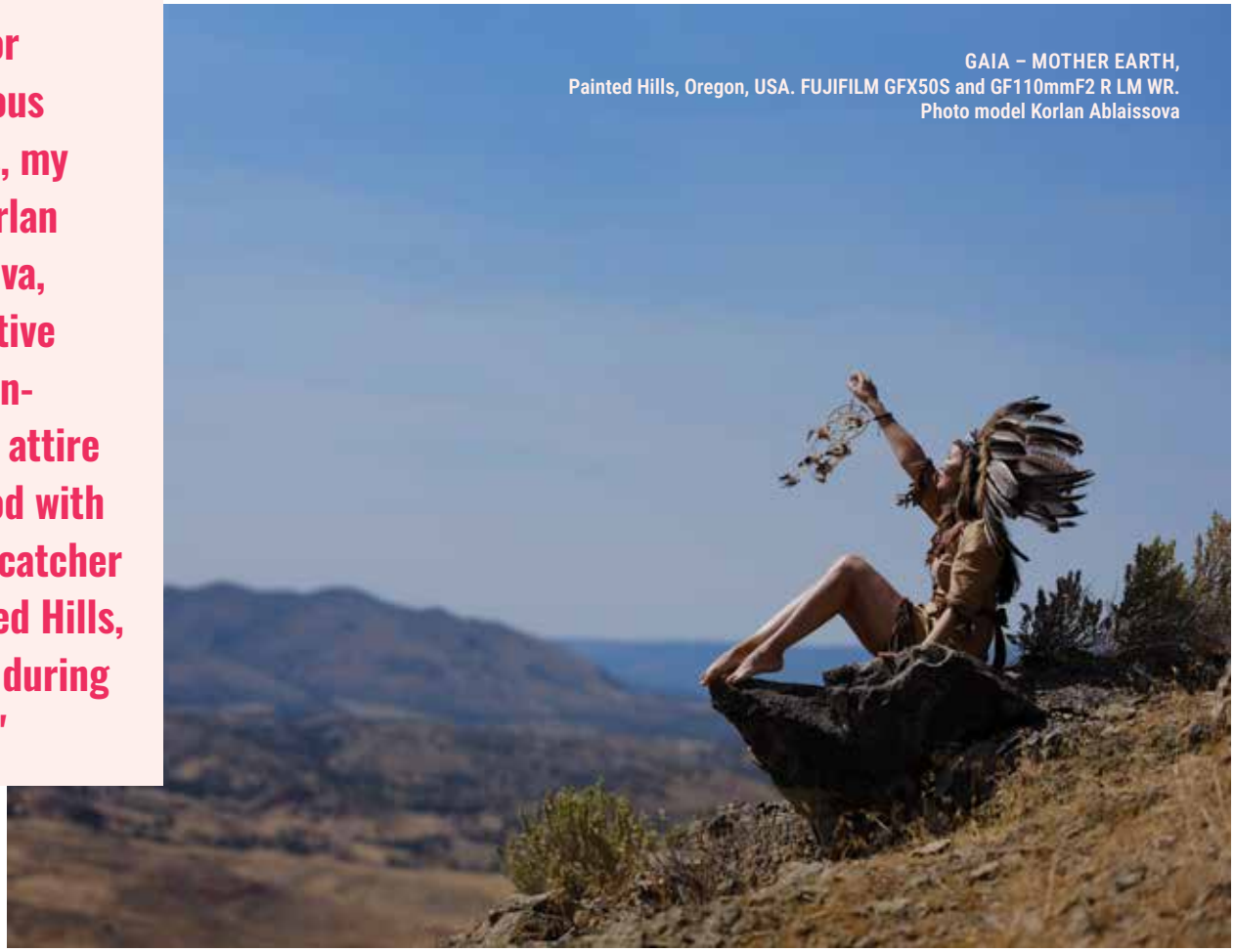


"Within the genre of astrophotography, and particularly in nightscape photography, women have become my most prominent and recurring subject. *The Power of Women in Astrophotography* celebrates feminine beauty, elegance, and wisdom."

encounters and shared wonder become part of every frame, inviting us to look beyond physical distance and remember the sky that blankets us all.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.

