

Manual for facilitators



a new Methodology to insert Your LIFE  
biography IN the EUROPE context

# Methodological Manual

The therapeutic, social, and cultural value  
of autobiography, through the game MyLife.



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**MyLife**

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[www.mylifeineurope.nkey.it](http://www.mylifeineurope.nkey.it)

*"Wherever writing intends to take us, it will make us happier, when we find those pages dispensed from forgetfulness. If it accelerates our breath, if it attenuates it, if it moves us to arcane areas where the apnea of rethinking and thinking can become a contemplative condition to meditate on ourselves, it turns into an introspective experience that tempers any loneliness."* Duccio Demetrio

# INDEX

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>WRITING OF SELF</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>THE MY LIFE IN EUROPE PROJECT</b>	<b>13</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	16
<b>MEMORY, NEUROPLASTICITY, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY</b>	<b>19</b>
TYPES OF MEMORIES	21
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY	22
THE BRAIN'S AREAS OF WRITING AND SPEAKING.	24
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	28
<b>THE NARRATION OF SELF</b>	<b>33</b>
EGOGRAPHIC WRITINGS	35
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	40
<b>BRIEF HISTORY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>43</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	48
SITEGRAPHIC REFERENCES	49
<b>THE FREE UNIVERSITY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ANGIARI</b>	<b>53</b>
SITEOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	55
THE NARRATION OF ONESELF IN ILLNESS AND TRAUMA	59
NARRATIVE MEDICINE	60
<b>THE WRITING OF SELF IN TRAUMA: EXPRESSIVE WRITING</b>	<b>64</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	65
SITEOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES	66
<b>METHODOLOGY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE</b>	<b>69</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:	78
SITEOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	78



<b>THE “MY LIFE IN EUROPE” GAME</b>	<b>81</b>
THE FEATURES	83
THE RULES	85
CARDS AS NARRATIVE DEVICES	86
THE DECK OF 64 CARDS	88
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:	89
<b>THE ROLE OF THE MASTER</b>	<b>157</b>
NOTES ON M. KNOWLES ADULT EDUCATION THEORY	157
THE ROLE OF THE MASTER	159
THE MASTER’S MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES IN GROUP PLAY ARE TO:	161
THE ROLE OF THE MASTER IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS:	163
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	169
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>171</b>
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS PROPOSED BY PARTNERS	171
<b>PARTNERS</b>	<b>191</b>



# INTRODUCTION

CARLA SABATINI, GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

This methodological manual is meant to be an easy tool, useful to introduce to the autobiographical approach anyone who wants to write about themselves and help others to do it, enabling the development of skills to write about their life or certain events without specific linguistic competences, through stimuli proposed in the **My Life Game**.

It's directed at operators, educators, facilitators, who provided their services in various contexts: nursing homes, hospitals, schools, day-care centres, all those places where writing about oneself and sharing with others helps with feeling less alone, with feeling better and feeling as a part of a bigger world such as the European Community. With an autobiographical methodology, the various operators can integrate autobiographical competences with a relational approach, organise workshop, repeatable training and self-training courses

The Manual aims to offer an overview of the most significant aspects, presented in the training sessions, during the LTTA (Learning, Teaching, Training Activities) of the project, which concern: memory, cognitive games, storytelling and writing of oneself, the autobiographical approach and methodology used by the Free University of the Autobiography of Anghiari, providing bibliographic references and useful sites to delve into the various topics, some of which are very complex, and on which there is a very vast literature.

It also contains a description of the cards used as narrative stimuli in the My Life Game, with some writing proposals, and of the important and delicate role of the facilitator, called master in the "**My Life in Europe**" project, acquires within the group game.

Creating a "narrative context", in which participants/players can express

themselves freely without judgments from others, is, in fact, one of the fundamental tasks of the facilitator, through which the **My Life game** can serve *“to develop the narrative, to talk about one’s own story and to talk to each other [...] to encourage the return to personal writing and the pleasure of reading others’ autobiographies, biographical novels and all that can contribute to remembrance education, which today is so at risk”* (Duccio Demetrio, 1997).

This Manual, the final product of the Project together with the Game and the instruction booklet for the web app, contains, therefore, all the tools you need to replicate the experience in different contexts and in other countries, as modulated in the Project.

The unpublished pages that follow, entitled “WRITINGS OF SELF”, kindly donated by Prof. Duccio Demetrio, that we sincerely thank, Founder and Scientific Director of the Free University of Autobiography of Anghiari, introduce and guide us, with subtlety, profoundness and expertise, in the complex and fascinating world of autobiographical writing that permeates the whole Project “My Life in Europe”.

# WRITING OF SELF

DUCCIO DEMETRIO

*The forces that drive this hand to write are also the desire for something not to disappear, for it not be as if it had never been.*

*Amos Oz<sup>1</sup>*

Autobiographical writing is a form of wandering, it is a difficult but exciting journey. After lines after lines dedicated to our history, we realize that we are obeying a moral principle: we want to explain to others, who maybe will read us, what we have learned from life. Or, not with the narcissistic claim to be equalled, but in order to awaken in those the questions that we have asked ourselves, those which we have been able to answer or believed to have answered and those that will always remain as they are.

For example, we believe that writing about our life, finally, will bring us home. At least to its threshold, to look inside it, between grateful and frightening emotions before scenes that we would rather forget. Revisiting dark corners and bright rooms. Then we discover that that house is us, that on those papers a drawing of our faces begins to appear. A map that we did not always have at the beginning of our journey and that is revealed gradually in the next stages. Still with shady areas, erasures, inexplicable folds.

Writing invites us to return to these spaces from which we had perhaps escaped and from which, however, the passage of time had distanced us. The fact of finding ourselves, thanks to the power of a memory that becomes more fluid if prompted by the pen, turns memories into stories. It softens the harshness, smoothes the asperity of things, events, rehabilitates affections, helps us to forgive and absolve ourselves. We believe that writing about us leads us to the discovery of what we had left in some closet. Where we felt it was appropriate to keep it. Memory offers

<sup>1</sup> A.Oz, *What Makes an Apple?: Six Conversations about Writing, Love, Guilt, and Other Pleasures*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2022



us the retrospective consistency of having lived. Something, however, rather than the sense of emptiness that haunts those who tenaciously want to forget. Under the protective sheets of oblivion. And, instead, we soon realize that the attempt to write our story inevitably shifts furniture, lifts those drapes, assigns new words to everything which, in the meantime, without our knowledge, had gone to seek less uncomfortable and more hospitable accommodation. Every autobiography puts us back on track. Forward, not backwards, as you might believe; the pen draws new environments that resemble only slightly the ones we have left. The pen will revive us if we let her work as best as it can.

It prevents us from settling, satisfied, on those papers that are no longer white, in the fallacious pursuit of that “forever” which is one of the most widespread self-deceptions. When the love for writing is transformed into affection for ourselves, for what we have lost, failed to choose, forgot to do for others, we just have to accept that getting back on the road to which it impels us. Offering us hospitality in the search for time still to be lived; denying those who believe that memory condemns us to passivity. And not instead delivering us, revitalizing us, on the unstable and migrant surface self-thought and every suggestion of the world, of nature, of its power and wonder. Writing therefore guides us towards the freshness of beauty that we admire walking in the company of a memory that awakens step by step. With the pen between our fingers the stops become milder, lighter, necessary, and intense. Wherever writing intends to take us, it will make us happier, when we find those pages dispensed from forgetfulness. If it accelerates our breath, if it attenuates it, if it moves us to arcane areas where the apnea of rethinking and thinking can become a contemplative condition to meditate on ourselves, it turns into an introspective experience that tempers any loneliness.

Writing is a form of narration that requires rules, purposes, prediction to those who can or will read us, but first of all the clear desire to undertake this experience. Stories structure, organize, order our everyday and prosaic behaviour. We communicate through stories, we already know it, often presupposed, fragmented, incomplete:

but always as directed by an impulse or narrative instinct that the Israeli writer David Grossman has so well summarized in reference to:

*That powerful impulse to create stories; to organize within the context of a plot that reality which often is chaotic and incomprehensible; to find in everything that happens the obvious links, and the hidden ones, that can give things a particular meaning; to highlight the compelling features in every event, and to make you the protagonist stand out in those.*

A philosophical principle, an ethical postulate, a conception of life can be expressed by resorting to a story or a myth, to several interconnected stories and to more myths. Socrates, by the mouth of Plato, used tales to expound his theories. Narrating is reproducing, reconstructing, inventing stories that are ordered by mental activity, because narrating, it's worth repeating, is a manifestation of the way we think, of which contents are transmitted. Inside every story we should, again David Grossman urges us in this sense, to be able to discover how the mind of the narrator has moved, what cognitive processes have characterized it most, what “moves” they have adopted to present that given story. This also has an educational relevance: we can discover something more about ourselves or others based on the manifestations of their storytelling or telling about themselves. We can identify some trends that are relevant than others, for example, with respect to the role attributed to mental acts, corresponding to just as many words, descriptive, argumentative, reflexive, introspective, explanatory, imaginative, etc. Every sufficiently accomplished story, that is, when it is able to make us understand its internal logic or syntax, is a “portrait” very similar to the person who conceived and presented it, what are the means they used. By doing this, each one of us is an actor and interpreter of their own story; we feed on the stories of others, inventing new ones, drawing them from those with which he has deliberately or by chance come into contact. If we are deprived of the opportunity to tell or to become part of the stories of our neighbours, to express ourselves or interact with expressions, we suffer from a deficiency that can lead us to unbearable pathologies. We are talking

<sup>2</sup> D. Grossman, *Con gli occhi del nemico*, tr.it. Mondadori, Milano 2007, pp. 5-6.

about stories as an inescapable manifestation of our being women and men, as “subjects of language” and not just one kind of language. Of the story as a vital necessity, as a need and a human, civil, political right; of the life of everyone as an ongoing narrative, a shared autobiography, actionable in every circumstance. “We write our story” day by day, even being illiterate; it is embodied in our bodies, in the ways of being and acting, is the result of narrative fragments and inherited stories that we retransmit in turn with sufficient determination, clarity and transparency, or, that we abandon drifting, in their sudden interruption, in the opacity of not having been able to tell them consistently until the end.

# THE MY LIFE IN EUROPE PROJECT

CARLA SABATINI, GRAZIA CHIARINI

The project *"My Life in Europe, a new Methodology to insert Your LIFE biography IN the EUROPE context"*, is part of the Erasmus+ programme for innovation and the exchange of good practices and responds to the needs of the European Community to extend and develop the skills of educators and other staff supporting adult learners. It provides innovative technological tools to support lifelong learning and training in the field of autobiographical writing (Lejeune, 1986; Pineau, 1989; Dominicè, 1992; Jedlowsky, 1994; Demetrio, 1996; Formenti, 1998; Kaneklin, Scaratti, 1998).

The idea of the Project was born in 2019 after some autobiographical writing initiatives, realized within the RSA (Residenza Sanitaria) "G. Meacci" in the Municipality of S. Croce sull'Arno (Pisa). Over the course of three years, the facilitator and other operators of the structure, coordinated by Grazia Chiarini, an expert autobiographical methodology and consulting at the Free University of Autobiography of Anghiari (LUA) and president of the Board of the Nursing Home, collected stories of the elderly on various topics: foods, recipes, aromatic plants, sayings, passions. The elderly showed interest in the initiatives, they felt listened to and happy to be able to share fragments of their life, feeling at the same time important and less lonely. The operators and family members who participated in the collection also felt emotionally involved. The result was a nice atmosphere of sharing from which four short books have been produced and presented to the citizens in public meetings organized by the City Council.

After a meeting, in Montaione (Florence), on the occasion of another European project, *"Viral"*, attended by Carla Sabatini, computer scientist and an expert at Erasmus project design who works for the company Nkey srl of Santa Croce sull'Arno (Pisa); Beata Partika, sociologist and coordinator of the Centre for Adult Education (CEBS) in Wrocław, Poland; Silvia Petre, manager of Pro Xpert Association of Ramnicu Valcea in Romania; Sara Calcini, psychologist and psychotherapist, and

Grazia Chiarini, who talked about her experience within the RSA of Santa Croce sull'Arno, the methodology used by the LUA and the importance of autobiographical writing in promoting peoples' psycho-physical well-being, even and especially in situations of fragility.

The exchange of thoughts led to the idea of creating a project in which sociology, psychology, adult education and autobiographical writing would meet with technology to create an innovative tool to be offered to those who deal with adult education.

In addition to the partners mentioned above, ASPHI Onlus Foundation of Bologna and Bem Fazer Vai Avante Recreational Association of Gondomar, Portugal, also participate in the project.

The first phases were characterized by various moments of study and research, starting from the survey on needs through a semi-structured interview, proposed in various countries by CEBS, in parallel with the review of international scientific literature, which confirmed the impact of autobiographical writing on the well-being of those who practice it and the beneficial effects of online activities on the cognitive functioning of the elderly (Kyriazis-Kiourti 2018). Research was then carried out on educational games available on the market, both in person or online, and on various essays and texts such as "The game of life. Thirty proposals to tell a story" (Demetrio, 1997) which gave structure to the idea as it began concretizing and, subsequently, resulted in the definite Project, with a duration of 30 months, from October 2020 to March 2023.

While the general objective of the Project is to spread autobiographical writing in the European context, involving people from the age of 60, with or without disabilities, and to promote a sense of belonging to the European Community, the following are specific objectives: create a user-friendly game, which doesn't require the acquisition of specific skills, and which promotes the enhancement of self through autobiographical writing; create a manual for operators that can function as a useful tool to introduce autobiographical writing in any non-formal educational path, to be integrated into professional activities in various contexts; create a memory archive

that is the heritage of all; build a network of facilitators to exchange good practices.

To achieve these objectives, various meetings between the various partners were organised. The pandemic, which began in 2020, caused more than a few issues regarding travel, so giving priority to a mixed mode, both online and in person, was necessary. During these meetings the partners shared the steps to follow in this shared path, and the following were created: a website, where you can find all the useful tools for autobiographical interventions and other in-depth material with direct access to the online Game; a mailing list in which to exchange reports, documents and other material; folders on Google Drive to store all the documents produced and the analysis materials produced by Caterina Benelli, Associate Professor and teacher of General and social pedagogy at the University of Messina, and also coordinator of advanced training courses of the LUA, Sara Calcini, humanistic psychologist and psychotherapist, Grazia Chiarini, physician, expert in narrative autobiographical methodologies and LUA referent, and Beata Partika, sociologist and coordinator of the CEBS Centre.

The stages of the meetings were characterized by moments of residential training, lead by the experts of LUA and Nkey, through theoretical frontal approaches and experiential moments of play, alternating with phases of "learning on the job" and remote learning for the experimentation of the Game in its various versions and in different contexts. An important and delicate aspect of the training meetings was to convey the salient elements of autobiographical methodology and narrative devices and, most of all, the fundamental role that facilitators/ masters must acquire to build, through group work, a "narrative context", based on the suspension of judgment, respect, trust, sharing and mutual learning. In the various phases of the training, which took place in Romania, Bologna, Portugal and Poland, the representatives of the four partner countries of the project met in a mixed manner and shared reflections, emotions, and information on the next steps of the project.

In the "learning of the job" phases, after the training, the partners, returning to their own contexts, had the opportunity to experiment with the learned methodologies,

identifying people to whom they could propose the autobiographical activity of the My Life Game and compiling a report in which to highlight reflections, positive aspects and problems that emerged in the various game sessions. The experts of the Anghiari's Free University of Autobiography continued to follow the process by remotely supervising the methodological and operational issues regarding the autobiographical method. Doctor Lisa Bellini, within the Unifi /LUA Master, has drawn up a report on the autobiographical writing workshop with the My Life Game, which took place in-person in Santa Croce sull'Arno: the operators of the Nkey Computer Agency, leader of the Project, used all the data from the various reports to improve technical aspects of the game.

During the period following the international learning meeting which was held in Porto, Portugal, from May 16th to May 19th 2022, from June until the end of September, a piloting phase was carried out, in which a scientific test was used to evaluate the effects of autobiographical writing, proposed in the MyLife Game, on subjective wellbeing and on other aspects of positive health. The test consists of five validating scales which were made available by Prof. Sergio Ardis, Lucca's Medical Hospital Director, Founder and National Secretary of GIF and Positive Health.

A thank you goes to all the partners of the Project, crucial for the designing of the Project, and to all the participants involved in game sessions.

A special thanks goes to Prof. Sergio Ardis who kindly provided tests for trials and data analysis.

Researching, finding new pathways, developing thoughts by affirming the value of writing, represent the common thread of the My Life in Europe Project, of which the keywords are writing, synergy, sharing, connection, wellbeing.

### **Siteographic references:**

<https://mylifeineurope.nkey.it/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MyLifeinEuropeErasmusProject>

1

**MEMORY, NEUROPLASTICITY,  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY**

Grazia Chiarini, Sara Calcini



# MEMORY, NEUROPLASTICITY, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

There has been a lot of scientific research that over the centuries has dealt with the correlation between mind and brain, without reaching a definitive theoretical framework. Thanks to modern neuroimaging techniques (such as positron emission tomography and functional magnetic resonance imaging) and non-invasive brain stimulation, neuroscientific data confirmed the localization, in specific brain areas, of psychic functions whose alteration had already been shown in people with brain injuries.

An injury to the **hippocampus**, for example, can lead to memory issues and the alteration of other brain structures, such as the **amygdala**, the **insula**, and the **orbito-frontal cortex**, produces a picture of changes in behaviour and emotional learning. Based on numerous experimental and clinical research, scientists have thus been able to assume that some mental processes, such as memory, have some correspondence with brain activity.

**FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NEUROLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW, MEMORY IS DEFINED AS THE CAPACITY OUR BRAIN HAS TO STORE INFORMATION COMING FROM OUTSIDE THROUGH PERCEPTIVE FACTORS SUCH AS SENSORY ORGANS.**

This information is decoded, processed through the mind and the brain, and stored in the form of memories that can be later recovered.

**Memory** can be defined as an archive, in different brain areas, of images and experiences, fundamental for the survival of each, to which tap into the present and help make future decisions.

The mnemonic process is characterized by three phases: coding information, consolidation and recovery.

The whole process can be affected by several factors, from the depth of processing of the stimuli in the coding phase, to the emotional relevance of the stimuli and the emotional state of the person. Memory processes are possible because of **brain neuroplasticity**, that is, the brain's ability to change its structure in response to experience.

The brain functions as a totality where all its parts are interconnected as a web of processes. A structural change can lead to the creation or strengthening of connections between existing neurons or growth of new neurons, producing actual changes (Siegel, 2017).

**Neurons**, small cells that participate in functions related to the nervous system, are about 80 million at birth and then decrease with age. During the day, we constantly lose and generate neurons. Some cells, through processes of neuron regeneration, can create new connections, and this is the process called **neurogenesis**, that gives rise to new neurons throughout the life of a person.

Each life event produces changes to the structure or function of neurons, both temporarily and permanently. Events create new links (synapses) between neurons, reshaping the brain map. The huge number of possible connections (more than 10,000 connections per neuron) gives the brain a great flexibility which can be altered even in old age.

To better understand how mnemonic consolidation occurs, when we need to memorize a speech, large groups of neurons are activated, repeatedly and simultaneously, through the passage of electrical signals. Synapses allow the transmission of electrical signals from one neuron to another with the help of chemical molecules called neurotransmitters. The more a speech is repeated, the greater the frequency of these electrical signals. This activates a process at the cellular level, called long-term potentiation, which strengthens the connection between neurons and ensures humans to remember information more easily and precisely. Mnemonic consolidation decreases in some forms of cognitive impairment. (Le Baron, Hernandez, Navarro et al., 2008; Rosenzweig, Barnes, McNaughton, 2002)

## Types of memories

Many scientists have studied memory processes, through various experiments and trying to make a classification. According to the most widespread classification criteria, based on memory retention duration, **there are three main types of memory: sensory memory, short-term memory, long-term memory.** (M. Atkinson and Shiffrin 1968).

The ability to forget, however, is very important because it allows us to process only the essential information, and not every single thing that we come across every day.

**Sensory memory** receives sensory information (auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory) and retains it for a few seconds or milliseconds.

**Short-Term Memory** (MBT) has limited capacity (less than a minute) in storing information (maximum 5-9 elements - Miller 1956).

MBT is generally divided into:

- **working memory** (Working Memory, or WM), which contains information that we keep in mind for a purpose;

- **iconic memory**, which retains visual information that continues to persist for a few moments;

- **Echoic memory** which retains hearing information that continues to persist briefly.

**Long-term memory** (MLT or Long-Term Memory) can encode the information that also comes from the MBT and store it for a long time, like the hard drive of a computer does.

MLT is generally divided into the following subtypes:

- **implicit or procedural memory** (main structures involved: subcortical) which takes place in actions and concerns mostly motor and phonetic skills, which are learned through exercise and used without voluntary control (e.g. swimming, skiing, driving, cycling).



•**explicit or declarative memory** (main areas involved: prefrontal cortex, temporal area and connected structures such as amygdala and hippocampus) which is expressed with words, concerns communicable information that is recalled consciously and that can be further divided into: episodic memory (memory relating to specific events); autobiographical memory relating to episodes of the person who evokes them; semantic memory, memory linked to knowledge on the outside world.

### Autobiographical memory

Autobiographical memory stores facts and events that have occurred during the life of a person and consciously unifies the various experiences giving them sense. This allows situations that happened far in time to be kept alive in our memory. Autobiographical memory is stored in the hippocampus, which would link memories to the specific spatial contexts in which the event to be remembered occurred. There is solid experimental evidence that the activity of the hippocampus increases when a memory is recalled and that injuries to the hippocampus - due to trauma, strokes or neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's - may prevent one from recalling memories and specifically the formation of new memories.

The clearness of a memory is dictated by the emotional or behavioural significance related to it. The sphere of emotions, in fact, is important to recall memories or to feel new emotions like nostalgia. A connection between smell and state of mind, which allows a memory to be recalled easily by perceiving that smell in a later period, has been demonstrated throughout various studies – just like one remembers that moment which is linked to a certain emotion, a smell or taste. The amygdala, which, like the hippocampus, is located in the subcortical region of the temporal lobe, allows the control of information and the attribution of a particular affective and/or emotional meaning to such information. It is interesting to know that theories about learning, on the biological side, claim that the mnemonic trace is consolidated when a behaviour or stimulus is followed by a reinforcement capable of arousing pleasure (Pavlov, 1927;

Skinner, 1938; Thorndike, 1913; Watson, 1930).

The great French writer Marcel Proust, in his novel *"In search of lost time"* (First volume *"Swann's Way"*, 1913), writes that in eating a treat, a madeleine, soaked in tea, he suddenly begins to remember when he was a boy and his aunt brought him, every morning, upon his awakening, a madeleine for breakfast.

Culture, society, and personal history of each of us can also influence this sensory memory. Autobiographical memory, drawing information from the past, can help to make decisions for the present and for the future, to better understand the behaviour of others and the social context in which a person lives (Robinson and Swanson, 1990), to behave differently when certain conducts of the past have caused suffering to oneself or to others (Bluck and Gluck, 2004).