"To honor Indigenous cultures, my wife, Korlan Ablaissova, wore Native American-inspired attire and stood with a dreamcatcher in Painted Hills, Oregon, during totality."



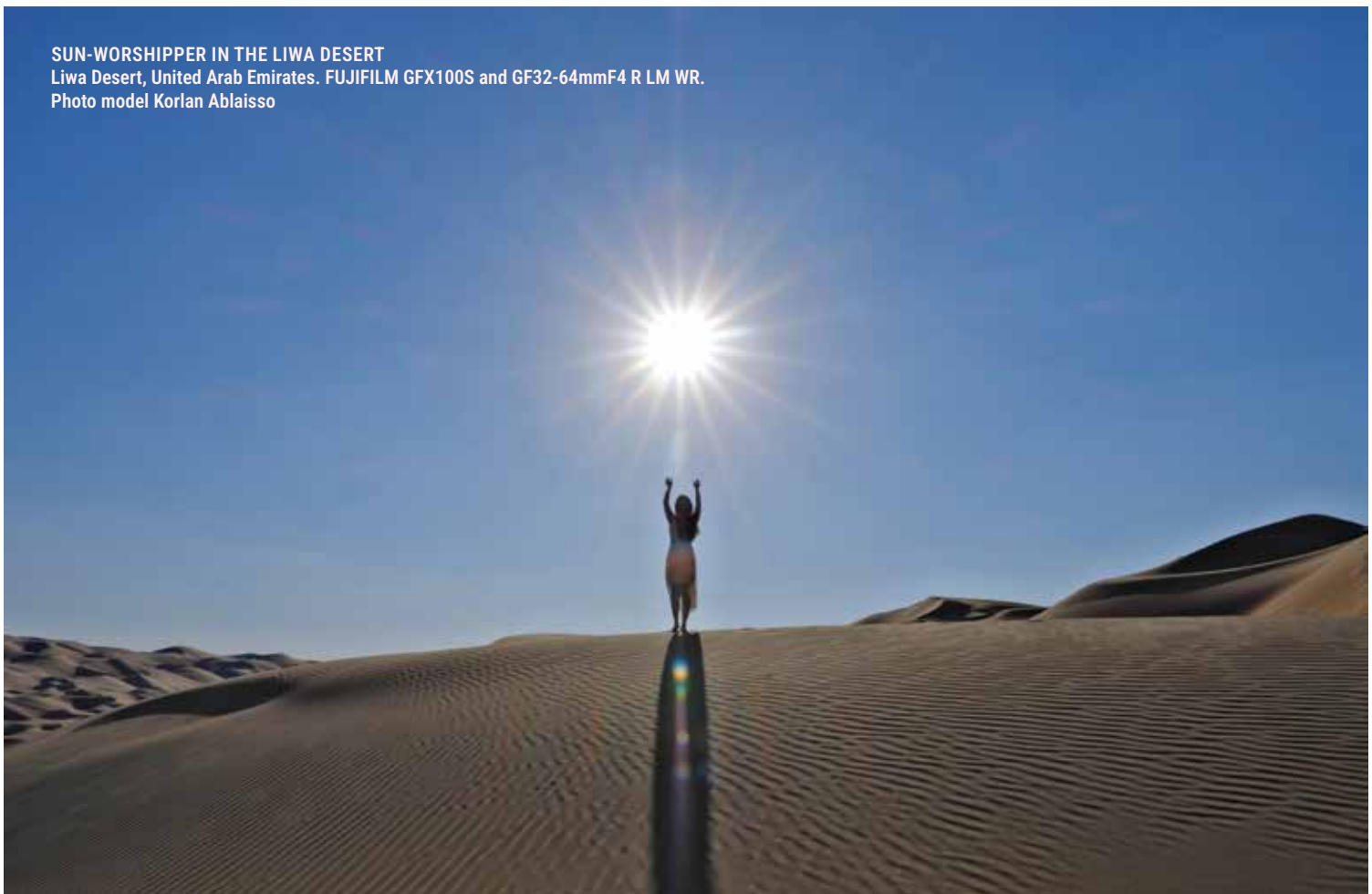
GAIA – MOTHER EARTH,
Painted Hills, Oregon, USA. FUJIFILM GFX50S and GF110mmF2 R LM WR.
Photo model Korlan Ablaissova



Full Moon – A Mirror for Humanity
Assamstadt, Germany. FUJIFILM GFX50S and GF250mmF4 R LM OIS WR and GF1.4x TC WR

This photograph is a tribute to Native American voices and cultures that remained in the shadows for far too long. It also celebrates their continued emergence into the light through recognition, resilience, and renewal.