Autobiographical memory plays an important role in building one's self-image over time (Bluck and Alea, 2008) and to give it continuity and stability. Memories of important aspects of life speak of our identity, of the years in which our personality has taken shape, as it happens for the years of adolescence, of youth, of early maturity.

When we tell stories about our past, we gradually restructure the meaning of individual memories, so that the reality of memories becomes progressively less important than its *"biased"* reconstruction which implies distortions, embellishments, omissions, transformations, although autobiographical thinking represents an important experience, a meaningful adventure that can

### MEMORIES

THE CLEARNESS  
OF A MEMORY  
IS DICTATED BY  
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SENSORY MEMORY

bring psychological well-being, as Duccio Demetrio notes (Il gioco della vita. Kit autobiografico. Trenta proposte per raccontarsi, Ed. Guerini, 1997, p.10)

*“In fact, those who have studied the psychology of autobiographers tell us that the story of oneself, while it might not heal us from bad memories, as an outlet, a tool of liberation and commitment, it gives us relief and makes us feel a certain sense of pleasure.”*

### **The brain’s areas of writing and speaking.**

Although the ability to write has developed from oral language, at brain level, writing and speaking are considered, two independent systems, even if connected. In an article published in Psychological Science, a group of American researchers demonstrated that it is possible to maintain intact the functionality of the brain area responsible for writing even if the area responsible for oral language is damaged, and vice versa; this phenomenon also occurs for the smaller components of language, the morphemes. (B. Rapp, S. Fischer-Baum, M. Miozzo, 2015). The study of the brain areas involved in the process of writing and reading has had a great boost thanks to the development of functional magnetic resonance (f MRI) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) techniques. Data from various studies on the definition of writing and reading have allowed to clarify the functional relationships between the different brain areas involved.

The anatomical and functional structures involved in the process of writing and reading are different but closely interconnected:

1. *posterior occipital area* in which basic visual analysis takes place, the recognition of symbols;
2. lower temporal and occipital area *which function as a deposit for the spelling representations* of words and favours the process of word recognition.
3. *posterior-superior temporal area* or Wernicke Area for the comprehension of language transmitted via listening;

4. *Broca area*, on the frontal lobe of the left cerebral hemisphere, which activates the neuromotor program for sound production (mouth, tongue, larynx). The motor articulation of words also requires the involvement of the additional motor area of the cerebral cortex and extrapyramidal motor subcortical structures (basal ganglia, cerebellum).

To write we must make a complex movement, which is the result of the joint action of the nervous and muscular systems. Holding a pen for writing is an operation consisting of different components: the movement of the arm that reaches the pen or the keys of the computer or tablet, that of the wrist and handwriting.

These actions are controlled by two systems: **the Pyramid System** and **the extrapyramidal System**. The pyramidal system depends on neurons located in the motor cortex; the extrapyramidal system depends on neurons located in the basal ganglia, in the subcortical area.

Motor patterns are recorded in the cerebellum, ie the sequential actions of muscles that allow you to walk, write, jump etc. Automatic movements, like those of writing, are the result of exercise that over time favours the establishment of a procedural memory.

“

COURSIVE HANDWRITING IS SLOWER, STIMULATES NEURONAL CIRCUITS AND FACILITATES ATTENTION, CONCENTRATION, AND MEMORY. DIGITAL WRITING, NOW WIDESPREAD, IS FASTER, ALLOWS TO CORRECT, EXPAND, COPY ONE’S OWN WRITINGS AND SHARE THEM QUICKLY. IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN THE USE OF PENS AND TECHNOLOGY, EDUCATING OURSELVES AND OTHERS TO A CONCIIOUS USE OF TABLETS, SMARTPHONES, PCS, AFTER HAVING UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDWRITING.

”

## Cognitive games and “serious” games

With aging, some basic cognitive processes become slowly less efficient and can impair general cognitive functioning, including memory and its systems. One of the main causes of mental aging is the loss of neurons over time.

Neuron loss mainly affects certain structures such as the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex.

There are also many conditions that can cause memory disorders, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and thyroid disease. Thanks to neuroplasticity and neurogenesis, we can activate cognitive resources also through the training of memory.

Cognitive games are useful to train the mind and cognitive skills and share some important features: they present a structured activity, with a purpose and a recognizable goal; allow the acquisition of new skills and consolidation of current ones; have simple, clear and explicit instructions; they allow for progress measurement and are rewarding, according to the task.

Some examples of cognitive games:

- Board games
- Word games
- Memory
- Diaries
- Writing about memories

Cognitive games called serious games are interactive virtual simulations with a well-structured objective in which serious and playful aspects are balanced. They are designed for educational purposes in the context of adult education with the goal of learning by doing. Experiential learning indeed encourages more profound and lasting behavioural changes.

The oxymoron (combining words with opposite concepts) is a serious game with ancient origins. The first to use this terminology were the Neoplatonic philosophers who coined the Latin expression “serio ludere”, to indicate a combination of serious and non-serious topics.

In the digital field, they were first mentioned in 2002 following an initiative led by David Rejeski and Ben Sawyer. These authors stressed the importance of using the video game industry to empower public organizations through learning and simulation-based games (Ma et al, 2011).

Cognitive stimulation through play is a method to allow the maintenance of a healthy brain and to limit the decay of the functions cognitive that necessary to carry out daily activities, even in the elderly people with dementia (Tziraki et al., 2017).

People with a non-severe cognitive deficit can train cognitive functions through small challenges and simple rules, achieving a common goal.

Serious games that are easy to use after a first phase of getting acquainted with them (Zucchella et al. 2014) and can be used in different contexts (home, nursing homes) with the involvement of different groups (therapists, caregivers) with a variable frequency (a once a week or every day) and may be repeated several times.

Scientific research has shown that online activities have beneficial effects on the cognitive functioning of the elderly people, even those with dementia, in different areas such as: reaction times, memory, attention span, control of cognitive functions and increase of multitasking abilities (Kyriazis, Kiourti, 2018).

### **The My Life game shares some of the features of cognitive games and serious games:**

- It uses cards as a writing stimulus.
- Its activity is structured around a path that allows you to get to the end of the game.

- It has simple instructions.
- It allows you to acquire new skills or consolidate the ones you already have (like knowing how to play online games).
- It allows you to measure your progress (cards used, written products).
- It favours the valorisation and the gratification linked to the task.

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**2**

**THE NARRATION OF SELF**

Grazia Chiarini, Sara Calcini



# THE NARRATION OF SELF

GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

The concept of narration is very broad. The term narration derives etymologically from the Latin narrate akin to agnarus, which means “aware”. The art of storytelling begins with the dawn of humanity and, over time, the evolution and development of language have led man to enrich their narratives, often colouring them with intense emotional involvement. In myths, fables or fairy tales, often the actions of the protagonists are, in fact, accompanied by a description of moods, emotions, internal experiences, with which the reader can mirror and identify with the characters.

*“[...] a man is always a storyteller, he lives surrounded by his stories and everything that happens to him he sees through them and tries to live his life as if he was telling it.”* (J.P. Sartre, 2014 La nausea, Ed. Einaudi, pp.58, 59.)

*“Reading short stories-writes Umberto Eco – means playing a game through which you learn to make sense of the immensity of things that have happened and happen and will happen in the real world”.* (U. Eco, Six Walks in the Fictional Woods, 1994, p.107)

Through narration, an individual is able to organize their experience and interpret the events that happen to them, giving them the structure of stories, myths, rites and customs of a culture.

According to American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1992), narrative of itself responds precisely to the individual’s need to rebuild reality by giving them a specific meaning at a temporal or cultural level. Narration is also a space for reflection through which the picture of one’s own existence, their world and relationships emerge. A fundamental aspect of narrative thought, according to Bruner, is constituted by the *“narrative creation of the self”*, an essential dimension of construction of subjective identity and at the same time of constant openness to the Other.

"Today with the emergence of neuroscience and all its wonders, it is still most important to pay attention to personal narrative, consider each patient as a unique human being with its own history and strategies of adaptation and survival" - writes doctor and psychologist Oliver Sacks in *"The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat"*. (Ed. Adelphi, 1986, p.14.

"There is a moment, in the course of life- writes philosopher Duccio Demetrio- in which we feel that things need to be told in a different way than usual. [...] Since, perhaps, writing has taken on the task of telling firsthand what you have lived and to resist the oblivion of memory." This need is called autobiographical thought, "that set of memories of one's past life, of what one has been and has done, is therefore a presence that from a certain moment on accompanies us for the rest of our life." (D. Demetrio, "Raccontarsi. L'autobiografia a cura di sé" Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1996, pag.9)

"Writing is like running to a lover and the lover is the story, the novel." - quotes writer Dacia Maraini (1990)

The object of love, in the case of autobiographical writing, is represented by our history. When we write we begin a path of self-recognition through an introspective movement in search of who we are, retrospective of who we have been and projective of who we could be, but we are also in "search of the many roles, the many parts we've played and the character that we're most interested in portraying a given moment or instant of life" (Duccio Demetrio, 1996, p 35), of the many Selves that we've been, that we are and that we will be. Through what Demetrio calls cognitive bilocation, we split, we multiply, we distance from ourselves while retracing our life events. Our weaver has the function of sewing together the fragments of our stories, of giving legitimacy to the other selves that live there, of calling us to the responsibility of accepting ourselves as we are and to give space to dreams, aspirations, ideas, to what we have not been able to express before (1996, page 14). Autobiographical writing then becomes a resource and a cure for "rediscovering the plurality which

had been lost, at least in our memory" even later in life. It allows you to reflect on your own actions, on your own perceptions and self-knowledge becomes the goal of self-care. Writing as self-care implies discipline and constancy, and it has the power of guiding us towards what we did not think we could achieve, even with the fear of failing, yet with the tension that leads us to the revitalization of ourselves.

### **Egographic writings**

The writing of self includes a wide range of expressions and can be divided into two main categories: minor or episodic works and major works of self-narrative. The terms "major" or "minor" do not express a judgment but wants to indicate the time dedicated to writing.

Minor egographs preferably use the present tense, with typical diary features. Among these we include: autobiographical engrams, which include elementary and primitive scriptures such as drawing, scribbling, the symbolic traces that an individual can leave along their journey; autographic fragments, unlike engrams, show greater knowledge of the language by using notes, sms, postcards, affective cards...); hand-delivered letters, that have an impromptu and diary-like format ( notes from parents, friends, lovers, letters written out of grief); self-deception, in which a writer who's writing about themselves masks their own aspects and traits through writing; self-profile, self-referential writing, with physical and psychological self-descriptions, which is also used within major works and can be part of confessions or autobiographies.

Major egographic writings are characterized by a particular attention to narrative structure and retrospective investigation. Among these we can include: egopoetry, in which compositional research is more accurate; diary; writings of experiences focused on family, professional life, stages or passages of life; confessions in which the story of one's own life can be accompanied by a request for forgiveness or social



reintegration; memorials that retrospectively describe memorable events such as an adventurous journey, a great love story, a period of war, a disease; autobiographies, which “are the chronological reconstruction of one’s own past where the memory tries to give account of the seasons of the life, of the most significant experiences, of the vicissitudes, of the intertwining between the various autobiographies of one’s existence, both independent and interconnected”(Demetrio, 2008). Let’s look at some of them more in depth.

A diary is defined by Fr. Lejeune as “a place to experiment and to test, an exercise for the memory, a self-database, a draft of oneself” and can prepare us for more demanding kinds of writing.

The term diary comes from the Latin dies (day). A diary is, in fact, a narrative in first person singular, written on the spur of the moment, day after day, indicating the date of the day on which it a certain page was completed and using an informal linguistic register. Its functions are those of care, self-help, and it has a cathartic, liberating effect, especially when it comes to kids and adolescents’ diaries.

During adult life, diaries can be used to feel more present in the world, to write about the unspeakable, to meticulously describe events, meetings, reflections. People write diaries for themselves or for an imaginary interlocutor. They are generally found and published postmortem.

Several metaphors that express the consoling, purifying, liberating character of writing are attributed to diaries, as well as to autobiographies. A diary can be seen as a compass, a confessional, a piggy bank, a labyrinth, a padlock, a rosary (Duccio Demetrio, 2008).

Some examples of diaries: the war diary De Bello Gallico by Giulio Cesare; Christopher Columbus’ logbook; the diaries of Anne Frank and Hetty Hillesum; the diaries of the American poet, who died by suicide, Sylvia Plath and many others.

## **Autobiography and Biography.**

The word autobiography comes from the Greek αὐτός “myself”, βίος “life”, γράφω, “I write” – “I write about myself. If I write about you or him or her or them, I’m writing a biography.”

Autobiography is an ancient literary genre for all those who want to talk about themselves and their lives, about what they have done and learned over the years. Through autobiographical practice, everyone, at any age, learns to document their own experience, to leave a testimony of themselves to others, to think and reflect better, to redefine themselves.

Autobiography can be defined as an auto-formative method that everyone, alone or with the help of a facilitator, can experience first-hand within a path of self-discovery, with the possibility of highlighting potential narratives which were previously unknown. This promotes, from a psychological point of view, an increase in self-esteem and a decrease in loneliness.

It’s scientifically proven that writing your own history, practicing writing day after day and taking stock, from time to time, of certain steps and phases of existence, educates to the development of one’s inner world, stimulates one to remember, to concentrate, to reason on oneself. It is growth path that accompanies many individual therapeutic analyses. Autobiography is also considered a method of self-healing (Demetrius, 1996) because it gives meaning to memories and generates

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

IT COMES FROM  
THE GREEK ΑΥΤΟΣ  
«MYSELF», ΒΙΟΣ  
«LIFE», «ΓΡΑΦΩ»,  
I WRITE ABOUT  
MYSELF

reflexivity, as well promoting the exploring of one's own identity.

In autobiographical practice, as was previously described, there's a phenomenon that Demetrio (1996) defines as "*cognitive bilocation*", the ability that each person has to split their identity, being both the author, the story's protagonist and also the person who reads what's been written, without the risk of losing or negating themselves. This distancing process happens both in time (then-now), and in space (there and here), and also in becoming characters of various episodes of our stories. This "*temporal ubiquity*" allows us to live the past, the present and the future at the same time, and to rediscover ourselves through the image of someone who's Other from oneself.

This phase implies a willingness to listen to oneself (Formenti, 1998) with the desire, also, to communicate our experience to an interlocutor who listens to us or to the reader of our autobiography.

Besides being a spontaneous and individual activity, autobiographical writing can be used in adult education (in career counselling programs, in language courses for adults), in social sciences (for research purposes, as support for political and social interventions), in the healthcare field (mental health, chronic diseases, end-of-life).

### COGNITIVE BILOCATION

THE ABILITY THAT EVERYONE HAS TO SPLIT THEIR IDENTITY, BEING BOTH THE AUTHOR, THE PROTAGONIST OF THE STORY AND THE PERSON WHO READS THEIR OWN WRITINGS, WITHOUT LOSING OR NEGATING THEMSELVES

“

“DURING THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY, “ AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE “, THROUGH THE WRITING OF ONE’S LIFE, HELPS PEOPLE TO DISCOVER THINGS OF WHICH THEY WERE NOT AWARE BEFORE, TO GIVE MEANING TO EVENTS FROM THE HISTORY OF ONE’S LIFE, TO REFLECT ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, FINDING NEW BALANCES WHEN THEY FEEL LOST, AS IT OFTEN HAPPENS WITH CHRONIC DISEASES.”

”

Autobiographical writing thus becomes an important professional tool as it manages to give dignity to any life story. The collection of biographies of people who present physical or existential suffering, social discomfort, who cannot or do not want to write about themselves, allows them to make their voices heard and to feel less alone.

It is necessary, however, that those who wish to professionally avail themselves of such methodology, undertake a self-training course before using it for others.

Autobiography involves three equally important levels: the individual level in which the aim of an autobiography is to try to build a narrative, consistent self, enhance its uniqueness, show that your life story is similar to that of others and thus increase a sense of social belonging; the level of collectiveness or or collective memory, through which the memories that unite a generation, a social, ethnic, or religious group are preserved; the historical level or historical memory level, in which the memory of the past settles in individuals and social groups of a Country through autobiographical writings, and which Maurice Halbwachs defined as “an ocean into which all partial memories flow”. These levels are interconnected as all life stories are connected and concern the individual but also their generation, the community and the historical period in which they live.

Another interesting theme is that of “minuscule” writings introduced by Pierre Michon (1984) or the “philosophy of small things” (2013) by Francesca Rigotti where

microstories and microwritings have a significant relevance as they bring to light people and stories which were destined to go into oblivion.

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3

**BRIEF HISTORY  
OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Caterina Benelli, Sara Calcini, Grazia Chiarini



# BRIEF HISTORY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CATERINA BENELLI, SARA CALCINI, GRAZIA CHIARINI

The history of autobiographical writing is so broad and so many authors have contributed over the years, enriching with their texts this fascinating literary genre, that it becomes difficult to mention even the most representative authors without being reductive. In the bibliographic references there are some reference essays for those who are willing to read more about the topic.

Examples of autobiographical narration have been present since prehistoric times, although not in written form, through paintings and rock engravings. An example would be the engravings of the cave of Romito, specifically the graffiti, which can be found on a large exterior boulder, representing a majestic bovid (Uro or *Bos primigenius*), one of the oldest evidence of prehistoric art in Italy and one of the most important at European level, located in the municipality of Papisidero in Calabria. Through engravings and other findings, which cover a time span between 23,000 and 10,000 years ago, it was possible to reconstruct eating habits, social life and the environment in which *Homo sapiens* lived.

The oldest example of autobiographical writing dates back to the 10th century B.C. and is attributed

to the Egyptian author Sinuhe, servant of Pharaoh Sehetepibtawy (Ammenemat I), who has written the *Adventures of Sinuhe*.

The Greeks and Latins also wrote about themselves, through memoirs, letters, comments and prayers (Demetrio, 1996) although these texts are far from the autobiography and the autobiographical pact, described by Lejeune (1986), in which the author, the desire to represent themselves, is committed to telling the truth.

St. Augustine was the first to use autobiographical writing in an introspective sense. In the *"Confessions"* (written from 397 to 400 AD), which represent the

beginning of this genre, the author expresses his reflections on his own actions, with a predominantly religious outlook, within a path that has led to personal and moral growth. Through memory you can understand yourself better.

**FOR S. AUGUSTIN, KNOWING MEANS REMEMBERING. HIS CONCEPTION OF TIME IS INTERESTING. TIME EXISTS AS A SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION, WHICH PUTS EVENT IN SUCCESSION: FIRST THE PAST, THROUGH MEMORY, THEN THE PRESENT, THROUGH ATTENTION, FINALLY THE FUTURE, THROUGH THE ACT OF WAITING.**

The first mainly religious autobiographical writings, such as George Fox's texts, an English preacher who was the founder of Quakers, and the English theologian John Wesley, founder of Methodism, were gradually abandoned with the advent of Humanism, to give way to more personal and evolutionary works.

Francesco Petrarca's works are also worth mentioning, with the collection of epistles "Familiares" and in the "Secretum"; Enea Silvio Piccolomini, author of the "Commentarii rerum memorabilium"; Benvenuto Cellini with "La Vita", from 1570, a personal story in the context of an historical era, discovered and published during the eighteenth century. Another important autobiographical author Michel de Montaigne: his "Essays" (1588) are a collection of writings on various topics and with numerous personal reflections.

During, Enlightenment personal events are intertwined with a particular attention to contemporary social life and an interest in adventure is born. Some examples are Carlo Goldoni's Memoirs (1784-87), Histoire de ma vie (1822) by Giacomo Casanova, the Memoirs written by him (1823-29) on Lorenzo Da Ponte and Vittorio Alfieri's life, published posthumously in 1806. The "Confessions" (1782-1789) by Jean Jacques Rousseau represent one of the most significant examples of autobiographical literature, which tell the first 53 years of the author's life in 12 books.

From Rousseau onwards we witness the birth of a series of autobiographical

writings on various themes: childhood, the past, memory. During the twentieth century autobiographical tradition tends to contaminate with romance, giving rise to autobiographical novels. Among the most important works we remember "In search of lost time" (A la recherche du temps perdu) by Marcel Proust, published in seven volumes between 1913 and 1927, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" by James Joyce (1916), "Zeno's conscience" by Italo Svevo (1923) and The Man Without Qualities by Robert Musil, (1930-1943).

We also must cite autobiographies which are characterized by a strong political and civil commitment

Such as "The words (Les Mots, 1964)" by Jean-Paul Sartre and "Memories of a dutiful daughter" (Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, 1958) by Simone de Beauvoir.

With the development of relationship psychology and psychoanalysis, autobiography becomes a tool for research and to care for identify, and accompanies many psychotherapy journeys, in which the patient is encouraged to reconstruct and reveal their own intimate story through narration, to grasp the narrative structure of the Self, to understand their own current way of existing, in order to pursue change.

An interesting synthesis of autobiographical writing and self-analytic psychoanalysis is the book Memories, dreams, reflections by Carl Gustav Jung, written in collaboration with Aniela Jaffé and published in 1965. This type of autobiographical writing can be also seen in Marie Cardinal's novel The words to say it (2017).

In the 1980s, autobiographical writing aroused the interest of many French, Canadians, Swiss and Italians scholars belonging to various fields of knowledge: psychological, sociological and pedagogical (Lejeune, 1986; Pineau, 1989; Dominicè, 1992; Jedlowsky, 1994; Demetrio, 1996; Formenti, 1998; Fabbri, 1991). Writing about oneself and one's life stories became, for these authors, an opportunity for meditation and intellectual regeneration.

The French school in the field of autobiography has seen its development in with the studies of Philippe Lejeune ,beginning with the well-known volume “Le pacte autobiographique (1975). Lejeune’s work, which started in the seventies, is of great cultural and scientific interest because it crosses the history of autobiographical studies in literature from the classics of French autobiography (Rousseau, Stendal, Proust), approaching the stories of “common people” through the foundation “Association pour l’Autobiographie et cultural heritage” ([www.autopacte.org](http://www.autopacte.org)).

Lejeune stands on the international scene as the leading scholar of autobiography whose scientific trajectory deserves to be known and carefully considered (Benelli, 2006).

The interest in biographical approaches was born in America in the ‘20s and ‘30s with the Chicago School of Sociology through the collection of autobiographical writings related to social unrest and urban marginality.

The biographical sociological model would be taken up in the seventies by the French school that will choose, as subjects of research, artisans and their families as described by Manuela Olagnero and Chiara Saraceno in their essay *Che vita è*. The use of biographical materials in sociological analysis, Editore Carocci, 1993. The analysis of life stories in the pedagogical field is has been discovered and used since 1970, by French researchers, Gaston Pineau and Pierre Dominicè and Italian ones, especially by Duccio Demetrio, although currently, it is possible to speak of a real international school, to which many scholars, from various countries, belong. In Italy, at the beginning of the Nineties, a research group from Bicocca University was founded in Milan, coordinated by Duccio Demetrio, former full professor of Education Philosophy and Theories and practices of adult storytelling.