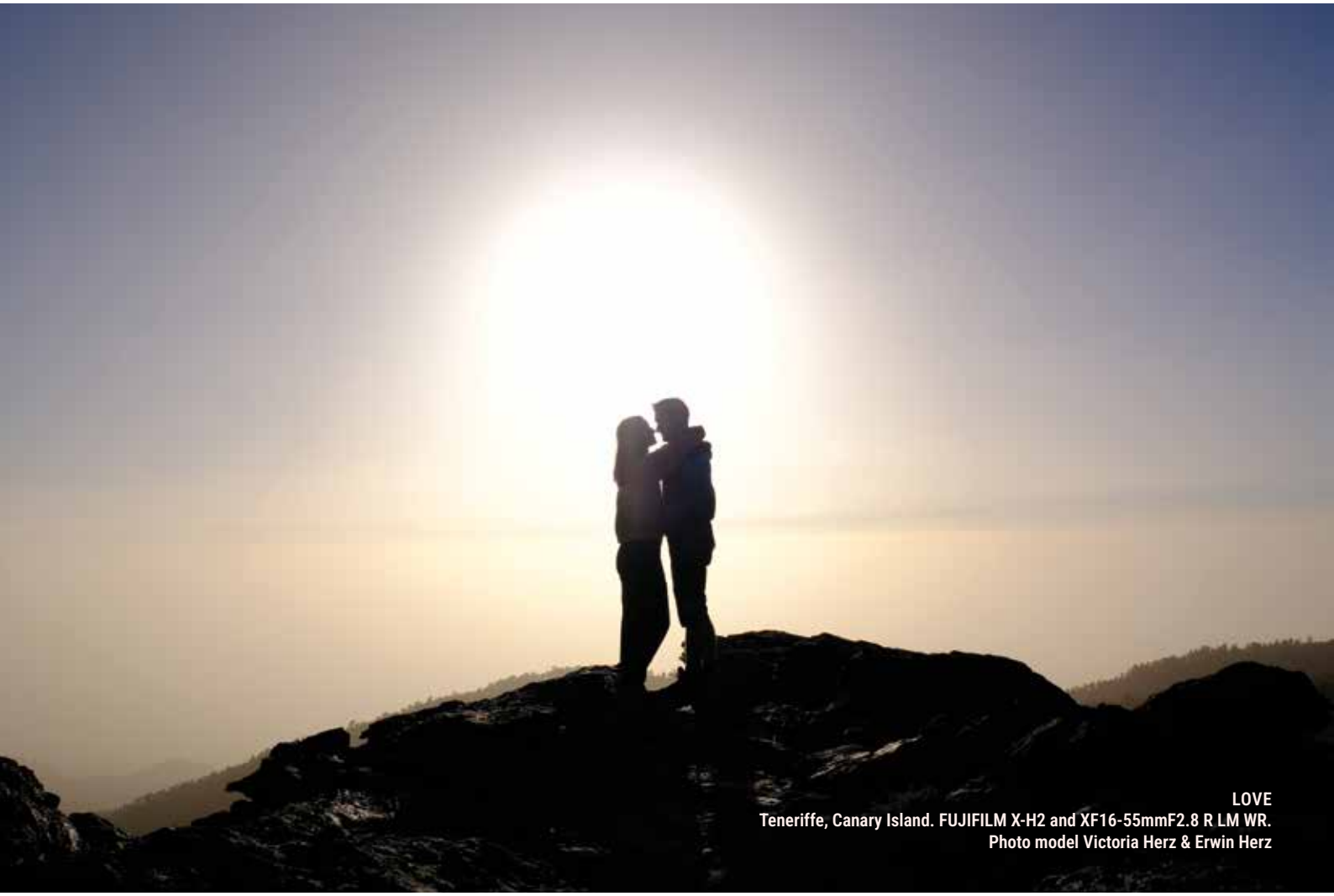
TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE
Painted Hills, Oregon, USA. FUJIFILM GFX50S and GF32-64mmF4 R LM WR