On September 10th, 1998 Duccio Demetrio and Saverio Tutino, animator and organizer of the Diaristic Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano, signed the constitution of the Free University of Autobiography, a non-profit cultural association based in Anghiari, Tuscany, which has become a community of research, training, and

dissemination of memory culture in every kind of field. On 5 September 1998, in Pieve Santo Stefano, representatives of European archives, which have common characteristics of preservation and dissemination of autobiography, met for the first time. During the international conference Autobiographical Archives in Europe, held in Rovereto in January 1998, the European Association for Autobiography (AEA) was established, and it has since promoted many initiatives and projects, in an attempt to find European convergences on the topic of grass-root autobiography and to build a network. The European Diary Archives and Collections Network (EDAC) was founded in June 2015 in Amsterdam, with the objective of exchanging best practices, data and expertise between different diaries archives in Europe and promoting academic research on diaries.

The autobiographical genre is constantly evolving and with time it has acquired new elements. In recent years, autobiographical writing from books has moved onto social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, personal blogs, where authors share experiences, emotions through images, videos, posts, or tweets. But still the research in this field is not yet mature and anyway, it questions us on the power of writing of self in different places and contexts and on the functions of public autobiographical writing as a form of communication.

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4

**THE FREE UNIVERSITY  
OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ANGHIARI**

Caterina Benelli, Grazia Chiarini, Sara Calcini



# THE FREE UNIVERSITY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ANghiARI

CATERINA BENELLI, GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

The **Free University of Autobiography of Anghiari**, founded under the patronage of the Faculty of Education of the University of Milano-Bicocca and the City of Anghiari, since 1998, the year of its foundation, has been following the aspiration of being a place in which to welcome all those who wish to reflect, truly understand but also experience the value of autobiographical writing. In August 2011, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research accredited the LUA among the training bodies for the professional updating and training of teachers. Duccio Demetrio, former professor of Philosophy of Education and Theory and practice of narration and autobiography at the University of Milano-Bicocca, is the Scientific Director, assisted by a Scientific and Educational Council, (made up of teachers from several Italian universities and teachers at the LUA School) and fifty local collaborators. The LUA has a social, political-pedagogical vocation and is a real community of autobiographical practice that's constantly evolving; through the experiences gained by individuals or groups coming from all kinds of backgrounds, it supports not only theoretical contributions, but also the results of experimental and innovative activities developed "on the field", which prefigure new orientations and spaces for reflection that are shared in regular meetings, seminars and workshops throughout the year. The self-training aims of this autobiographical approach, which are the key elements of the activities carried out by LUA, are to encourage the skill of self-narrating, to reread and reinterpret one's own experience – experiences that often contemplate changes and painful events.

Learning objectives allow you to acquire personal awareness through the writing of oneself and the acquisition of specific skills in the use of autobiographical and biographical methodologies; this allows one to operate professionally in adult education, in individual autobiographical counselling with people in existential

difficulties, and in the collection and promotion of memories at a local level.

The Association organizes training and research through various activities: the Athe Gracci Autobiographical Research and Studies Centre, seminars, summer weeks, the School of Eco-narration, courses for representatives and trainers, the **School "Mnemosyne"**, who is the goddess of memory in Greek mythology. Mnemosyne comes from the same root of the word mnemonic, which is the Greek word *mnēmē*, which means "memory".

*The Triennial School of Autobiographical and Biographical Writing*, called **Mnemosyne**, offers a first preparatory year (**Graphain**); in the second year, there are four advanced paths (**Morphosis/Mnemon** I serious level, **Koinonia**, **Mimesis** I - and II serious level and *Ta Eis Heauton*) and in the third year three courses of specialization (**Biblos**, **Morphosis/Mnemon** II level, *Kliné*). At the end of the first year, students can acquire the title of autobiographical writing scholar, and, if they decide to continue their studies, at the end of one of the courses of the second year they earn respectively the title of *Expert in the management of autobiographical laboratories and autobiographical collection; Expert facilitator, through writing and autobiographical methodology, dialogue and cooperative relationships in respect of diversity; Expert in narrative writing; Expert in autobiographical methodologies and self-analysis writing*; ; at the end of one of the specialization courses of the third year they can earn the title of Consultant for the promotion of contemporary autobiographical literature: in school, in families, in cultural and social services, the title of expert *Formator in the planning and development of laboratories and community biographical collections, of Consultant in autobiographical writing*.

The Mnemosyne course, in its various declinations, allows participants to obtain a preparation in the specific area of adult training, a preparation centred around the design, implementation and management of laboratories in various fields: schools, hospitals, care-as in prevention -, nursing homes, prisons and multicultural contexts with the aim of promoting well-being and improving the living conditions of the various parts of the population.

Local governments, institutions, cultural and social associations operate within the complexity of the difficult historical period that we are experiencing, characterized by important social, economic and political changes which were influenced both by the Coronavirus pandemic started in 2020 and by the repercussions of the war in Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022; these institutions increasingly require projects and paths of valorisation of personal and community stories to respond to the needs of various population groups.

Among the activities organized by LUA we include Congresses, Conferences, Autobiography Festivals, participation in European Projects and activation, together with the Department of Training, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology of the University of Florence, in 2022, of the First Level Master in Methodologies of self-bio-graphic research, storytelling practices, adult education: for educational, scholastic, cultural and caring professions, coordinated for LUA's part by Duccio Demetrio and Caterina Benelli.

Finally in 2022 the LUA, under the direction of Caterina Benelli and with the collaboration of Milan publisher Mimesis, launched the international magazine "Autobiographies. Research, practical experiences". The Magazine has an International Scientific Committee and an Editorial Committee and is available in open access on Mimesis' website. A unique magazine on the international scene that features lectures, studies, research, and good autobiographical practices: a reference point to develop projects, ideas and reflection in the field of fiction, biographies and autobiographies.

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5

**THE NARRATION OF ONESELF  
IN ILLNESS AND TRAUMA**

Grazia Chiarini, Sara Calcini



# THE NARRATION OF ONESELF IN ILLNESS AND TRAUMA

GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

A disease is a transient alteration of the psycho-physical state of an organism, capable of reducing or modifying its functionality. It is the breaking of a balance, a transition from one type of life to another, especially if it is chronic diseases.

It is important to know how and why the alteration occurred, finding the cause but also the meaning that this alteration has in the life of a person and of those around them. Knowing all this can lead to the onset but above all the progression and prognosis.

**IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO REFLECT ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TREATING OR CURING SOMEONE AND TAKING CARE OF THEM.**

**To cure** (from the Latin Cura- ae) encompasses the therapeutic means and medical prescriptions related to certain diseases or general morbid states. The English term is to cure and refers to the disease in the organic sense. The body is an object to be studied.

Taking care of someone or something is an assiduous and diligent commitment to pursue a purpose or to practice an activity, to provide for someone or something; to take care of oneself, of one's person, of one's health. The English term refers to how the disease is lived (illness). The body becomes the subject, the focus is on the person.

**Caring** is a relational practice of verbal and non-verbal communication, combining scientific knowledge, technical competence, and human interest for the sick person. In the space of care, as in any interaction between human beings, there is an exchange of narratives and mutual listening.

**Listening and understanding** allow to identify the key to align with the sick person and get their complicity; Stories allow us to see first-hand the consequences of illness on people's lives.

## Narrative Medicine

Through Narrative Medicine we can better formulate the diagnosis, evaluate the efficacy of a cure and identify the best answers compared to the requests.

*“A patient, long before they become the subject of a medical investigation, is a simple storyteller, a narrator of their suffering - a traveller who has gone to the land of the sick”* (Spinsanti 2015)

The concept of storytelling in Medicine was born in the United States in the 1990s, within the Harvard Medical School, where psychiatrists and anthropologists Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman were among the first to emphasize the importance of “stories” as a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of treatment and build a solid therapeutic relationship.

In *Medicine, rationality, and experience*, Good argues that the meaning of the disease is built through narrative practices of which the protagonists are the people living with the illness, their families, all those involved in the path of treatment. Stories of illness refer to personal experience, the subjective perception (illness) that each person has of their own disease, how society perceives a disease or an imbalance (sickness) situation.

*“Listening to a story of illness is not [only] a therapeutic act but it is giving dignity to that voice”* (A. Frank, 1995).

Active listening to disease stories also helps health workers acquire a special expertise, what we might call narrative competence.

“The right to have absolute freedom to speak of oneself is always the basic rule of autobiography. We must feel entitled and

## NARRATIVE MEDICINE

A WAY TO EQUIP DOCTORS, SOCIAL OPERATORS, OR PHYSICAL THERAPISTS WITH THE ABILITY TO SEE, INTERPRET, IMAGINE, TO ADOPT ANOTHER PERSON’S PROSPECTIVE, TO CHANGE THEIR PRIORITIES, TO MOVE BETWEEN THAT LIMINAL AREA BETWEEN THEM

receiving attention for everything we say. [...] No judgment must pollute autobiographical testimony; no one can afford to correct us, cause us to vary a nuance or an opinion” (D. Demetrio, 1995). Not all people, however, have the desire to tell things about themselves. This is how narrative and communicative competence becomes fundamental for caring professions.

The term Narrative Medicine (MN) was coined by Rita Charon, medical internist at Columbia University in New York, to indicate this kind of medicine practiced with narrative skills, which is distinguished from traditional medicine because of a greater understanding of the complex narrative situations that are created between medical personnel, patients and all other subjects that are in relationship with them.

Narrative medicine is [...] *“a way to equip the doctor, the social worker, or the physiotherapist with the ability to see, interpret, imagine, adopt the other person’s perspective, to change their priorities, to move in that liminal area between them. To offer, modestly, anything that can help”* (Rita Charon, 2000).

By *“narrative competence”*, Rita Charon means that set of skills that relate to recognizing, absorbing, interpreting and being somewhat conditioned by the stories of other people’s lives in the context of a narrative interrelation. In the field of self-writing one can also speak of autobiographical competence. Both terms can be considered part of a holistic relationship of help and care.

Jerome Bruner reminds us how narrative (and also autobiographical) skills, although motivated by an original need, need cultural construction, adaptation and learning.

In Italy, in Rome (11-12-13 June 2014) the National Institute of Health, together with the National Centre for Rare Diseases, in the Consensus Conference *“Guidelines for the use of narrative medicine in clinical care, for rare and chronic degenerative diseases”*, provided a definition of Narrative Medicine and indications for training. Here are some important points: *“The term Narrative Medicine refers to a methodology of clinical intervention based on a special communicative competence. Narration is the fundamental tool to acquire, understand and integrate the different points of view of those involved in the disease and*



in the treatment process. The goal is the shared construction of a customised course of treatment (history of care). Narrative Medicine (NM) integrates with Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), and taking into account the plurality of perspectives, makes clinical-care decisions more complete, personalized, effective and appropriate. The narration of the patient and of those who take care of them is an essential element of contemporary medicine, based on the active participation of those involved in the choices. People, through their stories, become protagonists of a path of care.”

#### **Recommendations for the training of operators mention:**

“Narrative Medicine is a working method that offers a potential not yet explored within care relationships. In addition to specialized training courses, therefore intended for several content operators, the need to use different means (literature, cinema, theater, songs, painting, etc.) through which a story can be narrated must be stressed. This can create a basic preparation for a culture of storytelling in healthcare professionals.

Recommendation: It is recommended to introduce narrative competence in all its aspects and fields of application in the academic and public health training courses of social-health care professionals. The design of multidisciplinary and interprofessional paths is recommended, with the use of active methods and tools such as: - collections of stories of patients, relatives and health professionals; - reflexive writing; - literature, cinema and other expressive arts;- web 2.0.

Reasons: Narrative medicine must become an integral part of training and updating, so that social and health workers have adequate tools to support pharmacological, surgical, and physical treatments. Using works from writers, artists, directors is enormously more effective and penetrating than the real stories themselves and allows a kind of detachment that’s useful in the educational field.”

“Narrative Medicine mainly concerns three different analytical approaches deriving

from different disciplinary fields: 1. narratological (literature); 2. phenomenological-hermeneutic (philosophy); 3. socio-anthropological (social sciences). In scientific literature there is a plurality of instruments proposed in relation to different contexts, objectives and actors. There is no evidence that one instrument is better than the other. Here are some examples: - interview conducted with narrative skills;- semi-structured narrative interviews; - parallel charts; - Story Sharing Intervention (SSI); - reflexive writing; - narrator vicar; - Time Slips; - Video interview.

Criteria for using the tools: - the importance of leaving the interviewee free to use the narrative mode more suited to him; - contain the dimension of the story, aiming it to an operational side in the care process.”

Some notes on methodology:

**“NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY HAS A PRECISE ARTICULATION THAT PROCEEDS IN STAGES: STIMULATING NARRATIVE, COLLECTING ITS CONTENTS, MARKING AND INDEXING THEM, BUILDING MEANINGS, ELABORATING THE NARRATIVE LANGUAGE, EVALUATING ON THE BASIS OF THE IMPACT”**

(See Experts Reports in bibliography).

Narrative Medicine allows to approach the “reasons” of the patient, through the comparison between the point of view of the different operators, facilitates the group work, decreasing inefficiencies and errors; helps reflect on oneself, on daily clinical practice and to promote self-care by preventing burnout. (Zannini L.-2008).

## The writing of self in trauma: expressive writing

In 1983 Prof. James Pennebaker, psychologist and researcher, interested in the relationship between writing and health (Pennebaker, 1997), accepting the idea of one of his students Sandra Beall, who wanted to do a master's thesis on how much expressing emotions can have a positive influence on the wellbeing of people, conducted an experiment on two groups of first-year undergraduate students of psychology.

The two groups were told to report to the laboratory for 4 consecutive days and to write for 15 minutes a day, without stopping and without paying attention to the spelling, following the instructions. The first group had to write about personal traumatic events that they hadn't talked about before, in one of three ways: by simply expressing their emotions during the writing session; by treating trauma in its factual aspects, dealing with facts and expressing the emotions felt in dealing with said trauma. The second group had to write about everyday life and the environment where they lived. With the permission of the subjects, who were guaranteed anonymity, the researchers would evaluate their state of health by collecting and comparing information on the number of visits for medical treatment, carried out at the university's clinic reserved for students, in the months preceding and following the experiment.

The results showed that: the students of the first group gave up medical examinations in the following months, with improvements in health and mood. Those who had written of their deepest thoughts and feelings had turned to the clinic less than 0.5 times - a 50% decrease in the monthly frequency of visits. As for the students of the second group, no change was recorded.

All the information from the various questionnaires compiled by the students, together with the data provided by the clinic, confirmed that "writing about the deepest thoughts and feelings related to their traumas had triggered an improvement in mood, a more positive attitude and a better physical health" (Lo Iacono G. G., 2016). Pennebaker thought that the beneficial effects of writing, which he called

expressive writing, were due to the expression of thoughts and emotions they had hidden from others and partly hidden from themselves. A traumatic experience, translated into writing, can be better understood and overcome.

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6

**METHODOLOGY  
AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE**

Caterina Benelli, Grazia Chiarini, Sara Calcini



# METHODOLOGY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICE

CATERINA BENELLI, GRAZIA CHIARINI, SARA CALCINI

Human experiences, reworked through narration and autobiographical writing, produce a greater knowledge of oneself and of the sociocultural context in which we live. Retracing the events of our life gives us the opportunity of telling them to ourselves and to others, to share experiences, thoughts, to try to understand and to give a meaning to our actions but also to those who are or have been close to us. Individual narration, in fact, is intertwined with the stories of other lives and contributes to giving meaning to people's own lives.

Autobiographical writing allows us to be aware of our history and to value personal memory. It is not simply a journey back in time according to a narcissistic perspective; the point is to write about oneself in a formative perspective that leads to self-awareness and the revitalization of oneself.

*"Autobiography [...] is not just about the past: it's present whenever the protagonist of the story transcends the pure experience of their life and asks questions"* (Demetrius, 1998).

Autobiography, moreover, is always unanimous because it gives voice to the people we have known, even those who are no longer there. One can start to feel the urgency of autobiographical thoughts at any age, that is to write about ourselves to recover our memory but also to acquire a new mental habit that allows us to take care of our story, give it new meanings and share it with others.

Bruner (1992) points out that the method consists in proposing a negotiation on the meaning through the mediation of narrative

interpretation, constituting one of the great results of human development in an ontogenetic, cultural, and phylogenetic sense. Between the end of the seventies and the early the notion of a narrator "Self" made its appearance; it is defined by Bruner (1992) as a Self that tells stories in which the description of the Self is essential part of the story.

Autobiographical methodology offers tools for a person to reconstruct the plot of the one's relationship with themselves, with others, to recover the sense of their life experience, of their own existential events, to understand themselves more deeply and re-design themselves.

It is a formative-biographical practice, a research path, a perspective of self-training, which has as its contents the different dimensions of human life: personal, social, professional, moral, spiritual, religious.

Autobiographical writing is predominantly individual but can also be performed with others and/or in groups. At the LUA headquarters it takes place in a group. To be more precise it is an individual work done together with others.

People, mainly arranged in a circle, write individually, around a table or, depending on the stresses or times of the day, in other places of their choosing. The group, metaphorically, initially portrays itself on the bottom because it's the uniqueness of each one's story that's given importance and value. In sharing, the group comes to represent the chorality of storytelling in a space where abstention from judgment prevails.

At the beginning of the autobiographical path people are invited to make a pact (Lejeune P. 1986) in which they always commit themselves to be authentic, to tell the truth about their life (or a part or an aspect of it); to highlight if the writing concerned the first period, the genesis of their identity. The autobiographical pact is opposed to fiction even if, in an autobiographical work, elements of fiction can sometimes help

where there are gaps of memory or when the author reports episodes of their life told by others, mainly by parents or relatives, when it comes to childhood memories.

*"The deal, - writes Duccio Demetrio - that the autobiographer makes (of sincerity with respect to the truthfulness of the source) does not only concern the reader, potential recipient of such writing" [...] "but, beyond this relationship, the agreement, in the first place, is made between the writer and the character who the author consciously wants to be: a character that's required to be other-from, playfully entering and exiting from one side or from the other. The deal one makes with themselves must correspond to the resemblance between the narrating self and the character." (2008, p.222)*

Autobiographical methodology is a non-rigid approach that can be creatively adapted to different contexts; it has, however, some precise and structured characteristics: individual writing, the sharing of non-compulsory texts, reflection, restitution.

Meetings create a limited space-time, a space of well-being and freedom in which everyone can take time for themselves, opening up to new possibilities and perspectives.

Through exercises guided by a facilitator, readings and comments of literary passages, sharing of testimonies, participants develop the ability of carefully listening to themselves and to reflect on the experiences they went through.

The aspiring autobiographer begins a journey in which they are invited to *"gradually set out towards the burden of finding themselves and legitimizing themselves existentially by writing pages connected with lived situations, in relation to memories evocative of:*

- *sensory and physically salient perceptions (the burden of corporeity);*
- *moods (the burden of emotion);*
- *seasons, periods, phases, not necessarily respecting chronologies and backgrounds (the temporal burden);*
- *places where one has lived (the spatial burden);*
- *events: the outcome of one's choices for decisions taken or because they were decided, conditioned, at the mercy of events (the burden of apical events);*
- *leading and significative characters that one's existence (the relational burden);*
- *values, beliefs (the ethical burden);*
- *reflections on the consequences of one's actions, on emotional experiences, on the consequences of certain events (the burden of interpretation and symbolic burden);*
- *enigmas connected to the inexplicable and obscure moments of existence, not necessarily autobiographically connotated (the philosophical and religious burden).*" (Demetrius, 2008, p. 242)

The search for connections between the various existential dimensions, also in moments of group sharing or in the dual relationship with an autobiographic consultant, opens opportunities for discussion, reflection, growth.

Depending on the autobiographic educational context, the facilitator designs a path in which they provide specific solicitations to writing. The context could be individual or group counselling, a single meeting or a long-term path. The autobiographical facility takes care of the comfort

of those who participate, ensuring active listening, the feedback of what emerged, paying attention to the quality of interactions.

**FOR THE STORY OF ONESELF TO BECOME TRULY AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR THE GROWTH, CARE AND ENHANCEMENT OF PEOPLE, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOPS ARE AVAILABLE TO EXPLORE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THEMSELVES, OF OTHERS AND TO GET INVOLVED.**

To facilitate this, the group autobiographical practice must provide for the creation of a narrative context in which participants can exchange their own narratives, without fear of being judged. One's individual story begins to enter another story, that of the group that participates and progressively meets the story of all. Emotional aspects emerge, fragments of self, self-reflexive content, meanings that mix with one another and help individual and group growth. It is a work of co-construction where the narrative context is an opportunity for knowledge and mutual enrichment.

It is important that the setting where the workshop takes place is a cozy and quiet place, with a table sufficiently large table, with paper, pens and possibly pencils or colour markers. The participants accept the rules of the autobiographical pact.

Writing is the main medium, supported by poetry readings, narrative excerpts, reflexive fragments, photos. The goal is not to write well or be on topic but for participants to undertake research on themselves and the events of their existence. The important rules to follow are the suspension of judgment with respect to one's own writing and that of others. It is important that participants accept the words that come without giving interpretations or comments but with an attitude of listening in resonance, to echo. This allows them to wonder what those words stimulate in them, what parts of their story they helped to awaken, to mirror themselves in another person. Another rule is to remain silent during the writing to better approach memory, one's own thoughts. The writing is individual but can be interspersed with a work in pairs. Then, sharing of the writings allows the meta-reflexion on what happened in

writing and with writing, which new aspects have emerged, which aspects or content have been activated. The songs are read aloud by those who want it, but there is also ample space for reflection and discoveries.

The stresses used by facilitators have a progressive trend, with the function, at the beginning of the path, to “warm up” the thoughts and the pen, through engrams or fragments of writings, later through more complex narrative forms to foster educational reflection. The LUA training courses are aimed at people of different ages (from 25 to 60 or more) who are motivated to write for personal reasons and who are willing to face a preparatory autobiographical phase lasting at least six months, which includes three intensive moments (from Wednesday or Thursday to Sunday morning) in a workshop, with moments of personal time and space. The working methods belong to the category of stressed writings, as mentioned above, meaning suggestions that are not improvised but consistent with the models proposed by autobiography specialists, following international studies and experiences. The various training courses, proposed by LUA, allow those who attended them, not only to write their own autobiography but also to have the autobiographical skills to disseminate the theories and practices acquired in various occasions.

Duccio Demetrio’s words accurately describe autobiographical practice:

*“In writing about our life, in the courageous presumption of recounting it in its complexity and entirety, or only with*

*respect to salient and crucial moments, everyone realizes that to tell it you must give a chronological sequence to events; you must make use of the very rules of writing; you must give yourself a method and self-discipline that’s both cognitive and inherent to the conditions any writer needs: silence, solitude sought, concentration, application continuity, etc. Moreover, you must choose themes, topics, facts, classify memories: introducing ordering criteria that regard what to say and how to say it and silence, what to put first and what to consider as secondary. As mentioned above, how could a writing completed according to these self-induced or solicited methods, carried out during formative experiences (as we’ve been proposing them at the Free University of Autobiography of Anghiari for over fifteen years) not generate changes within ourselves and in our social and emotional relationships?”* (Demetrius D. 2015, p., 67-68).