SUN-WORSHIPPER IN THE LIWA DESERT
Liwa Desert, United Arab Emirates. FUJIFILM GFX100S and GF32-64mmF4 R LM WR.
Photo model Korlan Ablaisso



NEW MOON – GENESIS OF A NEW LIFE
Teneriffe, Canary Island. FUJIFILM X-H2 and XF200mmF2 R LM OIS WR and XF1.4X TC F2 WR. Photo model Victoria Herz & Erwin Herz



LOVE
Teneriffe, Canary Island. FUJIFILM X-H2 and XF16-55mmF2.8 R LM WR. Photo model Victoria Herz & Erwin Herz

ANNULAR SOLAR ECLIPSE – THE RING OF UNITY
Newman, Western Australia. FUJIFILM X-E1.
Photo model Sarah Ponceblan and Gregory Sabatier

"On May 10, 2013, the path of an annular solar eclipse crossed Western Australia. At sunrise, the Moon covered the Sun almost completely, leaving only a brilliant ring of light – the spectacular Ring of Fire – rising above the horizon."



FREE SPIRIT COUPLE LIVING THE VAN LIFE
Newman, Western Australia. FUJIFILM X-20.
Photo model Sarah Ponceblan and Gregory Sabatier



Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

My journey between worlds



RAFFAELE HORSTMANN
Artist, Photographer & Producer
GERMANY

IG: @raffaelehorstmann
Website: www.raffaelehorstmann.com

For years, Raffaele Horstmann moved between worlds: the freedom of theatre and the precision of industry, personal expression and commercial demands. The contrasts that shaped his childhood followed him into his work, sometimes inspiring him, sometimes leaving him searching for perspective. Then came a different understanding: he did not have to choose a shore. His story asks what becomes possible when the parts of us that seem opposed begin to speak to each other.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.

(Below) DREAMSCORE







Shots for the new Album ***Not The Surface*** by The Bottomline. Art direction and design by Raffaele Horstmann, shot using the Fujifilm GFX 100 II.





"Over the years, the poles grew stronger. My personal projects became more conceptual, multi-layered and political, demanding more research, more conviction and more openness."

Last year, I worked with the Graf von Faber-Castell team to develop a campaign and oversee the photography and video production. All photographs were shot using the Fujifilm GFX 100 II





PICTURE BY JANNIK CZAUDERNA

"At the same time, commercial assignments led me into the world of luxury brands – a world with its own rules, its own aesthetics, its own pace, and its own psychological mechanisms."







"The worlds I once moved between, I now weave into a greater whole. My journey between worlds has shown me that contrasts do not have to be contradictions. They can be a home. You just have to be willing to keep changing perspectives"

< DOPPELGAENGER



ANDREA VAILATI
Founder Artesettima, director
ITALY

IG: @artesettima | @a.vailati



SIMONE BIAVATI
Photographer, Artesettima
ITALY

IG: @simone_biavati



SCAN THE QR CODE TO LISTEN TO THE FULL STORY AS YOU EXPLORE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY.

Unfolding Worlds: Journeys of the Senses

MADRI (MOTHERS):

A journey through living memory

What disappears when a generation's stories are no longer there to be heard?

Travelling across Italy, Andrea Vailati and Simone Biavati enter the homes of grandmothers who carry memories of war, work, change and everyday life.

MADRI makes space for people, not stereotypes: complex lives, freely shared, at a moment that cannot be repeated. An invitation to listen while living memory is still here to speak.



MADRI was born from this sense of urgency: the need to tell the story of Italy through the women whose lives embody its history. Women who have preserved dialects, struggles, folklore, forms of labour, spirituality, contradictions, family memories, and regional cultures that are too often forgotten.