The practice of autobiography in during training processes takes into consideration two main trajectories: **the reason behind writing about oneself and what happens with autobiographical writing.**

Regarding the first issue, we can refer to the volume **Why we love to write. Philosophy and myths of a passion** by Duccio Demetrio (2011) that leads us to the desire for autobiographical writing, which derives more from an unconscious need than from a profit or from seeking out a very precise goal. **Among the main benefits of autobiographical writing, there are:**

- *Understanding:* writing about ourselves and our lives brings us to a deeper level of awareness of what we have experienced, because by writing we observe it with lucidity and clarity.
- *Healing:* autobiographical writing can heal or soothe many wounds, allows us to bring “peace” to our story. Being able to see with a much wider look what has happened to us often entails a greater indulgence, one understands why we acted in a certain way and that perhaps, those who hurt us (although it is certainly not a justification), did it without realizing it or because of their situation, their condition,

**AUTOBIOGRAPHIC  
AL PRACTICE  
BECOME THE  
ATTITUDE OF  
THOSE WHO  
TAKE CARE OF  
THEMSELVES AND  
OF OTHERS**



which may not have allowed them to act differently.

- *Social testimony*: through our autobiography, we bear social witness to an era, a civil society, a political and cultural situation. Let's think of great stories from the past in the work of Vasari, for example, who, by telling the lives of painters, sculptors and artists, actually speaks in depth about the society of the time.
- *Denunciation*: writing can be a means to denounce various situations, as we can see from many examples of texts where people tell their own story.
- *Equalization of emotional accounts*: writing works on resentment, one of the emotions that can hurt us most because of how stagnant they are. Through writing we bring light, we air the rooms where there are negative feelings that hatch like embers under the ashes.
- *The leitmotif of our life: there is one*. There's a common thread, a theme, an ongoing music that is constantly repeated revealing our talents, our attitude, the gift that we must bring to the world.

In the second case, that is **what happens with the practice of autobiographical writing**; these are among the main functions, the formative and education consequences that result from autobiographical methodology.

#### *Self-listening training*

- ✓ Need to listen to each other, to stay within ourselves.
- ✓ Need to make silence in a world of chaos and urgency of self-listening.
- ✓ Leave a trace to watch yourself grow.
- ✓ Need to get to know each other at all ages.

Education to otherness and to a new kind of attention to others' stories

- ✓ The need to educate people to listen, to pay attention to the stories and the lives of others in order to know them, in order to educate people to have relationship with the other-from-self
- ✓ Need to participate in the stories of others and to train empathy.

- ✓ The need to connect and communicate.

Remembrance education

- ✓ Need to create a bridge between yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- ✓ Need to be part of a story and understand it, from within and through the "common, ordinary stories and to create the "memory of the future.
- ✓ Research, document, save stories (Benelli, 2020).
- ✓ Need to enhance the uniqueness and originality of stories

#### *Autobiographical writing enhances narrative abilities*

Finally, after so much work on memories and on oneself, it is necessary that writing rediscovers how to build plausible stories, inspired by the facts that have been witnessed. Scripting them, discovering the powers of language, the research of the plot, the lexical varieties we can choose from to learn how to tell others about ourselves.

In essence, keep in mind why we propose autobiographical practice and the potential educational and didactic consequences; it becomes the attitude of the trainer, the teacher and the educator who takes care of others (even before, of themselves) through all the forms and declinations of self-storytelling in written, narrative, and playful form.

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Fondazione Archivio Diaristico Nazionale onlus

7

**THE “MY LIFE IN EUROPE” GAME**

Sara Calcini, Grazia Chiarini



# THE “MY LIFE IN EUROPE” GAME

SARA CALCINI, GRAZIA CHIARINI

The Game is the final product of the European Erasmus + Project My Life in Europe, a new methodology to insert autobiographies in the European context, together with the methodological manual and the technical instruction booklet.

The game's aim is to familiarise people with autobiographical approaches, stimulating in a captivating way the act of writing about life episodes; to help build their autobiography, through the collection of their writings; to make life stories known, stimulating the construction of new relations also with people from different countries and thus increasing a sense of belonging to the European Community; taking care of oneself and others to improve the psycho-social well-being of citizens, particularly the weakest groups of the population.

This state of well-being is also related to the fact that when we write about ourselves we activate a process that helps to bring out episodes of life that may be hidden, to become aware of them, to put order in what we are living (or have lived), also proposing new perspectives, a project to be built. When we can achieve a certain clarity and awareness with writing, we feel some relief, especially in the case of painful events.

The Game can be inserted among the so-called serious games, or the latest generation of digital games designed for educational purposes in the context of adult education, in a perspective of lifelong learning and, even more specifically, learning by doing.

Through the game, in its various versions, any educator can use the technique of autobiographical writing in an easy and fun way, as a useful path to be integrated into therapeutic, rehabilitation and recreational programs.

It should be noted that recreational activity within the framework of autobiographical writing represents a meaningful educational device to experiment

with storytelling through educational activities that fall under the **“ludo-biographic” category** (Staccioli, 2010).

From an educational point of view, especially in reference to the theory of Adult Education (Knowles, 1980), each educator will be able to stimulate people to find various answers to the question “what is important to learn for me?”, also in reference to their own life story.

Autobiographical practice, through the game My Life, can involve various types of recipients, mainly with two different approaches: individual and group, as we will see below.

Although the target audience is represented by subjects over 56 years of age and disabled people over 40 years of age, according to the indications provided by the ASPHI Foundation of Bologna, all those who wish to use this special method both to write about themselves, and to extend their professional skills with innovative technological tools that can support lifelong learning and training, can participate in the game sessions.

*There are three versions of the game:*

- a web app version, easily downloadable on smartphone or PC, completely free, with which you can play offline or online and which, thanks to the contribution of ASPHI, is accessible to the visually impaired and blind.
- a printed version also easily downloadable from the My Life in Europe website.
- a hybrid version.

Of each version there are several decks of cards, black and white and coloured, with which you can play. It is also possible to build new decks of cards.

*The game modes are mainly two:*

- individual game if the desire to write your own story prevails, taking all the time necessary, without sharing with others, at least initially. The cards in the

various versions are a part of the fil-rouge that makes it able for everyone to write an autobiography that will be enriched along the way.

- group game preferably coordinated by a facilitator/master.

Whether it takes place in presence or online, the group autobiographical practice needs a narrative context where each participant can write and share fragments of their own story, without fear of judgment. The presence of the master is crucial to the creation of this context and to give all the information and support necessary for participants to proceed in the game.

*In the online version a group match consists of two subgroups:*

- Group match: provides that each participant plays with all cards in the deck;
- Collaborative Game: The cards of the chosen deck will be split by the Master among the players.

## The features

The game features a series of cards, used as stimuli to narration, also called narrative devices, which constitute two main types of decks: the 64-card deck and the 22-card deck. The choice of the number of cards has a meaning:

•**64** is the number of boxes of the classic Game of the Goose, 63 boxes + 1 representing the center, the goal of the game. According to the symbology of numbers,  $6+4=10$  and  $1+0=1$  representing the symbol of Unity, as in European Unity.

•**22** is the number of major arcana of Tarots, cards of ancient origin with psychological implications that have been dealt with by various scholars, including the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung and the writer Alejandro Jodorowsky, according to which symbolic images of Tarot cards are the mental and inner representation of life situations and lend themselves to many interpretations. Changing reading

strategy, each card says different things. (2021 Alejandro Jodorowsky, 2021). According to the symbology of numbers, 22 represents the Universe and its energy.

The choice of the two types of decks depends on the time you want to devote to playing and writing. The 64-card deck can be more useful in individual play and if multi-day or multi-week writing workshops are organized, without the urgency of getting to the end of the game as soon as possible. It offers more possibilities to explore more aspects of your life story. If, on the other hand, you have limited time available, the 22-card deck will easily get you to the end of the game. You can also start from the shorter deck and then use the longer deck later on.

You can also play the game several times choosing a new theme to write about, since there are so many episodes in each of our lives.

Each card contains a number, an image, a word, sometimes a sound, the description of the image and a proposal for writing, as an example. These stimuli are aimed at tilling, ploughing, moving memories, rearranging life events that players can write about in a dedicated space offered by the online game or on any other available medium.

A writing proposal can be useful one you find yourself playing for the first time, to overcome an initial moment of loss. The images on the cards and especially the words do not give precise indications but offer the possibility to wander in memory or, as one should say, memories, as Duccio Demetrio writes: "*We have in fact many types of memories, each one performs a different function depending on the purpose we want to achieve*", as we find in the Italian verbs that derive from Latin: *rievocare*, recall (give voice to memories); *ricordare*, remember (bring back to the heart with emotions); *rimembrare*, to reminisce about (to put together what is dispersed); to commemorate (to remember and to recall with someone, somebody we think is worthy of being remembered); *rammentare*, to bear in mind, (to recall an event, an unclear situation).

Memories that emerge in a chaotic way can be aligned by giving them a plot, a sense. With the game's web app all the writings that are born out of memories can be saved in PDF and used to build your own autobiography.

There are also other decks with which you can play: the deck of European cards; the "loose" deck of cards, consisting only of pictures with a description for the blind in the online version, without other indications.

### **The rules**

The rules are very simple.

*For the paper version you need:* one or two dice, placeholders, coloured or black and white cards, a notebook, a pen, colours for any drawings.

*For the online version you need:* a computer, a tablet or a smartphone, an Internet connection to play online.

*For the hybrid version you need:* a computer, a tablet or a smartphone, possibly a projector with working cables, to be able to view the chosen deck on a large screen, writing material.

The instruction booklet contains all the technical information on how to proceed.

In the group game the ideal number is 7-8 players, but they can be even more. It is preferable to have a facilitator, a Master who follows the participants and helps if there are issues. A section of the manual is dedicated to the role of the Master.

In the paper version the cards are placed on a flat surface, in numerical sequence from lowest to the highest number, in the form that is decided at the beginning of the game (spiral, vertical, horizontal) or cards can be drawn directly from the deck.

Each participant will roll the dice to decide in which order to play. For example, those who have the highest number will pull first and then, later, the lowest numbers will pull.

Each player takes turns in rolling the dice and proceeds with as many cards as the number indicated by the dice. Based on the card's image and word, the player writes an episode of their life that they then read to the other participants. Everyone, if they wish, can write of themselves following the card's solicitation but, based on the time available, the reading of one's own writing can be reserved only to the person who has rolled the dice.

The writing proposal is to be used optionally and is one of the many suggestions that can be found in this manual. It can be useful when playing for the first time, to "break the ice".

The winner is the first player who gets to box **64** or **22** of the respective decks. If they pass it, they should go back a number of cards that's equal to those in excess and continue the game.

Before starting, participants, together with the Master, may decide to vary the game, choosing a special theme to write on, as we will see later in the Manual.

At the start of a game, a prize can be established for the person who gets to the end of the game first.

In the online group version, the Master can read all the players' writings and save them in PDF.

### **Cards as narrative devices**

Autobiographical narration is a story that a person decides to tell about the life they have lived and contains the most important events, the significative experiences that they want to make known to others. It can cover the period that goes from birth to the present or a more limited part of life.

Each of the cards in the My Life Game is used as a narrative device that has the purpose of making memories resurface.

Some words or images have a clear meaning, like family, school, friends; others have a more obscure, metaphorical sense, like accomplishments, downfalls, stops, changes. This type of stimulus was chosen to give participants more space for personal interpretation, creativity, and reflection.

When a player is in front of a card, both in the paper version and in the online one, they look at it in its components, they can close their eyes, if they want, and let their mind travel freely, in a path that brings them back to their past experiences, to who they were and what they have lived through, making him reflect on the meaning that these experiences have had for him/her.

When a past or recent memory emerges, an emotion, a person, an object, a song, a book, a film, which have a meaning for them, the player writes on a notebook, whether they are using the paper version or the hybrid version of the game, or in the appropriate space of the online version.

Autobiographical writing can take the form, appearance and style that each player decides to give it: micro-narration, poetic form, letter, story or other creative forms.

The numbers, images and words of the cards are placed in a certain order, from childhood to adulthood and can be inserted within certain categories: time, space, bodies/ figure/ faces, actions/ facts, emotions, sensory perceptions, objects, categories that Plato would call "eidetic" (from the ancient Greek word εἶδος, "form", "aspect", from one of the roots of the verb indicating sight, ἰράω). To these categories, also called "descriptors", others are added: names, dates, animals.

The player can follow the proposed sequencing or can write in a more free and less ordered way, for example write from the very beginning of the game about a life period that's different from the one indicated on the card. "My first memory" can then

refer not only to childhood but to any first memory that comes to mind regarding different periods of life. If a card does not evoke memories or makes painful episodes emerge, which are too painful to be written about, at least in that moment, it can be skipped and resumed later. It is not, in fact, a matter of schoolwork but of stimuli designed to evoke memories.

Next to a brief description of the cards, there are some writing proposals that can be used to write of oneself or serve as an incentive to look for new ones. Compared to an image and a word, in fact, there are many episodes that can be recalled and, for each new game, players have the opportunity to write different memories and gradually build their own autobiography.

By choosing a special theme, before starting the game, for each new game, more autobiographies can be created related to a particular period of life: work, studies, health, love, dark events and so on. In this choice the Master can be of great help.

### **The deck of 64 cards**

This section of the Manual is dedicated to the black and white 64-card deck, in the order they appear in the online game. In parentheses you can see sorting of cards in the deck of 22. The cards below are in English, with the translation into the language of each partner's country.

Each paper contains: an image, the name given to the card, the description of the image for the blind or visually impaired, a writing proposal. The following are some brief notes, curiosities, information and six writing proposals in addition to that indicated by the card, which can serve as stimuli for further insights and which can be drawn both by the Master and the individual player, being aware that each of the players is free to express memories, feelings and thoughts regardless of the mentioned writing proposals.

Let's not forget, in fact, that the goal of the game My Life, with reference to the words of Duccio Demetrio, is to "develop the narrative, [...] encourage coming back to personal writing and the pleasure of reading the autobiographies of others, biographical novels and everything that can contribute to that remembrance education that's nowadays so at risk".

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## Name

Image of an ID card.

*Do you know who chose your name and why?*



The term "name" has a very wide variety of meaning. It has the same root in almost all Indo-European languages, in Greek *ὄνομα* (onoma), in Latin *nomen*, which has assonance with *numen*, divine power. The Latin word *Nomen omen* (or in the plural noun *sunt omina*) literally means "a name an omen" and expresses the concept of the auspicious value attributed to names, according to the belief of the Romans that a person's fate was indicated their name.

Common nouns indicate in a generic way people, animals, things, actions or ideas of the same species. Common names are, for example: man, woman, dog, river, apple. Proper names indicate in a special way a certain person, a place, a thing, an animal.

Giving a name to someone or something means identifying it to understand what or who you are talking about. That's what giving a name and being given one is very important. Usually, we carry our name with us a lifetime.

### Other writing proposals:

- Who gave you your name and why did they choose it?
- Do you know the meaning of your name?
- Do you feel like your name represents you?
- If you were to change your name, what would you call yourself?
- How does it feel to hear your name be spoken?
- Have you chosen a name for someone? It can be a person but also an animal, an object...

## My first memory

Image of a rocking horse.

*The first thing you remember about your childhood is...*

(N.1 in the of 22-cards deck)



The memory of an event that happened in early childhood may not be related to personal experience as much as it's linked to family stories, photos or the home movies. Their combination would then be experienced as a personal memory. (Duccio Demetrio).

### Riferimento bibliografico

Demetrio D., Il gioco della vita. Kit autobiografico. Trenta proposte per raccontarsi Ed. Guerini e ass., 1997.

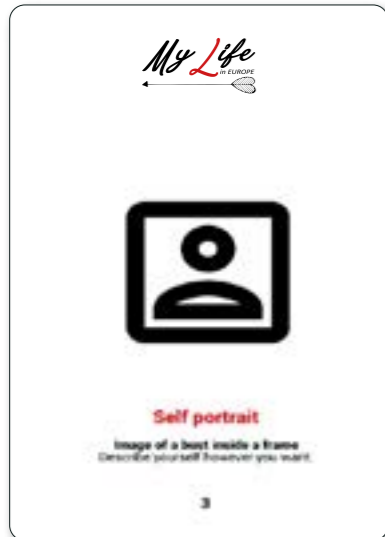
### Other writing proposals:

- If you think about early childhood memories what image comes to mind? How old do you think you were?
- What do you remember happened the first time you...  
realized you were in the world  
found something important  
loved someone  
learned something useful

## Self-portrait

Image of a half bust inside a frame

*Describe yourself as you want.*



In describing yourself, Duccio Demetrio invites you to write without interruption and, at the end of the writing, invites you to re-read your own writing to find out which of the following styles you have adopted:

**Curricular:** an impersonal and formal style without emotional connotations. A sort of chronicle of who you are.

**Self-reflexive:** a sort of examination of conscience, without particular distinction of periods of live, and neglecting facts.

**Poetic-metaphorical:** use of metaphors, symbols, images to describe oneself.

**Composite:** Using the previous styles by mixing them together.

It is possible that circumstances, places, periods of life that are linked in some way to the description of oneself emerge. It is also possible that many self-portraits emerge in memory (I represent myself at five years, twenty, thirty...), which makes us think if there have been changes in time, what has changed and what has

remained the same.

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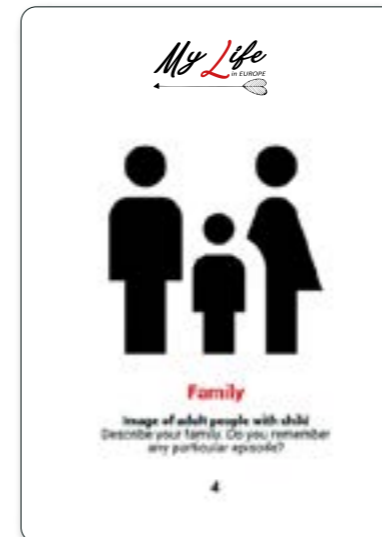
### Other writing proposals:

- Which of your physical features do you like?
- Which of your psychological characteristics do you like?
- If you were to change something about yourself, what would you change and why?
- Is there a feature of you that you would like to give to a person you love?
- What would you like a loved one to give you as a physical or psychological characteristic?
- Write a letter to your body or a part of it.

## Family

Image of adult people with child.

*Describe your family including yourself. Do you remember any particular episodes?*



The term "family" comes from the Latin familia, "group of servants and slaves which belong to the head of the house", from famulus, "servant, slave". Roman family also included the bride and children of the pater familias, since they legally belonged to him.

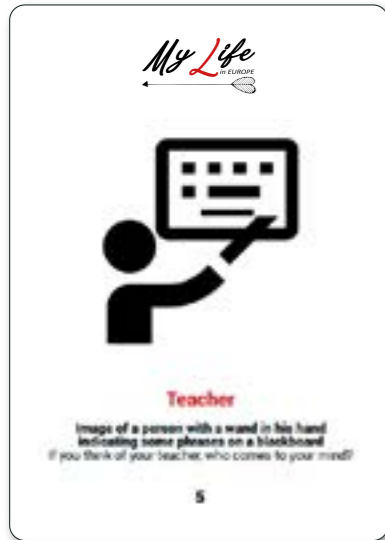
Over the years families have assumed different structures and functions, changing according to the historical, economic and social shifts of the various countries. Today the term "family" can be understood in various ways

### Other writing proposals:

- Write down the relevant characteristics of each member of your family, highlighting, if you want, strengths and weaknesses.
- Try to build a family tree of your family. Are there people who are no longer there or who you have not seen for some time?
- Do you remember an episode with one family member? With parents, grandparents, siblings...? What happened? Where were you? How old were you?
- Do you remember a family party? Write about it.
- Was there a time when you didn't feel at home?
- Reflect on what the term family means to you.

## Teacher

Image of a person with a wand in their hand pointing  
out some phrases on a blackboard.  
*If you think of your teacher, who comes to mind?*



The term Italian word for teacher, insegnante, comes from the Latin insignare 'engrave, imprint of the signs', (understood, in the mind), composed of in- and signare from signum sign. With the meaning to expose someone to something, explain something so that it is learned, communicate a knowledge.

If we think of the teachers who have been there and who are still there in our lives, the number is quite large because so many people we have known or know have passed down something to us, have taught us something. Grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters or other family members, school teachers, friends, acquaintances or people we have known for a short time but also animals may have taught us something that has served us, that has remained imprinted in our minds.

### Other writing proposals:

- Try to think about and describe the teachers you have had and what you have learned:
  1. in childhood.
  2. in adolescence
  3. in adulthood.
- That time you learned ... Who taught you that? How old were you?.
- Remember some teacher from a Nation other than your own?

## Project

Image of a light bulb, a team and a sheet of paper  
*The first time you thought about a project that you could develop,  
how old were you? What was it?*



The term "project" comes from the Latin: pro, forward, and jacere, throw. What is thrown in front. It has various meaning. Among these, project design is usually accompanied by a study of the possibilities of implementation or execution of what has been thought (for example: design of a building, a course, a bridge).

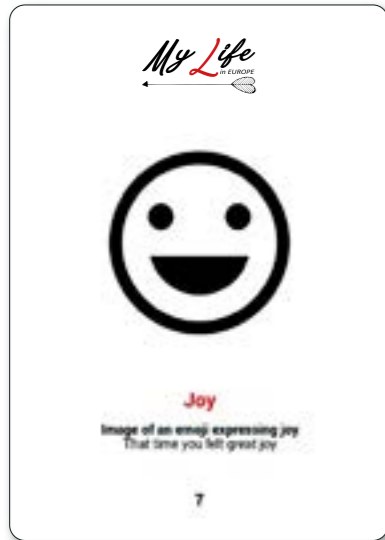
For philosophy of existential orientation, it is the concretization of that being that is always projected ahead of itself. A project is also the care you have of yourself, of other people, of your own world.

### Other writing proposals:

- Think about a completed project and the path you took to complete it. What happened? What people did you know who helped or hindered you?
- Think about a project you didn't accomplish and the path you took to try to complete it. What happened? What people did you know who helped or hindered you?
- That time you tried to do...
- What small projects would you like to realize for the future?
- What great projects would you like to realize for the future?
- Do you know a project of a family member or acquaintance? How could you help?

## Joy

Image of an emoji expressing joy  
*That time you felt great joy*



Emotions are intense, short-lived affective reactions, determined by an internal or external stimulus, the appearance of which causes changes at psychosomatic level. There are numerous classifications for emotions. According to US psychologist Paul Ekman emotions can be grouped into two major categories: primary and secondary. Primaries are present since birth and are common to all humans. For Ekman (1972), there are seven: joy, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, contempt.

Secondary, more complex emotions, such as shame, jealousy, nostalgia, develop during growth with social interactions and differ from culture to culture. Emotional memories are more vivid.

### Bibliographic References:

Ekman, P. (1972) Universals and Cultural Differences in Facial Expressions of Emotion. In J. Cole (Ed.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation (Vol. 19, pp. 207-282). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

### Other writing proposals:

- That time you felt great joy.
- What does joy mean to you?
- If you think back to an episode where you felt happy, what comes to mind?
- When you were little, were you afraid of something? Write about it.
- If you think of joy, what image comes to mind?
- What difference do you find between joy and happiness?

## Home

Picture of a home  
*If you think of a home where you live, what comes to mind?*



When, between 10,000 and 8,000 years ago, human species abandoned nomadism to become more sedentary, home has become the symbol of security, of peace, a place where the family can grow. Home is a physical space but it is also a place full of symbolic meanings that represents the reflection of our interiority and our relationships. According to psychoanalyst Alberto Eigue (2007), a home has a containment function, which protects us from what is outside, that can be experienced as negative, and creates an atmosphere of security and intimacy. A home is also the representation of those who live there and can transmit family memories, if it is inherited by relatives. Inside the home, in fact, there can be objects, even not of value, that have the function of connecting the present with the past.

### Bibliographic References:

Eiguer, A. L'inconscio della casa Ed. Borla, 2007; L'inconscio de la maison Ed. Dunod, 2004.

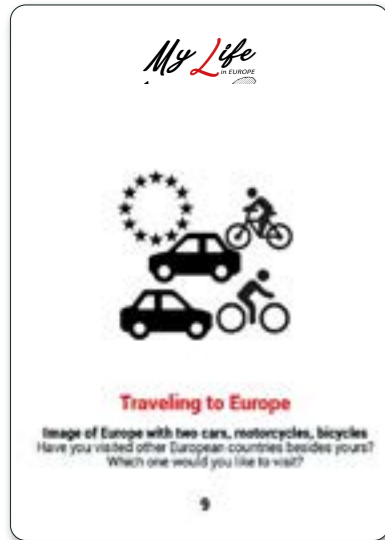
### Other writing proposals:

- Your grandparents' home.
- Your parents' home.
- What do you like and dislike about the home you live in now?
- Do you remember a particular home you saw in your lifetime?
- What kind of home would you like to have?
- What do you mean by the word home?

## Traveling in Europe

Image of Europe with two cars, motorcycles, bicycle.

*Have you visited other European countries besides yours? Which one would you like to visit?*



The European Union is founded on the following values, set out in Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon and in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: human dignity; freedom; democracy; equality; the rule of law; human rights.

As EU citizen, you have the right to free movement. If you are a citizen of a Schengen country, we are also free to travel to other Schengen countries without the need for border controls. You can also benefit from passengers' rights across the EU when using a plane, train, coach or ship to travel to, from or within the EU. You can bring pets with you provided you comply with the rules. The EU has limits on the amount of alcohol, tobacco or cash to take with you to another Member State. Each EU country can set its own limits or restrictions.

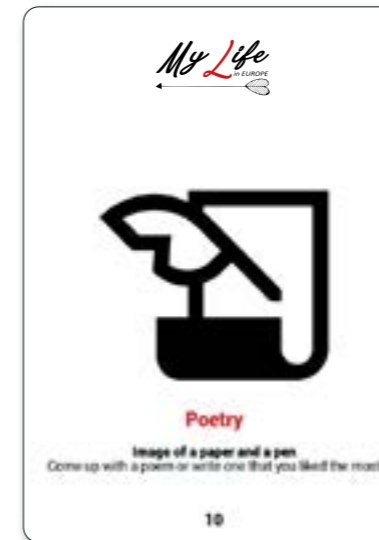
### Other writing proposals:

- The first time you could travel freely in Europe.
- The first time someone told you they travelled freely in Europe.
- What did you like the most, or what did you like the least about the country you visited?
- Among the EU values listed above, is there one that stands out as more important to you? Why?
- In what order would you put, from the most important to the least important for you, EU values? Why?
- Write about about your, or some acquaintance of yours', last trip in Europe

## Poetry

Image of a paper sheet and a pen

*Make up a poem or write one of the ones you liked the most*



Psychoanalyst S. Freud has defined poetry as a game (1907). The poet, according to Freud, is like a child who "[...] builds his own world [...]"; "creates a fantasy world, which he takes very seriously while clearly distinguishing it from reality".

For K. G. Jung, who treated the link between psychology and poetry in "Poetry and psychology", (1979), poetry, through words, has the possibility, as the unconscious, to "say" the "unspeakable", to bring to the surface emotions and vibrations, dreams and memories. Creation is realized when a part of the unspoken begins to emerge.

Poetry is a powerful, liberating, cognitive medium that can be used in the psychological field, for example during psychotherapy to help the patient to rework experiences.

The Petit Onze is a poetic structure characterized by five lines consisting of 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 words, for a total of 11. It is a short composition of European origin, attributed to the French poet, writer, and surrealist André Breton (1896-1966). In French ONZE = eleven, therefore "small eleven". If you write the words at the center of the sheet, first at the top, proceeding further, two, three and four, always concluding with a single word, you have a small tree of words with the trunk.

### Bibliographic References:

Ethel Spector Person, E.S.; Fonagy, P., Figueira S.A. On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" Ed. Yale University Press, 1995; Freud, S. Creative Writers and Day-dreaming, 1907.

Jung, C.G. "Poetry and psychology", Ed it. Bollati Boringhieri, 1979, Psychologie und Dichtung, 1922-50.

### Other writing proposals:

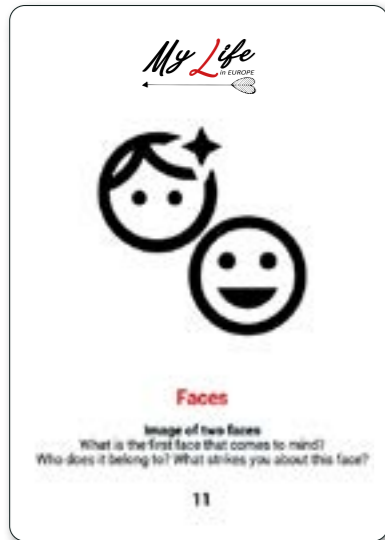
- Have you ever written a poem? At what age?
- Thinking of a poem you like, can say why you like it? What features does it have?
- Thinking about a poem that you don't like, you can say why you don't like it? What features does it have?
- Write a Petit Onze on what you want.
- Could you quote some poet that fascinates you? Why does it fascinate you?
- You can quote some poet from a different European country than you like

## Faces

Image of two faces.

*What is the first face that comes to mind? To whom does it belong?*

*What strikes you about this face?*



There are people we have known in our life that have impressed us in some way, for their smile, look, for their attitude. Starting from mother and father when we came into the world, then grandparents, uncles, cousins, first friends, first loves have gradually enriched our album of memories. Not only faces of people we know well, but also faces of strangers that we have accidentally seen somewhere, during a trip or at the bus stop. We have seen, perhaps, not only somatic traits but also the emotions that transpired from a particular face that struck us: joy, pain, surprise, despair, love. That face remained in our memory. In the "Phaedrus" (370 BC) Plato said that the eyes are the mirror of the soul as they know how to express our emotions and our feelings, they talk about us and our lives.

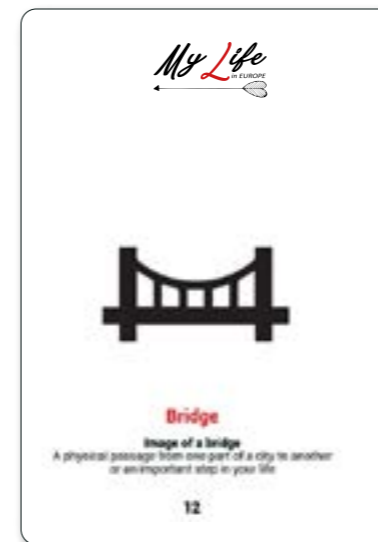
### Other writing proposals:

- What strikes you the most, in general, in a face?
- During the Coronavirus pandemic faces were partially covered by protective masks, except for the eyes. Do you remember any particular look from someone's eyes?
- Describe the eyes of a family member or friend. What do they tell you?
- Are there faces in your life that you remember in particular?
- Thinking of a film, a play, a photograph, or an artistic work you've seen, can you think of a particular face?
- Think of the look of a small or large animal you saw or have. Describe it.

## Bridge

Image of a bridge

*A physical passage from one part of a city to another or an important passage of your life.*



A bridge is a physical passage over a river, a stream, a larger road. It is a physical structure that unites what is divided, that allows you to get to the other side. It can also metaphorically be a period of transition in your life: from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood, from adulthood to old age but also from one school to another. From a psychological point of view, a bridge refers to what human beings have learned to build to overcome the painful condition of separation and isolation between themselves and others (interpersonal dimension) or between parts of themselves (intrapsychic dimension). The experience of conflict, of separation and at the same time the attraction to what is unknown, to the other, to what's different, has activated in human beings the ability to build bridges (language, metaphors, dialogue...) that allow to communicate, to meet between different shores without hindering what is in between (Gordon, 2003).

### Bibliographic References:

Gordon, R. The bridge: a metaphor of psychic processes, Ed. Boringhieri, 2003, Bridges: Metaphor for Psychic Processes 1st Edition Routledge; 1st edition, 1993.

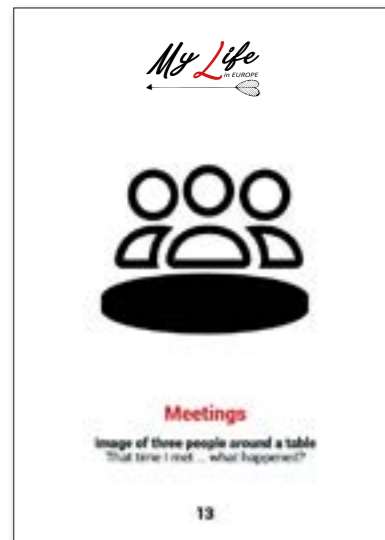
### Other writing proposals:

- The first time you saw that bridge.
- That time you crossed that bridge...
- If you think about the bridges you've crossed or built in your life ...
- Bridges of European countries: which ones come to mind?
- The collapse of a bridge: describe your feelings. Which bridge do you think about?
- The time you built a bridge between yourself and another person when there was a wall before. Describe your own or an acquaintance's experience.

## Meetings

Picture of three people around a table.

*That time I met ... what happened?*



When meeting others, new friendships, loves, new work or study collaborations can be born. In every situation, new relationships arise between people, which can get develop over time or come to an end. If we look back at our lives or look to the present or the future, we realize the many encounters that we have had and that have somehow marked us, for better or for worse.

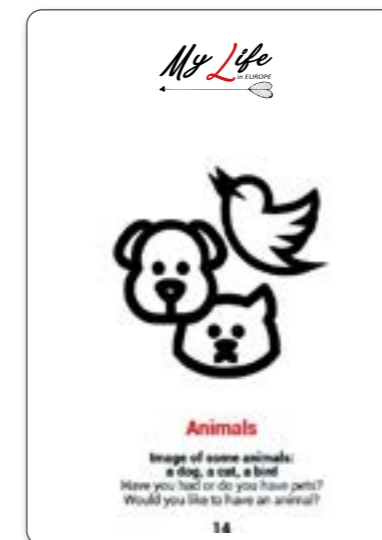
### Other writing proposals:

- A meeting you didn't expect.
- Your first encounter with love.
- Your first encounter with friendship.
- The first time you encountered pain.
- The time you attended a meeting.
- A special meeting.

## Animals

Image of some animals: a dog, a cat, a bird.

*Have you had or have pets? Would you like to have a pet?*



The company of a pet would carry out, according to some scholars (Shoda, Stayton and Martin, 2011), important functions of support against loneliness and isolation, social support, especially for elderly people, protection against problems and disorders of a psychosomatic nature as they would stimulate functions of the immune system. Simply stroking an animal would be a calming factor on heartbeat and breathing. (Solano, 2013)

### Bibliographic References:

Shoda, T. M., Stayton, L. E., & Martin, C. E. (2011). Friends with benefits: On the positive consequences of pet ownership. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(6), 1239-1252.

Solano, L., *Between mind and body: how to build health*, Ed Cortina, 2013.

### Other writing proposals:

- If you think of yourself as an animal, what animal would you be and why?
- The first time you saw an animal...
- Which animal do you like the most and which one do you like the least? Why?
- Are there people who, for their and physical or psychological characteristics make you think of an animal? Do you remember someone in particular?
- Describe your experience with an animal.
- Think about giving an animal to someone you know. What would you do? Which animal would you choose? Who would you give it to?

## Childhood games

Image of girls and/or boys playing with a ball

*Is there a favourite game you used to play when you were a child?*



This stimulus leads us immediately into the period of childhood. Every European country has different or similar games but with different names. It is important to know what children's games are in the European Community. Children's games, then, can vary over the years and it's an interesting intergenerational comparison to learn about the games of our grandparents and parents. Playing together with others means many things: communicate, create new relationships, rejoice, discuss, make arrangements... It is a life experience that is part of the education of the individual. Games are not limited only to the period of childhood but also involve adults and has proved to be a useful tool in therapeutic teaching, learning and rehabilitation at any age, in the absence or presence of disability. Games can also be useful to process painful and traumatic experiences, in the psychological field.

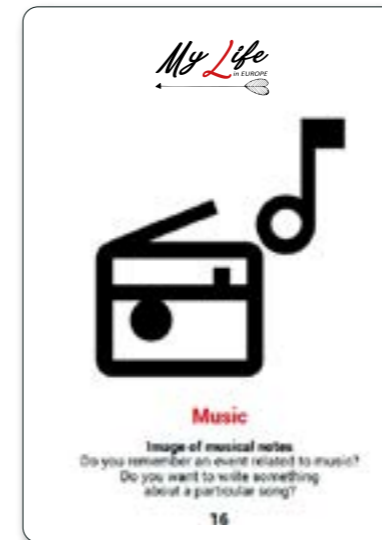
### Altre proposte di scrittura

- What were your childhood games?
- Your playmates
- The games told by your grandparents
- The games of your parents
- The games you like today
- What is your relationship with games?

## Music

Image of musical notes

*Do you remember a music event? Do you want to write something about a particular song?*



Music has accompanied us throughout our lives, from lullabies, to songs during our teenage years, to favourite music during adulthood. We may have learned to play an instrument or seen a friend or family member play the piano, guitar, violin or any other instrument. Maybe we accompanied them with our voice because we like to sing.

Music can give comfort, relax, give emotions, improve mood, as various studies on the effects of music on the human psyche show.

Music can also be a social activity and singing or playing together can help people get closer and increase a sense of belonging to a group. Another interesting aspect is that music can evoke in the minds of the listener specific colours. In the study of S. Palmer and colleagues at the University of California (2013), people from Mexico and the USA showed remarkable similarities in connecting dark colours with songs, sad and brighter colours with

more cheerful songs. These associations between music and colours would reflect the emotional content of the melody.

### Bibliographic References:

Palmer, S. E., Schloss, K. B., Xu, Z., & Prado-León, L. R. (2013). Music-color associations are mediated by emotion. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(22), 8836-8841.

### Other writing proposals:

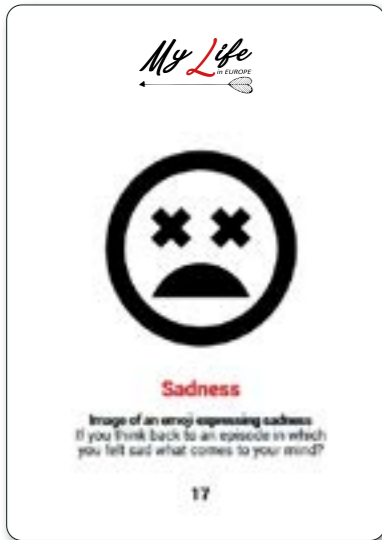
- What are the songs you consider important in your life? On what occasion did you listen to them?
- What music do you like?
- That time you sang...
- If you were a musical instrument, which instrument would you choose?
- That time you heard singing...
- Do you play a musical instrument, or would you like to play it?



## Sadness

Image of an emoji expressing sadness

*If you think back to an episode in which you felt sad, what comes to mind?*



Emotions are very important because they play essential roles for our quality of life. They help us, for example, to make decisions and make choices that are suitable for us at a particular time.

Expressing the emotion of sadness allows us to signal to those around us the need for care and support in particular moments. Let's think of children who manifest their needs through crying. Many moments of sadness have passed through our lives and have helped us to find meaning in what was happening to us, to elaborate unpleasant events, to urge us to a change aimed at achieving a new balance. It essentially stimulates us to know ourselves better, to improve ourselves and to better understand others.

### Other writing proposals:

- The first time you felt sadness. How old were you? Who were you with?
- That time you saw a friend crying. What did you feel? What happened?
- If you think of sadness, what image comes to mind?
- What other word or emotion can you associate with sadness?
- If you think of sadness as a flower, what do you see?
- Try writing a letter or message to a loved one who is gone.

## Europe

Image of the European flag

*Feel free to write thoughts, ideas, proposals, wishes on what the European motto "united in diversity" stimulates in you. Write a message to someone from another European country.*



The European flag was born in 1955 and symbolizes European unity and identity. It consists of a circle of 12 golden stars on a blue background. The number 12 is a symbol of perfection and wholeness. The circle is a symbol of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe. The fundamental values of the EU are human dignity, freedom of movement, democracy, equality, the rule of law, human rights.

"United in diversity" has been the motto of the European Union since 2000, translated into the languages of the member countries. The phrase stresses that the citizens of every European nation, while maintaining the richness of the history and identity of their own culture, seek to go beyond the differences and divisions between peoples, at the heart of conflicts, cooperating for prosperity, peace throughout Europe and to build a common identity.

The melody used since 1972 to represent the EU is taken from the "Ninth symphony", composed in 1823 by Ludwig van Beethoven, which set to music "the Ode to Joy", written by Friedrich von Schiller in 1785. The anthem, without text, expresses the ideals of freedom, peace and solidarity pursued by Europe.

European Day or Europe Day is May 9 and celebrates peace and unity. The date marks the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, issued by the then French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950, which set out the idea of a new form of political cooperation in Europe, which would have made war between European nations unthinkable.

### Siteographic reference:

[https://european-union.europa.eu/index\\_it](https://european-union.europa.eu/index_it)

### Altre proposte di scrittura

- Feel free to write thoughts, proposals, wishes about what being a European citizen makes you think of.
- Make up your own motto.
- If you imagine Europe looking down on it, what comes to mind?
- Which of the EU's core values does interest you the most? What does it mean for you?
- If you think about human rights, what comes to mind?
- What would you like the EU to achieve before May 9th of next year?

## Adventure

Image of a map and a compass

*Talk about an adventure, whether it's yours or others'. How old were you? What happened?*



Adventure is an exciting or unusual experience, which can also present risks, for example from a physical, financial or sentimental point of view. Adventurous outdoor activities can be carried out with recreational purposes such as adventure tourism but also with therapeutic purposes such as adventure therapy, a form of experiential therapy involving various types of outdoor activities (Russell, 2017).

The goal of adventure therapy, which is widespread in many countries, is to help participants develop important life skills that are useful in everyday life. Suitable for all ages, it can be indicated for those suffering from chronic pathologies such as depression, diabetes, obesity or neoplastic pathologies, but it is also used to learn and practice new behaviours, to improve interpersonal skills, to face fears, to experience new positive emotions, with the help of specialized operators.

### Bibliographic References:

Russell, K.C. (2017). Process Factors Explaining Psycho-Social Outcomes in Adventure Therapy. *Psychotherapy (Chic)* 54 (3), 273-280.

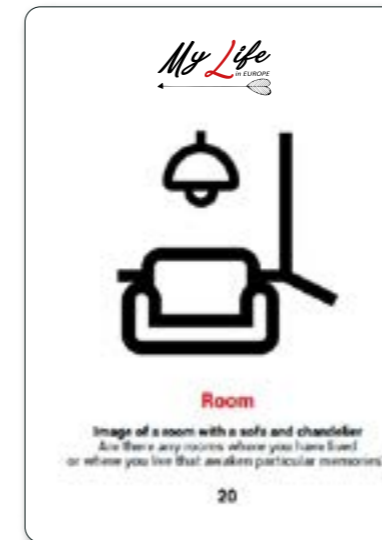
### Other writing proposals:

- If you think of an adventure film, which one comes to mind? Describe it.
- If you think of an adventure book, what comes to mind? What age were you when you read it? Which character impressed you the most and why?
- Is there any person in your family, living or not, that is or was involved in some small or big adventure?
- If you think of an adventure in which you could face risks, what you would like to do and with whom?
- For you an adventure is...

## Room

Image of a room with a sofa and chandelier

*Are there rooms where you have lived or where you live that awaken special memories?*



A room usually means an environment that's delimited by walls, which constitute the interior of an building: for example, dining room, bedroom, reading room. If we think about childhood, youth, and adulthood, we have hung out in several houses, we have inhabited their rooms or we have abandoned them.

According to Misner, Emery and Sapio (2022), life is like a room without limits of space but with only one entrance door from which the people we let in can no longer leave and continue to influence our life and our choices. The authors want to stimulate a self-reflection to better understand ourselves, our values and choices that we've made or that we're going to make.

In dreams, the room can represent a basic psychic and emotional space of our personality.

### Bibliographic References:

Misner, I., Emery, S., Sapio, R. Who is in your room? Independently published 2022, Who's in Your Room?, 2018 Ed. Indigo River Publishing, 2018.

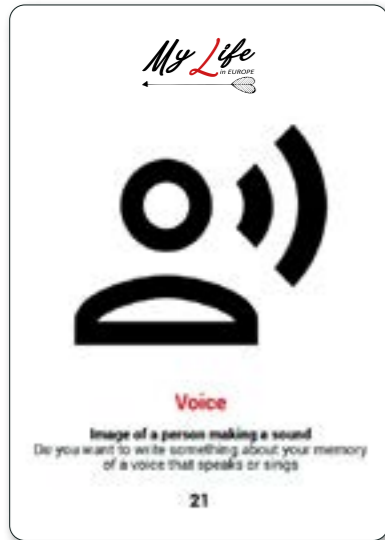
### Other writing proposals:

- Which room in your home do you like the most? Why?
- The first time you walked into that room ...
- Imagine that you are in a room with only one door from which people can only enter if you nod. Outside there are some people waiting. Who would you let in?
- That time you dreamt about that room...
- The room of your dreams.
- A closet, an attic, a closet hidden in a garden are rooms that made us fantasize, relive, desire. Can you think of one of those little rooms?

## Voice

Image of a person making a sound

*Do you want to write about a memory of a voice that speaks or sings?*



Many voices accompany us from birth onwards, starting from ours. Each voice has a different tone that identifies a person: a voice can be sweet, dry, chanting, ringing, cheerful, passionate, deep, angry, melodious, sad, reassuring, warm ... There are voices that sing lullabies, that say seductive words, or words as hard as stones, which can hurt. Then there is another voice, the one we hear inside us.

### Other writing proposals:

- That time he/she whispered to you...
- Is there a particular voice that comes to mind right now? To whom does it belong? On what occasion did you hear it?
- Do you remember a poem, a nursery rhyme, a piece someone read to you? What age were you? Who was reading?
- Try to record your voice and listen to it: how does it sound? Could you describe it? Do you like it? What colour comes to mind?
- Thinking of a singer or a singer, who comes to mind?
- Think of an argument that you witnessed or that someone told you, with angry and aggressive voices...

## Backpack

Image of a backpack

*Uno zaino pronto per una gita oppure uno zaino carico di ricordi, dolori, gioie.  
A backpack ready for a trip or a backpack full of memories, sorrows, joys. Describe one of these backpacks, what would you put inside the one you chose?*



A backpack is usually made up of a bag made of thick fabric or other very durable and waterproof material, and it is worn hanging from the shoulders and is used to carry various objects. A backpack, in fact, is used during the school period to carry books and notebooks or during excursions, often on foot, alone or with other people. It is necessary that the traveller chooses what to put in order not to weigh it down too much or struggle during the journey.