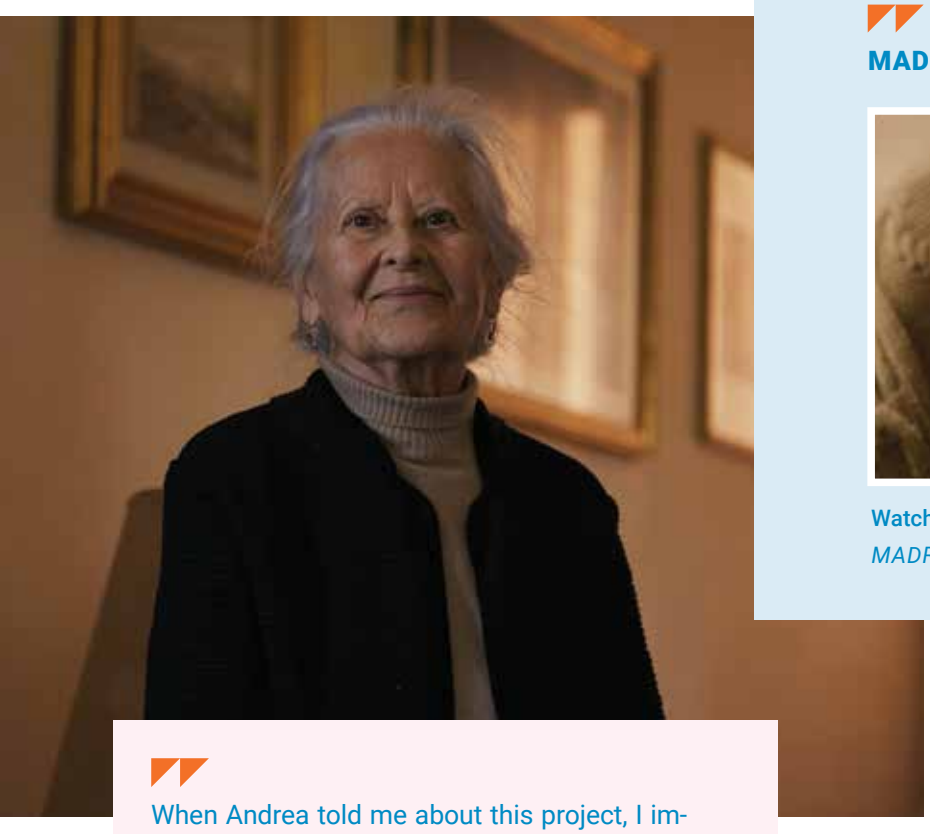




The strength of this project reveals itself through several elements. Travelling across the whole of Italy by van means rediscovering a country filled with landscapes, places, and cultures that are too often taken for granted. It means meeting these women within their families and allowing their voices to take centre stage, without demands or expectations—only offering them, perhaps for the first time, the space to tell their own stories, and to recount history itself from their point of view.It also means tracing connections and contrasts between grandmothers from different parts of the country: at times rediscovering traditions, at others dismantling stereotypes. Their relationship with religion, men, freedom, work, beauty, and the contemporary world are some of the key themes that emerge naturally from each encounter—sometimes in continuity with one another, sometimes in open conflict. Through this journey, we too are learning how to look at our country and its history.