Backpacks are also considered as a metaphor for life and are associated with everything that we carry with us, even everything that can weigh us down: material things, worries, fears, cumbersome relationships. Walking becomes hard, even in life, if we do not remove what is too heavy, if we do not set priorities.

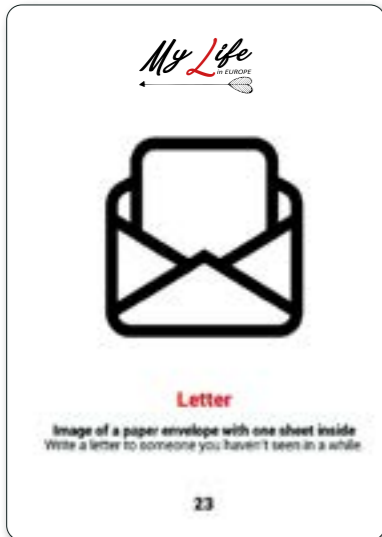
### Other writing proposals:

- Do you remember one of the backpacks you used in one or more periods of your life? Describe it.
- What does your backpack contain for an ideal trip?
- If you think of the backpack as a metaphor for life, what would you take out of your backpack?
- Imagine taking a walking trip with a friend. Who would you choose to go with?
- The backpack you're most fond of, whether it be yours or of someone you know.
- Think of a loved one, what item, that you have in your backpack, would you give to them?

## Letter

Picture of a paper bag with a sheet inside

*Write a letter to someone you haven't seen in a while.*



A letter is a type of text in which the writer has the precise intention of communicating with those to whom the letter is addressed.

Different types of letters are distinguished depending on the sender and the recipient.

A personal letter is the one that you send, with simple and direct language, to people with whom you're familiar: family, friends or lovers.

Usually, a paper letter is written by hand and sent by mail, folded and enclosed in an envelope, which bears the address of the recipient and sender.

Nowadays, paper letters are replaced by other forms of communication, such as SMS, email, instant messaging applications.

A letter written in literary form as an open letter is said epistle.

Some writers choose to write an epistolary novel, in which the protagonist tells what happens to them through the letters they send to a recipient or through an exchange of letters between several characters. An example of an epistolary novel is "Dracula" by Bram Stoker.

### Other writing proposals:

- Is there a particular letter you remember?
- Write a letter to a loved one.
- Write a letter to yourself and answer your letter.
- Write a letter to whoever you want: it can be an animal, nature, a place, a historical character...
- A letter you wrote or received in your teens.
- A letter you didn't want to receive.

## Foods

Image of different foods

*Is there any dish from a country other than yours that you like? Where did you eat it?*



During some trip, in a book, a magazine or in a shop near our home, we may have seen some food cooked in a different way from the one we're used to in our country, or we felt the scent, which made us want to eat it to taste it. You may or may not like that food but in any case, it is a way to get to know others and ourselves better. Even trying to taste a food of a country other than ours can make us reflect on how much we are available to open ourselves to the Other, to what's different, putting ourselves to the test. Food is a means to know the history, culture, habits of another country, as well as ours and helps us to look beyond our limits, opening ourselves to inclusion and sharing experiences with others.

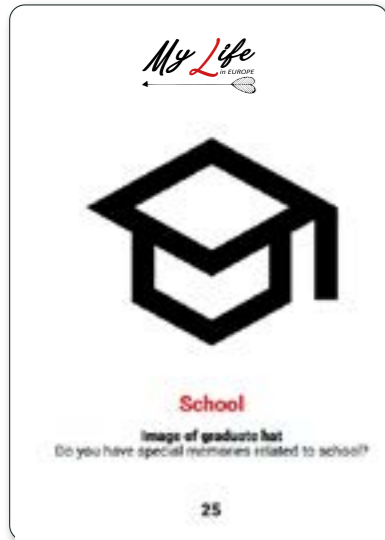
### Other writing proposals:

- Do you know a recipe for a dish from another country? Write it down.
- Is there any dish of a European country that you ate which you didn't like? Why? Where were you?
- Remember any occasion when you ate together with people from different countries. What did you try? What did you eat?
- Is there a dish from your country you like better? Which one? Try to write the recipe.
- How is your daily menu composed? Which foods do you prefer to eat?
- Thinking about food and emotions what comes to mind?

## School

Image of a graduate hat

*Do you have any school-related memories?*



School is a social institution, public or private, which is concerned with education with the aim of transmitting to the pupils the heritage of knowledge belonging to their culture and to offer special training in a given discipline, art, technique or profession, through a didactic activity organized according to shared rules. Beyond differences between countries, the common element between various schools is the formation and consolidation of knowledge according to certain learning objectives. Moreover, schools, in a different frame compared to families, can provide the development of relational contexts with adults and peers. It is a place where affections and feelings are born and grow, friendships develop and sometimes last for a lifetime. An important function of school is, therefore, to provide the necessary tools to grow culturally, psychologically and socially and to acquire responsibility and autonomy in one's choices.

### Other writing proposals:

- How is the school curriculum organized in your country?
- The first day of school, classmates, teachers: how many memories, how many hopes, how many disappointments, how many desires.
- Your education: who you were with, your teachers, the school.
- School choices: did someone advise you? Your motivations and ideas.
- Your expectations about your studies.
- That time you opened a notebook and saw...

## Passage

Image of a tunnel

*That time you went through that tunnel.*



The term passage has numerous meanings. Among them, passage means a physical place through which you pass but also the transition of going from one place to another. The tunnel is the most classic example of passage, which can be physical but also have a metaphorical meaning. In this perspective, a tunnel is a path at the end of which changes can take place in those who have passed through it, changes that may affect social, working, emotional and professional life.

For some people it is not easy to get out of a tunnel (for example, drugs, depression) and you need the support of family members and professionals.

### Other writing proposals:

- That time you went through a dark moment in your life...
- If you think about your life up until today, how many steps do you think you have gone through? At what age?
- If you think of a transition in particular, could you reflect on how you were before and how you've changed?
- If you think of a tunnel, what comes to mind?
- Do you remember a tunnel or more you crossed in some European country?
- Do you remember any situation where you helped a friend/family member to go through a particular period of their life?

## Study and work in Europe

Image of the European flag and two people reading at a table in front of a person who's listening.

*Have you had or have an experience of studying or working in another European country? Write your impressions. Have any of your family or friends had experiences like this?*



The European Union helps Member States to provide their citizens with the best opportunities for education and training. It also promotes language learning in Europe: encouraging more teachers and students to teach and learn languages; encouraging students, trainees, teachers and young people to travel and study/work abroad; creating networks to share knowledge and experience. There are several EU programmes that can help improve education, skills and personal development in many EU countries.

EU citizens working in the EU also enjoy certain rights under EU law. For example: in the workplace abroad, they enjoy the same rights as citizens of that country (pay, health and safety, social security and tax relief and reintegration in the event of unfair dismissal).

### Siteographic Reference:

[https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/studying-and-training-eu\\_it](https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/studying-and-training-eu_it) ;

[https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/working-eu\\_it](https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/working-eu_it)

### Other writing proposals:

- Are there aspects of other European states that you would like to know better? Which ones?
- If you had the opportunity, would you go to study or work in another European country? Where would you like to go?
- Would you like your family member to go to study or work in another European country? Why?
- What kind of study would you like to do in another European country?
- What kind of work would you like to do?
- What opportunities do you think you might have if you were to study or work in another country?

## Desire

Image of a shooting star and someone making a wish

*One of your greatest desires is...*



From the Latin desiderium, composed of de and sidera, lack of stars, the word desire indicates the lack of something that is distant, to aspire to.

Desire in the past, in the present, in the future. Choose the writing proposal that inspires you the most at the moment.

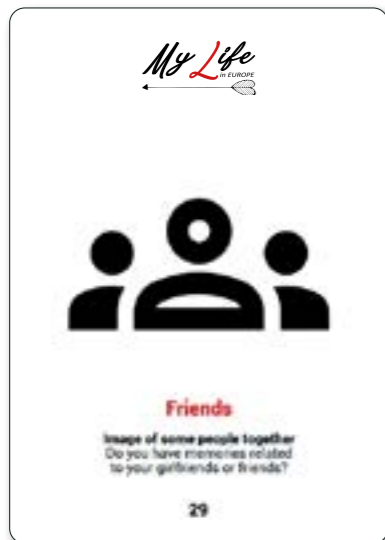
### Other writing proposals:

- The first time you felt the desire to... how old were you?
- In the future you'd like to...
- The wishes you've made.
- The wishes of someone you helped realize.
- The wishes you didn't fulfill.
- Make a wish.

## Friends

Image of some people together.

*Do you have memories related to your friends?*



The card image shows two figure on the sides of a central person, like the friends who are next to you, help you in times of need and share with you joys, sorrows and many other experiences. Friendship, in fact, is an interpersonal relationship accompanied by feelings of trust, respect, sincerity and mutual availability.

### Other writing proposals:

- Describe your closest friend. When did/did you meet/a them? What features do you have in common and what are different?
- Do you have any memories of one or more moments spent with a friend?
- What does "friendship" mean to you?
- That time you felt hurt by a friend. Write about it.
- Write a letter to your friend/s.
- That time with your friends...

## Expectations

Picture of an hourglass

*Thinking about a person, a project, a situation, or work write down your expectations.*



The hourglass is a tool that was invented in the past to measure the passing of time and symbolically indicates a connection with memory and time, with the experiences made in life and the changes that have occurred.

An expectation is a behaviour or quality that we expect from a situation and other people in certain contexts and circumstances that also affect us. An expectation is unidirectional in that it arises from ourselves and represents our personal belief that one or more events will occur.

Our expectations are formed from the information we possess based on our past direct or indirect experiences and can be used as a guide for our behaviour.

### Other writing proposals:

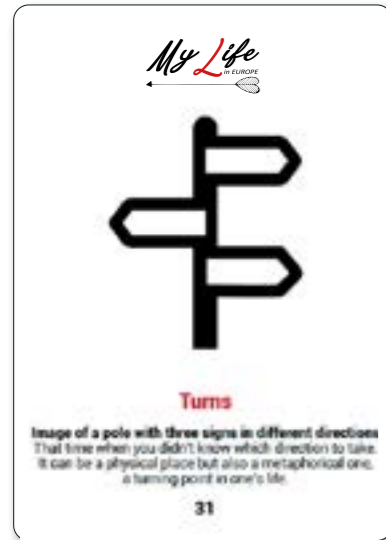
- Have you ever been disappointed by the expectations you had about a person?
- Have you ever been disappointed by the expectations you had about a situation, job or project?
- The time you expected ... instead ...
- How many times in your life have you created expectations?
- When I saw the image of an hourglass, I thought of...
- The time of waiting...

## Turning points

Picture of a pole with three signs that go in different directions

*That time you didn't know which way to go.*

*It can be a physical place but also a metaphorical place, a turning point in one's life*



Many times in life we are faced with a change of direction while we are travelling by car or by any other means or walking on foot. We can see new landscapes, different places that can be more or less beautiful. With road signs, the sign indicating a curve can make us pay more attention to the road we are driving on or forbid us to turn in a certain direction (eg no turning left)

In a figurative sense, a turning point can imply the need to make a decision, to make a choice, when there are situations that can radically change the course of events, to give an important turn in our life (for example in work, in our personal life). Some events can radically change our lives or those around us. This can occur, for example, in the case of an illness or after a road accident. It is therefore necessary to find new meanings and new ways to proceed on our journey of life.

### Other writing proposals:

- That time you had to choose a different path... who were you with? How old were you?
- The first time you turned the corner and...
- If you think about the turning points of your life, what comes to mind?
- An event of life you did not expect. Did it bring changes in your life?
- If you look down on your life, how many turns did you have or wanted to make?
- If you wanted to turn your life around today, what would you do?

## Message

Picture of a message

*Write a message that you received that particularly impressed you.*



A message is a news, an announcement addressed to one or more people, given verbally or by writing, through a means of communication of any kind or through a person in charge (a friend, a family member...).

It can also be a speech given by important personalities, on special occasions and in a particularly solemn form (eg m. given by the Head of State at the end of each year, m. given by religious personalities).

A message can also represent a proposal for reflection on a particular theme, a teaching that the author of a literary, cinematographic or artistic work wants to give to others.

By writing our autobiography, we convey our personal message to those who will read us.

### Other writing proposals:

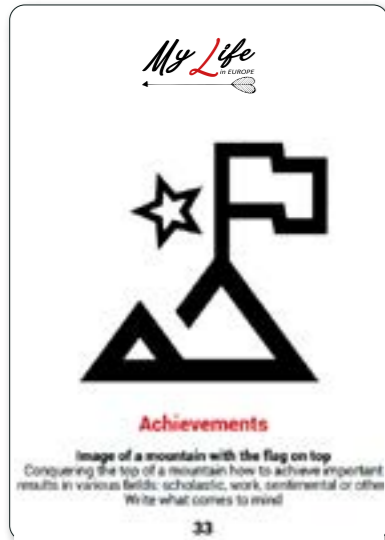
- Is there a specific message you remember?
- Write a message to a loved one.
- Think about putting your message in a bottle that you'll let go to sea and that someone will find. What would you write?
- A message you didn't want to get.
- Do you remember a film which conveyed an important message?
- What message would you like to give to others with your autobiography?



## Accomplishments

Image of a mountain with a flag

*Conquering the peaks of a mountain as achieving important results in various fields: school, work, personal life or other. Write what comes to mind*



When we think of the term “to conquest”, we think taking possession of a country, a city, a population, generally by the use of weapons.

If we refer, however, to the English term of “achievement”, we think of the achievement of a goal, a goal that we have set, engaging intensively, for example in study, work, sport.

It can be the satisfaction of a desire for love, winning the sympathy and esteem of someone but also the achievement of the summit of a mountain, of having walked to Santiago de Compostela, writing a book...

In a broader sense, it also means the arduous achievement of something over the years (for example: the achievements of workers, women, advances in science).

### Other writing proposals:

- Have you reached an important goal for yourself? Which one? In what field?
- Do you want to reach a goal that you have set for yourself a long time ago? Which one? How do you plan to reach it?
- When the beauty of that landscape conquered you...
- That time when ..... and you thought you couldn't.
- The first time you reached...
- The achievements that citizens have achieved within the European Union.

## Places

Image of a palace, a monument, a street.

*Describe one or more places that matter to you. What do they remind you of?*



The word “place” has many meanings. Let's see some of them: generically it is a part of physical space that can be occupied by someone or something (for example, a place to rest); it can indicate a city, a country, a village; an open place, not limited by natural or artistic shelters; a fortified place; a place where something happens or has happened (eg p. of the crime; p. of the battle); a building or part of it intended for a particular use (p. of amusements, study, punishment, prayer).

A place can be a symbol of belonging and recalls values, traditions, shared events. “Every landscape is in essence a concretion of events, a set of footprints, of signs, of «memories»” (Turri, 1974).

From a psychological point of view, a place is a cultural landscape built and on which meanings are projected.

Every day, for various reasons, we find ourselves attending a number of places: the neighbourhood where we live, the road to reach our workplace, the habits that lead us to prefer one place over another. Each place holds a certain meaning for us, stirs particular emotions.

### Bibliographic References:

Turri E., Anthropology of the landscape, Edizioni di Comunità, Milan 1974, p. 80.

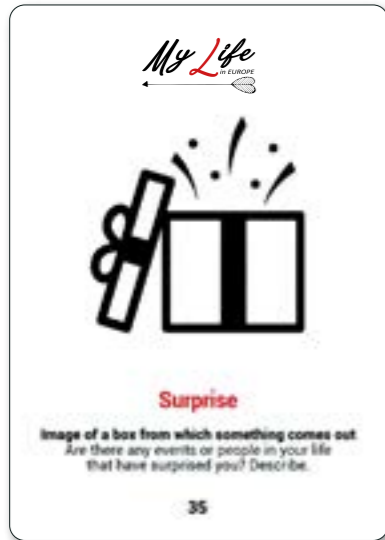
### Other writing proposals:

- The places of your childhood
- The places of your adolescence
- A place, in a country different from yours, where you would like to return.
- Where is Europe?
- Places of myth: Europa riding the bull.
- A place you don't want to go to.

## Surprise

Image of a box from which something comes out

*Are there events or people in your life that surprised you? Describe them.*



A surprise is an emotional state, of short duration, consequent to an unexpected event or contrary to the expectation of those who experience it. A surprise stimulates the subsequent emotional and behavioural reactions starting from the analysis of a new situation. Subsequent emotions can be, in fact, joy, anger, sadness, disgust or fear.

In Aristotelian philosophy, in the text "Poetics", surprise, the emotion of wonder, is understood as a source of knowledge, at the precise moment when a character breaks into a game. The individual, in fact, becoming aware of what they thought, believed, saw in comparison to what actually happens, can find a way to adapt to the unexpected.

It can also be a small gift inserted in a confectionery package.

### Other writing proposals:

- A surprise that pleased me. How old was I?
- A very disgusting surprise.
- After that surprise everything changed.
- I'd like to surprise...
- The first time I felt wonder.
- A painful surprise.

## European cities

Image of a city

*Have you visited any European cities? Which one would you like to visit?*



In Europe there are many cities rich in history, natural landscapes, monuments and characteristic places.

The symbols of the cities are expressed both in the physical structures (streets, squares, monuments) and in the ways of life, habits, rituals, typical ceremonies that represent their identity.

From this complex whole comes the sense of belonging of its citizens and the culture of collective and shared memory, connected to local speech, the narrative of urban life, characteristic jobs. All this system of values, customs, traditions are the face and charm of a city.

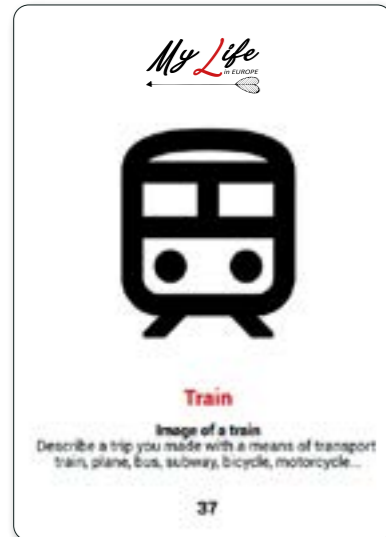
### Other proposals for writing

- Every European city has one or more symbols that characterize it: do you remember any of them?
- Are there places in your city that you particularly like?
- Are there ceremonies, events that characterize your city? What are they?
- Thinking about a European city you visited, what did you like best?
- Have you witnessed or heard about events or ceremonies in a particular European city? What are they?
- Describe your real or imaginary journey to a city where you would like to go.

## Train

Image of a train

Describe a journey you made with a means of transport: train, plane, bus, subway, bicycle, motorcycle ...



A train is a means of transport, consisting of identifiable elements, the wagons, permanently or temporarily united to form a single convoy. It represented a turning point for nineteenth-century nations, in the period of the industrial revolution, and played for many years a central role in the political, economic and social structure of many countries.

From a psychological point of view, trains can be seen as the metaphor of life, with their wagons, stations, their changes, the tracks, their accidents. At the moment of getting on the train, at birth, we find our parents and grandparents, then, in time, on our train will meet many other people, some of them will be meaningful: brothers, sisters, friends, lovers, children. Other people will be less important and will soon get off our train. Others, when they get off, will leave a void within us. We will continue to travel without knowing at which station we will get off, but it is important to pay attention to who will sit at our side.

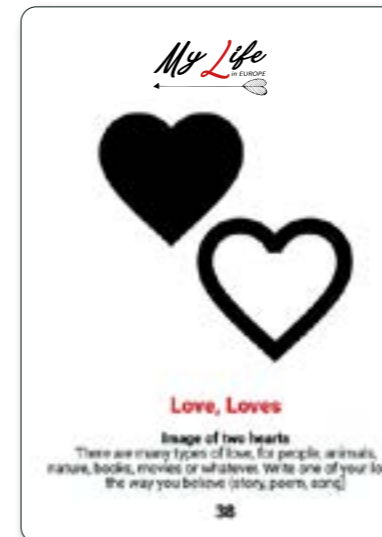
### Other writing proposals:

- By which means of transport do you prefer to travel? Why?
- The first time you took ... (a plane, a train, you rode a bicycle...)
- If you went through your life by train, what landscapes would you see?
- If your life consisted of many wagons, what or who would you put first class? What or who would you put in second class and who or what in the freight car? And where are you? Name your train.
- A passenger who sat next to you.
- Who would you get off your train?

## Love, Loves

Image of two hearts

There are many kinds of love, for people, animals, nature, books, film or other. Write about one of your loves choosing a style of your choice (story, poem, song).



How many forms of love exist in life!

Romantic love, passionate love, platonic love, parental love, filial love, brotherly love, friendly love, betrayed love, love for work, love for animals, love for nature, love for books, love and sometimes disaffection for life...

Many books, film, poems, works of art have been made in the name of a love.

Many memories and many stories to tell.

### Some writing proposals:

- The first time you fell in love.
- Write about your loves or love. You can talk about people but also about animals, nature, books, film and more.
- Reflect on the meaning that has the term "love" for you
- Write a message, a letter, a poem or a song to your love.
- Write a love letter to your body.
- That time you wanted someone to tell you "I love you".

## Falling

Image of a falling person

*In life there are so many moments when you can fall and then get back up again.*

*Write what comes to mind.*



In life there are times when you can fall, really or metaphorically. You can fall down the stairs, you can fall down from a bicycle, you can fall down a chair, you can get hurt. You can also fall down because the backpack we carry on our shoulders is too heavy: it can contain suffering, sadness, ingratitude, pain, unfulfilled needs.

The act of falling, which in the collective imagination is often synonymous with failure, disarray and surrender, can also be an instrument of knowledge, acceptance, a strong point that allows us to become aware of what is happening to us and to move forward

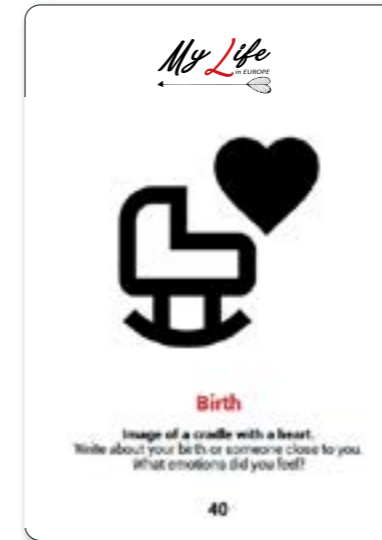
### Other writing proposals:

- That time you fell ... were you alone? Who was with you?
- When you felt "grounded" for something you wanted to do and couldn't do? What was it about? Who were you with? What happened after that?
- That time you saw another person fall. What did you do?
- That time you dreamed of falling. What could it mean for you?
- When you got up, after a fall, how did you feel? What did you think? Write about it.
- Making your way up after a fall: what changed?

## Birth

Picture of a cradle with a heart

*Write about your birth or the birth of someone you care about. What emotions did you feel?*



In Europe the use of cradles is very ancient (from the Latin *cuna*; *cunarius* or *cunaria* was the person responsible for rocking the cradle) and every culture has a particular rite of welcoming a newborn. The cradle is made with the intent to reproduce the movement experienced by the newborn in the womb to give confidence, to reassure.

The cradle also symbolically represents birth, which is the act of coming into the world, the beginning of life for every being but also the beginning of something, of any activity, for example the birth of an artistic movement, a large industrial complex, a party...

### Other writing proposals:

- Do you have a particular memory of your birth that someone told you about?
- Have you ever witnessed someone's birth?
- Have you ever looked after a newborn animal?
- That time you participated in the birth of ...
- Do you know one or more symbolic images related to birth?
- Thinking about that family photo ...

## Discoveries

Image of a person digging and finding something

*Have you ever had the feeling of having discovered something? When? How?*



Over the years scientists and explorers have made great discoveries: of continents, of new animal species, of constellations, of DNA, discoveries that have involved the whole of humanity. Then there are personal discoveries that involve or disrupt the life of an individual: discovering a treasure, a city, a precious book hidden in a trunk, a new road, one's own talents, that we like a person or that someone likes us and so on. In any case, discoveries bring about small or large changes, good or bad.

### Other writing proposals:

- Opening that drawer, you found...
- That time you discovered injustice...
- The time you discovered loneliness.
- When you found out you were capable of...
- When you opened that door, that drawer, that envelope...
- That time you were found doing...

## Journeys

Picture of a suitcase

*Do you remember anything about one of your trips? What trip would you like to do?*



"The real journey of discovery is not to seek new lands, but to have new eyes," says the French writer Marcel Proust (1871 - 1922).

It is important, to get to know each other better, to find out how you travel, if you like plan or if you prefer an already organized trip, what kind of traveller you are and what kind of trip suits you best. It can be a trip away from home or close to home. It can a trip you wished or longed for.

### Some proposals of writing:

The journeys of your life. Write about:

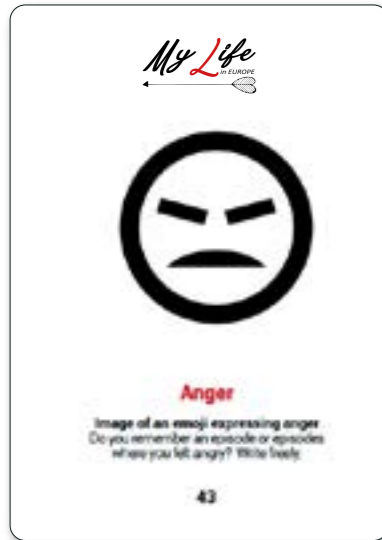
- The first time you went...
- Walking, you came to...
- The European countries you have visited or would like to visit.
- What does "travel" mean to you?
- Journeys in a fantasy world.

## Anger

Image of an emoji expressing anger

*Do you remember an episode or multiple episodes where you felt angry?*

*Feel free to write about them.*



Anger is a primordial, universal emotion that belongs to human experience, comes from the instinct to defend oneself in order to survive in the environment in which one is, and has different degrees of intensity. It can therefore have an adaptive function in that it acts as a signal in particular circumstances, as happens when we are faced with a danger. Each of us expresses anger in different ways and can sometimes suppress it. One can speak of maladaptive or dysfunctional anger when it creates individual suffering or impairs social relations. Anger is different from aggression in that it is not always followed by aggressive physical or verbal behaviour.

### Other writing proposals:

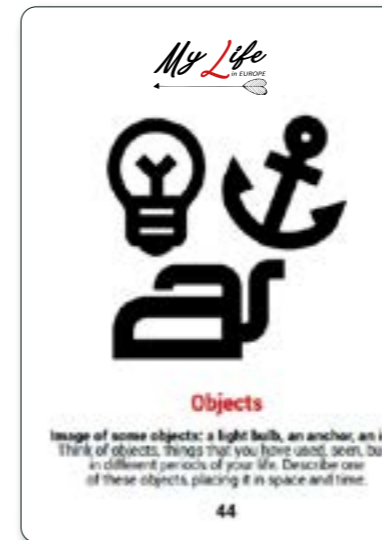
- If you think of anger, what image comes to mind?
- That time when anger brought you something good.
- The first time I felt anger
- What's the thing that makes you most angry?
- That time that person got angry with you.
- Anger and pain: reflection

## Objects

Image of some objects: a light bulb, an anchor, an iron.

*Think of objects, things you've used, seen, built, at different times in your life.*

*Describe one of these objects, placing it in space and time*



Objects, photos, clothes, postcards fill our homes. Sometimes they are locked in a trunk or in a drawer and are forgotten. Yet, opening that drawer or that trunk and reviewing them, many memories and many emotions come back to us. The objects represent our memory and hold many meanings for us.

### Other writing proposals:

- Think about objects, photos or other things that you have used, seen, built, in different periods of your life. Place them in the places of your life, in the streets, in the houses, in the rooms, in the open air. What do they remind you of? What event?
- Think of one object in particular. Why is it important to you?
- An object that is dear to you: was it given to you by someone? What does it represent for you?
- Think about the items you have and build a novel: for example, the coffee pot that talks, the cup that responds, the teaspoon that skips. Let your imagination carry you.
- Are there any items you have that you want to throw away?
- That time you lost...

## European currency

Image of the European flag and the Euro

*What does it mean for you to have a single European currency?*



The euro was introduced into the EU on 1 January 1999. For the first three years it was a scriptural currency, used solely for accounting purposes. Cash came into circulation on 1 January 2002. The name "Euro" was chosen by the Madrid European Council in 1995. The euro symbol (€) is inspired by the Greek letter Epsilon (€) and also represents the first letter of the word "Europe", while the two parallel bars signify stability.

The European Central Bank and the European Commission are responsible for maintaining the value and stability of the European Central Bank and for ensuring that the criteria required for EU countries to enter the Euro area are met. Today, Euro banknotes and coins are legal tender in 19 of the 27 Member States of the European Union, including overseas islands, departments and territories that are part of or associated with those countries. These countries form the Euro area.

### Siteographic References:

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/intro/html/index.it.html>

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/other/euroleafletit.pdf>

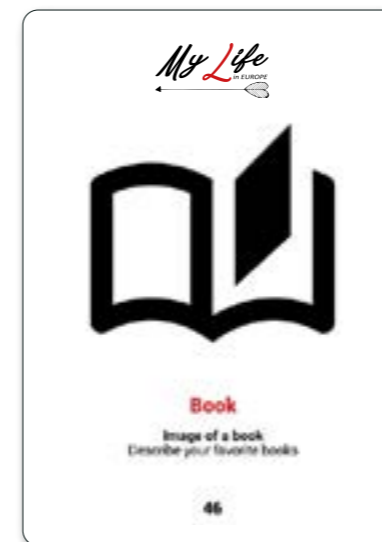
### Other writing proposals:

- Look at a coin, metal or paper, that you have: what images are there? What do they make you think of?
- Read on the site, shown above, the images on the coins of other countries. What do they make you think of?
- Do you have coins with different images?
- Do you have coins from other countries that are not in the Euro area?
- Coins of the past: what comes to mind?
- That time you found that coin in your hand...

## Books

Picture of a book

*Describe the books you're most fond of*



A book is a work composed of a set of sheets of paper or other material, bound and protected by a cover.

Throughout history, books have gone from being handwritten and/or painted, to being printed volumes, thanks to the invention of printing by Johannes Gutenberg, who published the first Bible in 1455.

Currently the book market is experiencing a revolution with the transition to digital format, known as eBooks, or in its adaptation to audio format, when it comes to audiobooks.

Books can cover any subject: science, literature, fiction, medicine, biography, etc. Books can be consulted for different purposes: for study, consultation, enjoyment...

Books have always been and still are extremely important for humanity, as a fundamental tool to preserve and transmit knowledge, beliefs and culture.

### Other writing proposals:

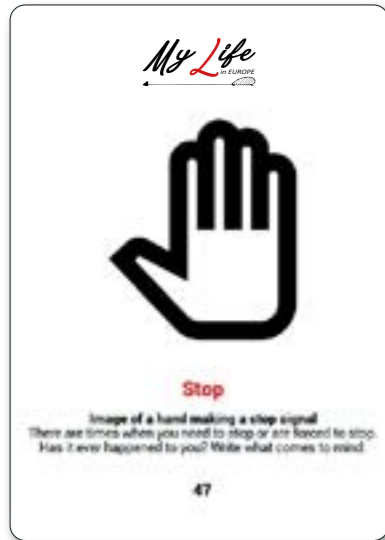
- What are the books you read that you like the most?
- Printed books, eBooks, audiobooks: which do you prefer?
- Describe a character in a book that fascinated you.
- The first book they gave you. How old were you? What book was it?
- If you were to write a book about your life story, what title would you give it? Which cover would you choose?
- School books: joy and sorrow.

## Stop

Image of a hand making a stop sign

*There are times when you need to stop or when you must stop. Has this ever happened to you?*

*Write what comes to mind.*



In life there can be many stops: those of a bus, a train, a plane, a ship, moments where you have to stop because of an illness, mourning, to take time and space for ourselves.

In some situations, they can be seen as negative but they are also opportunities to reflect and change.

### Other writing proposals:

- Your missed stops: when you wanted to stop and didn't.
- You stopped and saw, discovered, imagined...
- When the doctor told you that...
- That time you got off the bus and saw...
- That time you didn't know what to do when you saw someone stop.
- What are the stops in your life that have allowed you to find your way? What were you doing?

## Garden

Image of a watering pot bathing flowers

*Do you remember a particular garden that you saw and that fascinated you?*



A garden is a space, public or private, large or small in which flowers, ornamental plants, aromatic plants are cultivated.

Many cities have beautiful gardens where you can stop, relax, admire beautiful and fragrant flowers. Let's also think of the gardens of many royal villas that you can visit.

You can then find communal gardens that allow condos of one or more buildings to enjoy a common decorative space, usually bordered by a wall or a gate. Those who do not have a house with garden can carve out a space on their balcony to grow flowers but also use a small vegetable garden.

Growing your own garden, paying attention to the plant that grows is an act of care towards ourselves and towards others.

"It is the time you lost for your rose that made your rose so important". (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2016)

### Bibliographic References:

Saint-Exupéry, Il piccolo principe, traduzione di Maurizia Balmelli, Milano, Rizzoli, 2016, The Little Prince. Reynal & Hitchcock, New York, 1943.

### Other writing proposals:

- Do you remember a garden that you particularly liked or like even now?
- If you have a garden, how is your garden? Who takes care of it?
- If you had to describe yourself with a flower, what flower would you choose? Why?
- Your grandparents' garden. Do you have any special memories?
- If you think of your family members, what flowers would you choose for each of them? And for yourself?
- That time you got a free flower



## Door

Picture of a door opening.

*Ti sei mai fermato ad osservare le porte delle case? C'è una porta che ti ha interessato particolarmente?*



A door is an opening characterized by a barrier, hinged, sliding or swivel at the entrance of a building, of a room, a vehicle or a cabinet structure. It is, however, a space that delimits and defines two distinct environments.

Doors can be made of various materials, frequently wood, and can have different sizes, decorations, and colours.

Since ancient times doors have also assumed a symbolic meaning that evokes the idea of a confine, a limit and the act of crossing the threshold symbolizes the entrance into a space other than the one from which you come, perhaps it can be unknown, mysterious, magical or sacred, like the entrance to a temple and the passage from life to death.

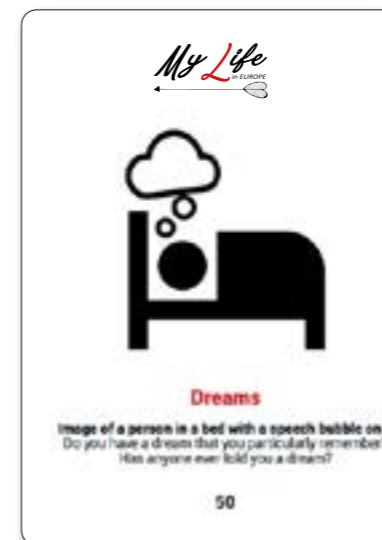
### Other writing proposals:

- Do you remember the door to your first house?
- When you walked through that door...
- Closing the door to someone or to an opportunity. Has it ever happened to you?
- Imagine opening the door of a house you don't know, what do you see?
- There an Italian saying that goes like this "Se si chiude una porta, si apre un portone" (When one door shuts, another one opens); what comes to mind?
- When you knocked on that door...

## Dreams

Picture of a person in a bed with a cloud above them

*Do you have a dream that you remember clearly? Has anyone ever told you about their dreams?*



Sometimes in the morning we wake up with the feeling of having lived in another reality and then we realize that we have dreamed.

There is no consensus on the definition of dream in scientific literature and many are the studies on dream in the field of neuroscience and psychology. A dream can be considered a mental activity linked to sleep, in particular to the REM phase (Rapid Eyes Movement), although recent studies have shown that it is possible to dream even in the non-REM phase (Foulkes & Vogel, 1965). Dreams are characterized by the perception of images and sounds which feel seemingly real to the subject that dreams, even real stories, that can be remembered upon waking (Domhoff & Fox, 2015).

According to the "dream theory" of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who was the first to use the interpretation of dreams as a therapeutic tool, dreams are a representation of one's unconscious desires. Daydreams are defined as "pleasant thoughts that make you forget about the present" (from Oxford Dictionaries), they detach us temporarily from the situation in which we find ourselves. Like nocturnal dreams, daydreams are also used as a therapeutic tool in a psychotherapeutic approach as in that of the "guided daydreams" of the French psychoanalyst Nicole Fabre (2002).

The art of divination which is believed to help interpret dreams is called oneiromancy.

### Bibliographic References:

- Foulkes, D., & Vogel, G. (1965). Mental activity at sleep onset. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 70, 231-243.
- Domhoff, G. W., & Fox, K. R. (2015). Dreaming and the default network: A review, synthesis, and counterintuitive research proposal. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 33, 342-353.
- Freud S., L'interpretazione dei sogni. prima edizione in lingua tedesca, 1899; Ed. Boringhieri 2019.
- Fabre, N. "Allo specchio dei sogni" Ed. Magi 2002.

### Other writing proposals:

- Do you remember a dream you had in your childhood? Would you want to talk about it?
- A dream that helped you reflect or reconsider something.
- Daydreams. Have you ever experienced them?
- Do you remember any film dealing with the theme of nocturnal dreams or with daydreaming?
- Do you remember any painting that depicts dreams?
- Do you remember an experience related to a dream?

## Pastimes

Image: a television, a ball, a pen

*Do you have any favourite pastime? Which one?*



A pastime is a pleasant and fun activity with which you spend your free time. Although there is not much difference between pastime and hobby, terms that can be used with the same meaning, actually "hobby" means more of an activity that we are passionate about and that we like to do every day, while "pastime" means more of an activity with which, in fact, you spend time when you have nothing to do.

In any case pastimes and hobbies, such as listening to music, reading, writing, cooking, walking, playing an instrument, painting, are very important for physical and mental health.

Having pastimes and hobbies is very important, in fact, even in old age because it stimulates creativity and keeps the mind active. The elderly find themselves having to occupy many free moments and need to reinvent themselves in order not to get bored, spending time by doing different activities that lead to psychophysical well-being.

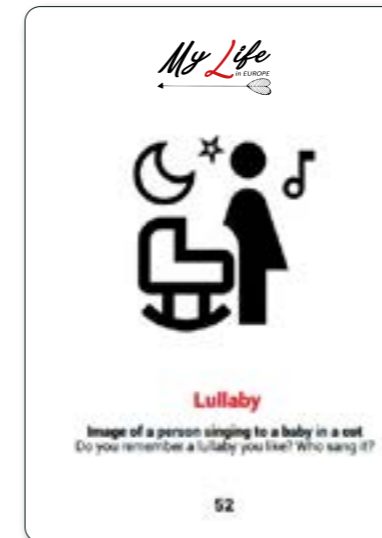
### Other writing proposals:

- Your favourite pastime in childhood and adolescence.
- Do you remember any of your grandparents' or parents' favourite pastimes?
- A hobby that has become a passion: can you think of anything?
- Have you made anything (object, story, knitting, blog) with your hobby?
- Do you remember any of your family members or acquaintances who created something with their hobby?
- Have you ever played or seen others play online games, as a pastime?

## Lullaby

Picture of a person singing to a child in a cot

*Do you remember a lullaby you like? Who sang it to you?*



A lullaby is a soothing melody sung to children to make them fall asleep. The idea behind a lullaby is that a song performed by a familiar voice makes children fall asleep. Lullabies can be found in cultures all over the world.

The European Union has funded the Lullabies of Europe project to collect all lullabies in the different languages of the Community to preserve their cultural heritage. A list of collected lullabies, translated into seven languages (Czech, Danish, Italian, Romanian, Greek, Turkish and English), is available on the website "Lullabies of Europe"

<http://www.lullabies-of-europe.org/> <https://www.facebook.com/Lullabies-of-Europe-129112613133>

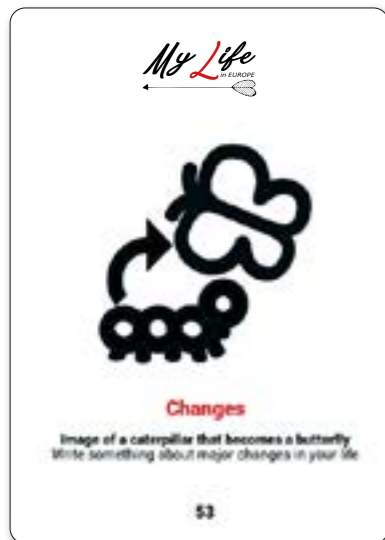
### Other writing proposals:

- Do you know a lullaby from a country other than your own?
- Did you hear a lullaby in some film you saw?
- Have you ever sung a lullaby to anyone?
- Has anyone ever told you they sang you a lullaby?
- Make up a lullaby for someone. Who would you sing it to?
- Read a lullaby of your choice. What is it about?

## Changes

Image of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly

Write about important changes in your life



In life there can be many significant changes. They can bring happiness, disappointment, anger, restlessness, serenity. You can change the colour of your room, you can change home, school, work, partner, friends. How have you changed from how you were before? There are so many possibilities, so many things to write about, go and look for them in your memory.

### Some writing proposals:

- If you think about a change that has involved you, what comes to mind? Is it connected to some place, season, period?
- Thinking about various changes in social, affective, relational life, write which ones have given you satisfaction.
- If you think about a change of yours in particular what would you write about: "I was..... I became/a."
- If you think about school or work what changes have there been in your life?
- If you think about personal life, what changes have there been in your life that you consider important for your growth?
- If you think about a sad period in your life (illness, the loss of a loved one, an accident) how did you deal with it? Who were you with? Have you found a new balance?

## Health in Europe

Image of European flag, stethoscope, and medical cross

Have you ever been in hospital for a visit, a hospitalization? Who was there with you? Roommates, health workers... talk about it. Were you in your Country or another?



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an international health organization founded in New York in 1946, based in Geneva, health is understood as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and does not consist only in an absence of disease or infirmity" "is a fundamental right of every human being, without distinction of race, religion, political opinions, economic or social status".

In 2011 a new concept of health was presented that would consist in "the ability to adapt and self-manage oneself in front of social, physical, and emotional challenges".

It has been decided that on April 7th each year, the day on which the WHO was founded, that the World Health Day should be celebrated.

The European Union integrates national health policies, supporting EU local governments in achieving common goals, sharing resources and overcoming common challenges. In addition to formulating laws and standards for health products and services at EU level, it also provides funding for health-related projects throughout the territory.

EU health policy aims to protect and improve health, ensure equal access to modern and efficient healthcare for all European citizens and to coordinate serious health threats involving more than one EU country. Disease prevention and response are two central issues for public health in the EU.

### Siteographic references:

[https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/health\\_it](https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/health_it); [https://health.ec.europa.eu/index\\_enex\\_it](https://health.ec.europa.eu/index_enex_it)

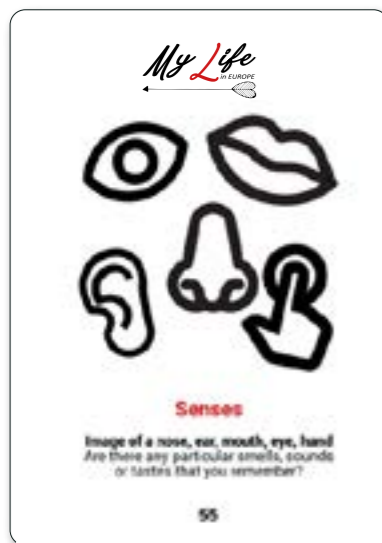
### Other writing proposals:

- Is there any healthcare worker you remember in particular?
- Have you ever been in hospital for a visit, a hospitalization? Who was there? Roommates, health workers... talk about it. Were you in your Country or another?
- Your family doctor: have you always had the same one? What relationship do you have with him/her? Describe a few episodes relating to your family doctor.
- The first time you walked through a doctor's office.
- What is health for you?
- What changes would you propose to improve Healthcare Services?

## Senses

Image of a nose, ear, mouth, eye, hand

*Are there any particular smells, sounds or tastes you remember?*



Let us try to recall with our senses what we have seen, heard, touched, tasted, smelled in different times and places. From our memories, a particular food, a smell or perfume could emerge.

Or maybe we remember how ecstatic we were to touch a fabric or the skin of a person, or how we were struck by a harmonious sound or a deafening noise.

We may have also experienced what is called "sixth sense", that precious capacity of our mind, which allows us to have intuitions, predictions, perceptions, not attributable to other senses.

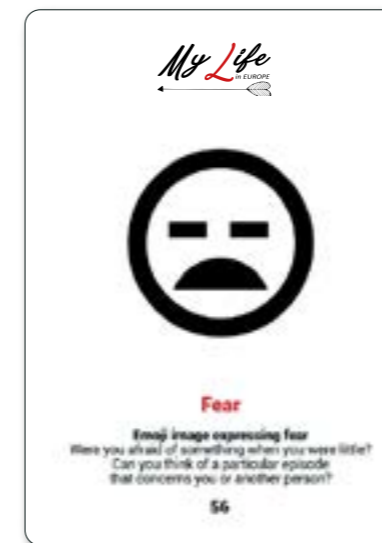
### Other writing proposals:

- That time you tasted...
- That time you smelled that perfume, that smell, that stench...
- The first time you caressed, brushed against, touched...
- That time you sensed, perceived...
- The time you thought of someone and then met them...
- Take a perfume, a flower, a food you have at your disposal: look at it, smell it, touch it, feel what it sounds like to touch it, feel what it tastes like. Describe it

## Fear

Image of emoji expressing fear

*When you were a child, were you afraid of something? Do you remember a particular episode about yourself or another person?*



Fear can be considered as a state of psychological and physical tension, which leads to an activation of individual resources, useful to prepare a subject to face a certain situation that's evaluated as "dangerous" and not safe. The term "fear" refers to states of varying intensity that can range from very intense fear levels when talking, for example, about "terror, high anxiety, panic" and less intense fear levels when it comes to "fear, restlessness, mild anxiety and tension".

We can all be afraid of change, of losing someone we care about, a job, a loved one, of not being able to overcome an obstacle that we have to face.