Andrea Vailati, director





MADRI/MOTHERS

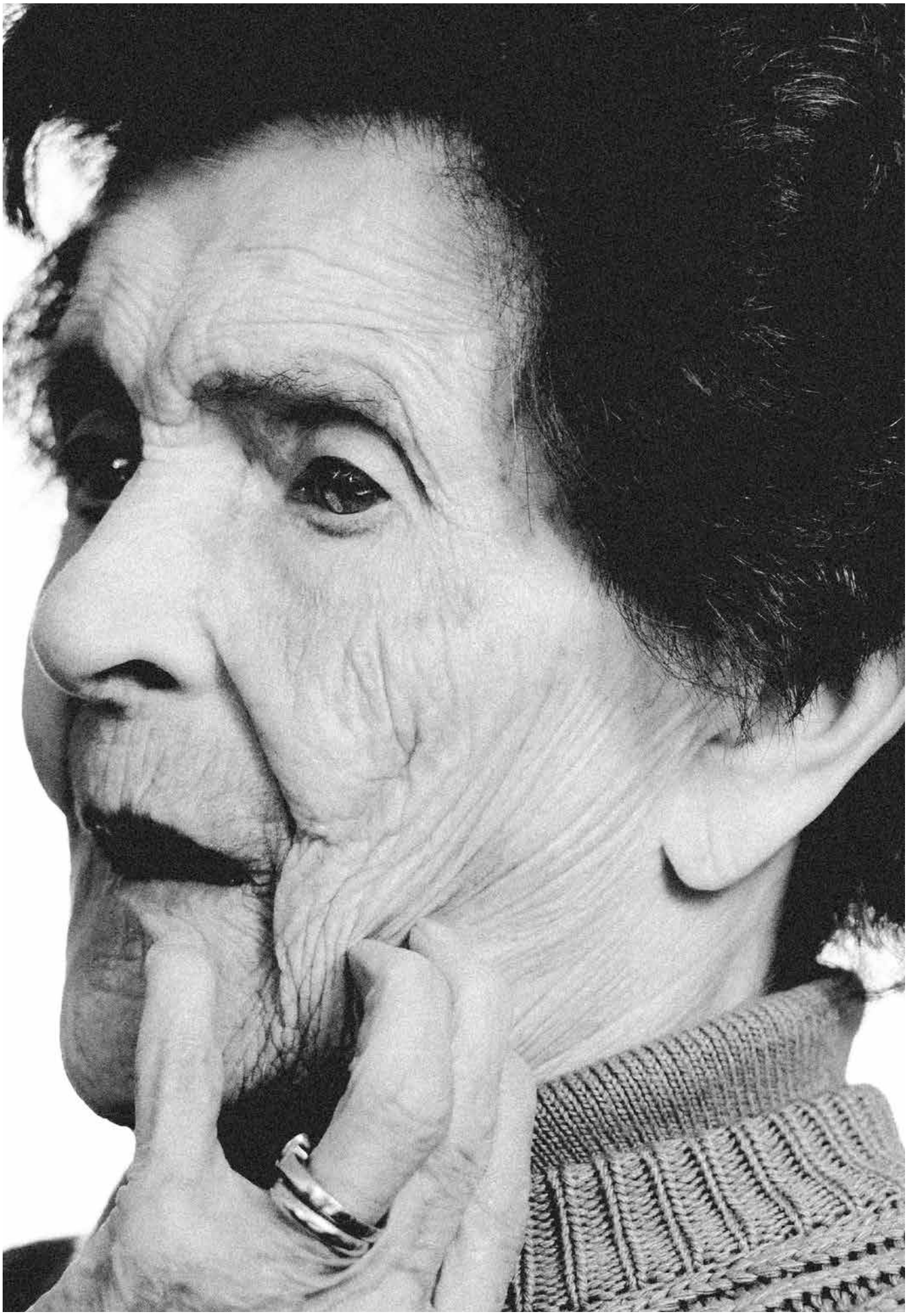


Watch on YouTube:
MADRI - IL TRAILER

When Andrea told me about this project, I immediately thought about how to bring it to life photographically. By nature, photography exists to witness, document, and represent a moment in history, a landscape, a personality, and no one embodies all these qualities, and lets them surface so naturally, quite like they do (the grandmothers, or as we call them, MOTHERS). Photographically speaking, we're not chasing any kind of sensationalism; we're trying to keep the images as natural as possible, avoiding artificial light altogether so we can portray the "mothers" and their surroundings exactly as we find them, stepping in on tiptoe, capturing only what they themselves consider worth treasuring. That's why I think of these less as “stolen shots” and more as gifted moments. The faces, the hands, the expressions of certain grandmothers have left me with so much emotion, feelings that would be hard to replicate even on a meticulously prepared set with a massive production behind it, precisely because the sincerity with which they hand us these small pieces of themselves is the same sincerity we bring to portraying them.

Simone Biavati, photographer





W4W

PEOPLE CHANGING THE WORLD
ONE SMILE AT THE TIME



Bert Stephani - Christina