### Other writing proposals:

- Are there animals that scare you? Talk about it.
- The first time you felt afraid...
- When you felt like you couldn't handle a situation...
- When that time in the dark you heard...
- If you think of fear, what image comes to mind?
- That time when fear paralyzed you...

## Mentor

Image of two people sending messages to each other

*Are there teachers of life, important people for you, maybe even someone you don't know personally, like writers and artists, who taught you, advised you in the past or that still do so in the present?*



Mentor (Greek: μέντωρ) is the name of a Greek mythological character, the mature and wise son of Alcimo, to whom, in the Odyssey, Ulysses gives his son, little Telemaco, before leaving for the Trojan War, to help him grow and get to know the world around him.

The term “mentor” currently means a person who has helped, taught, advised someone in the past or in the present, accompanying them throughout life choices.

They can also be people that you don't personally know, like writers, artists, scholars whose ideas and teachings have stimulated you to grow.

### Alcune proposte di scrittura

- Have there been any mentors, family members or not, in your life? Who are they? How old were you when you met them? What did they teach you?
- Are there characters that you have perceived as negative but that have nevertheless taught you something? What is it that they taught you?
- If you think of a mentor, you immediately picture...
- If you think about yourself, do you think you are or have been a mentor to someone?
- Your mentor today is ...
- Is there any character you have known through books, films, music, sports events or other mediums, that you have thought of or still think of as a mentor?

## Labyrinth

Picture of a labyrinth

*Have you ever been in a maze? What were your emotions?  
Have you been in situations where you couldn't find a way out?*



A labyrinth is a physical structure, usually quite large, built in such a way that it is difficult for those who enter it to find the exit. It is, in fact, made up of a complex route that's extremely difficult to navigate.

The term “labyrinth” comes from the Greek noun labýrinthos (λαβύρινθος), used in mythology to indicate the Knossos labyrinth of King Minos, in Crete, the best known among those of ancient times.

Labyrinths can also symbolize the effort of walking through life, but also the hope of finding a way out.

Today, mazes are also used for recreational purposes, such as puzzles, a classic pastime.

### Other writing proposals:

- Are there any mazes you have visited in your country or other European countries?
- That time you walked into a maze...
- There are situations in life where you feel like you can't get out. Do you know someone who has experienced something like this, or have you personally been in similar situations?
- Can you think of any artwork or film in which there's a maze?
- Draw your maze on a sheet of paper and describe it.
- If you think of the word “labyrinth”, what comes to mind? What are your thoughts?

## Artist

Image of a person painting a picture

*What kind art do you like the most? Or the least?*



An artist is a person capable of creating a work of art, in various fields: painting, music, drawing, writing ...

Through their works, an artist is able to express their personality and bring out emotions in those who look, listen, read them.

Entering an art gallery, listening to music or reading a book, we realize that we are surrounded by works of art that also tell us about those who made them.

Artists are not always known by many people. We can find works of art even in unexpected places, waiting to be discovered.

### Other writing proposals:

- A work of art you like: what is it? Describe it.
- An artist you admire.
- The first time you met that artist...
- The time you entered an art gallery... where were you? Which city?
- If you were an artist, what would you like to do?
- If you are an artist, describe your art.

## Landscapes

Image of a road with trees.

*Countryside, sea, mountains, lakes, cities.*

*Write one or more episodes of your life related to one or more of these landscapes.*



Landscapes consist of a series of characteristic elements of a given area (for example, a mountain or marine landscape). The description of a landscape can take on an affective and aesthetic value: a landscape can seem squalid, melancholic, charming, picturesque, enchanting.

Landscapes are also often the subject of artistic reproductions such as pictorial, cinematographic, photographic and audiovisual works. In our life we have seen and traveled through many landscapes that have fascinated us.

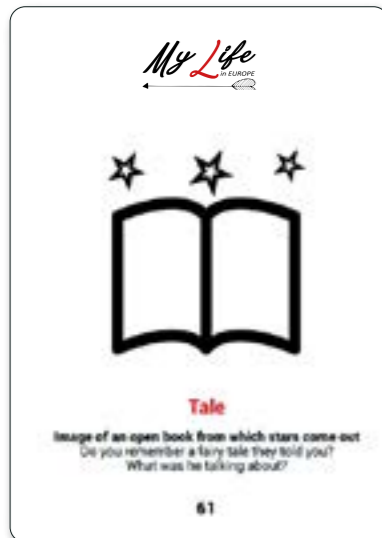
### Other writing proposals:

- Your first family outing.
- Describe your favourite landscape and a memory related to that landscape.
- The first time you admired a landscape you'd never seen before. How old were you? Who were you with?
  - If you think of a distant landscape what comes to mind?
- Your first contact with the earth....
- Nature that speaks to you...

## Fairy-tales

Image of an open book from which stars come out

*Remember one fairy-tale you were told about? What was it about?*



Classic fairy-tales, of popular origin, are stories characterized by fantastic elements and usually they have human beings as protagonists. In a fable, however, the main characters are often animals that embody the vices and defects of human beings. According to Russian scholar Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), who made a notable contribution to the understanding of fairy-tales, the structure of fairy-tales is much more complex and articulate than fables, with numerous extraordinary characters, and follows a narrative scheme common to each fairy-tale: an initial situation from which the story starts and in which the place and the time in which it is set are presented; key event that breaks the initial balance and marks the start of new events; development in which there are adventures and obstacles that the protagonist must overcome, with the help also of magical elements (magical lamp, wand, ring...); restoration of balance and conclusion with happy ending, in which the protagonist usually receives a prize.

Fairy-tales help children and adults communicate at a deeper level which escapes everyday language. Through fairy-tales, a child can get in touch with the surrounding world and understand that they will be able to solve their problems and find their happy ending, facing fears and insecurities.

European fairy-tales and all of children's literature have made a fundamental contribution to building European identity and community.

**Bibliographic References:** Propp, V., *Morfologia della fiaba*, a cura di Gian Luigi Bravo, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, (Sankt-Peterburg 1928); *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans., Laurence Scott. 2nd ed. Austin: University of Texas Press (1927)

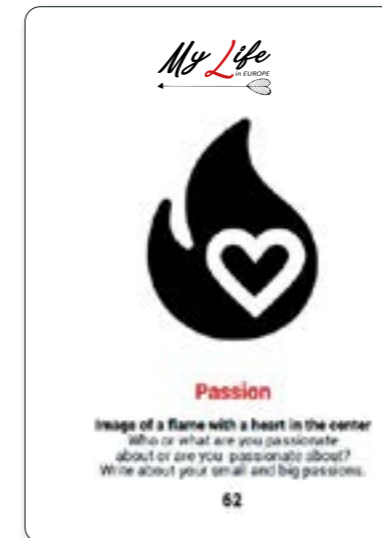
### Other writing proposals:

- Hai mai raccontato una fiaba a qualcuno? Quando?
- Inventa una fiaba, dando un titolo alla storia.
- In quale fiaba che conosci vorresti abitare e quale personaggio ti piacerebbe interpretare?
- Una fiaba che ti è piaciuta di più.
- Una fiaba che ti è piaciuta di meno.
- Ti hanno mai raccontato una fiaba? Chi? Quanti anni avevi?

## Passion

Image of a flame with a heart in the center

*Who or what are you passionate about or have you been passionate about? Write about your small and big passions.*



Passion (from the Greek πάσχω "to suffer,") is a feeling of intense enthusiasm or irresistible desire for someone or something, such as an idea, a proposal, an activity, a job, a person.

Who among us has not had a small or great passion for someone or something in our life, which has given us emotions and moments of joy? Just an image, a photo, a smell, a music to bring back those memories, to bring them back to our mind and heart.

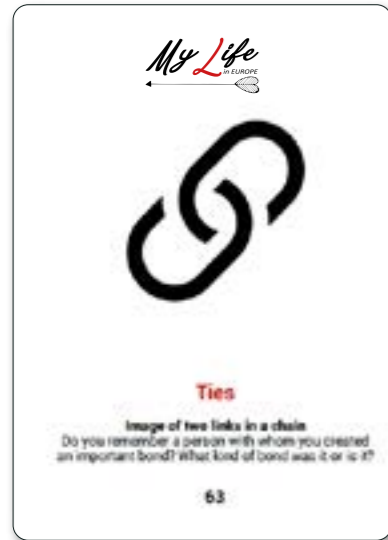
### Other writing proposals:

- Your greatest passion is....
- Your passions. How old were you? Are they different today?
- The time your heart started beating.
- Your forgotten passions.
- The passions of your family.
- An overwhelming passion.

## Bonds

Image of two links of a chain

*Do you remember a person with whom you created an important bond?  
What kind of bond was it?*



The term “bond” has many meanings. It can be defined as a means of union, conjunction, closure. For example, a chemical bond is a force that holds atoms together. It can also be considered as a relationship or affective bond, which involves mutual fidelity, or limitation of individual freedom. A bond, understood as a relationship between two or more people, can be of various types (friendly bond, a couple’s bond, parental bond), can have varying degrees of intensity and can be influenced from the context.

### Other writing proposals:

- What is the meaning you attribute to the word bond?
- The first time you established a strong bond...
- If you think about the connections you had in your life, how would you describe them?
- That time you broke the chains...
- Bonds as strengths. What do they make you think about?
- If you think of “bond” what image comes to mind?

## Finish line

Image of an arrow on a dartboard

*You have arrived at the end of this journey. The first victory is having devoted time and space to yourself. How do you feel?*



You took care of yourself, writing about your memories, experiences, thoughts, emotions, and feelings that you have felt or that you feel. You can start this journey again using different writing stimuli from the ones you used and found in this manual or invent new ones. Give space to your creativity and playfulness. By putting all your writings together, you can compose your autobiography and share it with other people.





8

**THE ROLE OF THE MASTER**

Sara Calcini, Grazia Chiarini



# THE ROLE OF THE MASTER

SARA CALCINI, GRAZIA CHIARINI

## Notes on M. Knowles Adult Education Theory

Before describing the role of the facilitator, which in the My Life Project is called Master, it is important to make a brief introduction on adult learning and education to better understand the role that the Master will play.

In 1973, a report by the Council of Europe suggested the profound transformation of education systems by integrating school education with adult education. Formative processes in adulthood have developed following the realization that human beings change over time and can be the subject of education throughout their life, also for the need of continuous updates in the professional and work field. Training activities can involve not only people interested in training, but also those who do not initially feel the need to do so.

Andragogy is a theory of adult learning and education, theorized in 1980 of which Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997) is the greatest exponent. The term, in analogy to that of pedagogy, which refers to the education of children, comes from the Greek *παιδία* -*παιδρός* , and *αγω* , ago, to lead.

A fundamental aspect of Malcolm Knowles' model is the consideration of adults as learners (learning subjects) with their specific individual perspectives.

Knowles identifies the andragogic model as based on six assumptions:

1. *The need to know*: adults feel the need to learn and to know what the benefits of learning are
2. *The concept of self*: while a child's life is based on dependence on others, adults generally live in an autonomous dimension.
3. *The role of previous experiences*: in the education of adults, previous experiences

and those who are made on the field play an essential role: these are experiences through experiential techniques, laboratories, simulations, problem solving activities, compared to transmission techniques. The experience provides the basis for learning activities.

4. *Willingness to learn*: adults are willing to learn to cope with their real-life situations.

5. *Learning orientation*: Adults are motivated to invest energy to the extent that they believe that it will help them perform tasks or tackle problems they face in real life situations.

6. *Motivation*: the desire for greater job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life.

On the basis of these characteristics of adult subjects, Knowles tries to formulate an andragogic model for training in which the learner's responsibility and the sharing of the project is central.

The fundamental elements of the andragogic model are:

- *Ensuring a learning environment*
- *Creating a mechanism for common design*
- *Diagnosing learning needs*
- *Designing a model of learning experiences*
- *Implementing the programme*
- *Evaluating the programme*

Knowles therefore proposes the direct involvement of learning subjects at all stages of the process, starting with the setting of objectives. He reevaluates between the learning resources, the experience, the emotional and affective state of individuals, the interactions between them and the context in which they live.

After these premises, considering that participation in the My Life Game involves people in a path of training and learning through autobiographical writing in a co-

construction process that enriches the knowledge of self and the other, the figure of the Master takes on a very important role.

### **The role of the Master**

The Master is a non-invasive figure that provides all the information necessary to choose and use the various versions of the Game My Life, helps participants who might have issues with the online game, supports players throughout the path, takes care of the group and the narrative context, so that participants feel satisfied and free to write about themselves, to share their texts with others, in an atmosphere of trust, respect and mutual listening.

The Master should preferably experiment with autobiographical writing with the My Life Game before starting a workshop, using the many writing proposals mentioned in the Game and the Manual to write of themselves. In this way, he or she can resonate and build a relationship with the participants, also enriching his or her own autobiography. Every story always has something to teach, to talk about, and creates a certain emotional resonance in the listener, involving the Master who helps to express emotions in a safe and non-judgmental context. The Master can also share their emotions and feelings but not personal opinions or preferences nor interpret the words and thoughts of the participants. Although we're not talking about a therapeutic group that would require the presence of a specialist conductor, writing and sharing one's writings brings a sense of relief and of well-being in those who participate in the activity. In any case, whether a person prefers to participate in a group or prefers a kind of intimate, individual writing, autobiographical writing is the «art of taking care of oneself» (Demetrio, 2008).

It is very important that the Master pays attention not only to the words but to the whole set of behaviours, to the ways of being and doing (postures, facial expressions, silences, inflexions in speech...) to everything that happens in the group during each meeting and should also be able to observe even themselves. They can also make

brief notes on the aspects they consider relevant. For example:

- they can write about a moment they are experiencing;
- they can write about their sensorial perceptions (sounds, lights, sensations, comfort/ discomfort);
- they can write about their own personal experience, thoughts, emotions, what might make them aware of what they are feeling.

All this can be useful for a retrospective reading of what happened in the game, and the first set of notes can always be edited and improved.

At the beginning of a meeting, the Master can invite participants to write freely about what comes to their mind in a few minutes, without sharing the writings and can use some opening games, so-called “icebreakers”, which help participants break the ice and interact with one another, facilitating group creativity and relationships. Some examples to use both online and in presence:

- write three words about how you feel at the beginning and at the end of each meeting;
- indicate a colour, a tree, a flower, an animal, a book or a character to describe yourself or how you feels.

This type of stress or stimulus can be repeated at the end of a few-days long workshop to give way to the Master of checking if there have been changes compared to the beginning and to take into consideration the participants’ journey by also hearing what they have to say about it.

With time, the Master can build their own “toolbox”, which can consist of quotes by famous people, poems, music, literary pieces, photos, paintings, videos, from which they can draw and use, along with the other writing proposals that you will find in the My Life manual, to stimulate participants to dig into their memory.

Listening, being non-judgemental and respectful are the fundamental qualities

that a Master must have. An active and open listening allows to give space to the thoughts and intuitions of the participants, who need time and patience to foster greater awareness in the group but also in the Master themselves, who can learn when to be silent and to speak only enough to encourage others to express themselves.

“Following the route”, “navigating by sight” are metaphors that give an idea of the attitude that the Master must assume, especially in very variable contexts.

In the event that participants have a tendency to share their memories verbally without writing them down, especially in the case of very old and/or disabled people, the Master should encourage writing without forcing it. The general goal of autobiographical practice within the My Life game is to encourage people to write their own story, but also allowing them to enjoy the experience.

### **The Master’s main responsibilities in group play are to:**

- Identify the context (health, educational, social...) and participants to which to propose the game.
- Design with participants meetings, defining spaces, times, schedules.
- In the first meeting, welcome the participants and present themselves. Propose free initial writing and/or icebreakers. Identify participants’ expectations, motivations, and objectives.
- Describe characteristics and purposes of the My Life in Europe Project.
- Describe the Game in its various versions and cards, informing participants that at the end of the game you can save in PDF the stories, copy them in Word format to create your first autobiography, which will be expanded over time, by playing more than once.
- Give technical instructions on the chosen version of the Game, accepting doubts and questions.
- Start the Game by inviting participants to write freely, without worrying about form or grammar.
- Invite to share one’s own writings and/or experiences, without forcing participants.

- Guide participants to listen carefully and respond to others' writings through constructive restitutions, without judgments, criticism or interpretations.
- Welcome the emotions and thoughts of the various participants, as well as their own.
- Help participants to clarify any doubts, limits, resistances and guide them in finding possible solutions.
- Make it clear that meetings are spaces of group reflection on the sharing of life experiences in a safe and welcoming environment.
- Make it clear that you constantly learn from your own experience and that of others at any age and in any situation.
- Use closing words if needed.
- Collect the stories, after participants have signed consent forms, and keep them.
- Greet participants and possibly schedule future meetings.

#### Some aspects of Online Group Play

In the Online Group Game, the Master agrees with the group of participants on how to meet: in presence, in a previously chosen location, or on an online platform (Zoom, Google meet ...).

In the first meeting, he or she creates the game, according to the technical instruction booklet dedicated to the Master which can be found on the Project's website and assigns a password to all players. Even players who are not able to participate in the first meeting will receive the password and link.

The Master invites players to write on the first card and share their writings, as previously indicated. It is preferable not to use too many stimuli, especially in the first meeting, in order to give space to presentations, expectations, to encourage bonding. Absentees will write on those same papers before the next meeting.

At the end of each meeting the Master will set up the next meeting without closing the game.

At the end of a course, the Master can re-read what's been written, including his

or her own work, together with participants, encouraging sharing and meta-writing. The Master can also point out common aspects, differences, detect metaphors, frequent words, discoveries. This research work, which can be used in any workshop, improves the Master from a professional and also personal perspective; he or she will be able to share the experience with other Masters and create a network to exchange of good practices and knowledge.

#### **The role of the Master in different contexts:**

##### Practical examples

Given that the My Life Game can be used in any context and for users of any age, we're going to give some examples of situations in which the Master can find themselves.

#### **FIRST CASE**

*Context:* in a retirement home

*Participants:* Adults aged 60 and over, without or with disabilities

*Master:* external; external master supported by the animator of the nursing home; animator and/or other operators.

*Recommended number of participants:* minimum two, maximum five. With more participants, more groups are preferable.

*Number of meetings and frequency:* once a week or every fortnight for a period varying from four meetings or more, depending on the deck chosen and the characteristics of the participants (manual skills, attention, disability).

*Duration of the meeting:* one hour/ one hour and a half, depending on the time of the other activities and the number of participants.

*Recommended group game:* paper version; hybrid version; classic online version.

The Master, to choose the type of game, will take into account the degree and type of disability present in the participants.

Deck types: all those offered on the My Life website.

Role of the Master in the various versions:

*Paper version:* the Master proposes to the participants to play as in the game of the goose, if he or she uses the numbered cards in black and white; alternatively, he or she has each participant draw a card from the deck, if she or he uses the coloured version, the “loose” cards. The Master stimulates story-telling and faithfully collects and/or records the stories of the elderly and transcribes them on paper. You can also register on the online platform of the Game, creating your own individual game, where you transcribe in the appropriate space, next to each card, the set of stories of the elderly that you have collected.

*Hybrid online version:* the Master chooses the deck and shows on PC or large screen the individual cards, inviting participants to write about the same card, proceeding with the collection of stories as described before.

*Classic online version:* it's recommended if the participants have good manual skills in writing and in case of mild cognitive decay.

In the online versions it is important that the Master does not close the game before they have finished all the meetings.

*Tips for the Master:* leave participants free to express themselves, use the toolbox if needed, do not rush participants reach the goal of getting to the end of the game. Pleasure lies in the journey and in sharing. The Master can prepare small prizes, certificates of participation or other, to stimulate the playful aspect and the pleasure of being together. They can also organize meetings with family members and present the work done, also promoting small publications.

## **SECOND CASE**

*Context:* Association/ Social Cooperative/ Foundation, dealing with disabilities and situations of fragility.

*Participants:* adults around 40 years of age and over, with different abilities. Players under 40 years of age can also participate.

*Master:* external; external Master supported by the educator of the Association/ Cooperative/ Foundation; educator and/ or another operator.

*Recommended number of participants:* minimum two, maximum five. With more participants, more groups are preferable.

*Number of meetings and frequency:* once a week or every fortnight for a period varying from four meetings or more, depending on the deck chosen and the characteristics of the participants (manual skills, attention, type of diversity).

*Duration of the meeting:* one hour/ one hour and a half, depending on the time of the other activities and the number of participants.

*Recommended group game:* paper version; hybrid version; classic online version. The master, to choose the type of game, will agree with the participants.

*Deck types:* all those provided by the My Life website.

Role of the master in various versions:

*Paper version:* the Master can propose to play as in the game of the goose if he or she uses the numbered cards in black and white, or can have each participant draw a card from the deck, especially if he or she chooses to use the colour version, the “loose” cards. You can choose to have everyone speak about the same card or on different cards. Depending on the type and degree of disability, the Master invites participants to write even small sentences in a notebook, on paper or on PC; or stimulates the story and collects faithfully or records the stories of participants and transcribes them on PC; or you can register as a Master in the online platform of

the Game, create an individual game with a specific name and transcribe the set of stories you have collected in the space next to each card.

*Hybrid online version:* the Master chooses the deck and shows on PC or large screen the individual cards, inviting participants to elaborate on the same card.

*Classic online version:* indicated if the participants have good manual skills in writing and in case of mild cognitive decay, for the blind and the visually impaired.

In the online versions it is important that the Master does not close the game before he or she has finished all the meetings.

*Tips for the Master:* leave participants free to express themselves, use the toolbox if needed, do not rush participants reach the goal of getting to the end of the game. Pleasure lies in the journey and in sharing. The Master can prepare small prizes, certificates of participation or other, to stimulate the playful aspect and the pleasure of being together. They can also organize meetings with family members and present the work done, also promoting small publications.

### **THIRD CASE**

*Context:* Cultural Association/ Library, Leisure Centre.

*Participants:* Adults around the age of 40 and over, without or with disabilities.

Players under the age of 40 may also participate.

*Master:* external or internal to the structures.

*Recommended number of participants:* minimum four participants, maximum ten.

With more participants, more groups are preferable.

Number of meetings and frequency: once a week or every fortnight for a period varying from four meetings or more, depending on the deck chosen and the characteristics of the participants (manual skills, attention, type and degree of disability).

*Duration of a single meeting:* from an hour and a half to two hours.

*Recommended group game:* paper version; hybrid version; classic online version. The Master, to choose the type of game, will take into account the preferences of the participants, the degree and the type of disability present.

*Deck types:* all those offered on the My Life website.

#### *Master's role in various game versions:*

*Paper version:* the Master proposes to play as in the game of the goose if he or she uses the numbered cards in black and white, or has each participant draw a card from the deck, especially if he or she chooses to use the colour version, the "loose" cards. He or she stimulates storytelling and invites the participants to write their story on a notebook, a sheet of paper, or on PC.

*Hybrid online version:* the Master chooses the deck and shows on PC or large screen the individual cards inviting participants to elaborate on the same card and write on a notebook, a sheet of paper or on PC.

*Classic online version:* indicated if the participants have sufficient manual writing skills, in case of mild cognitive deficits, for the blind and the visually impaired.

In the online versions it is important that the Master does not close the game before he or she has finished all the meetings.

*Tips for the Master:* leave participants free to express themselves, use the toolbox if needed, do not rush to reach the goal of getting to the end of the game. Pleasure lies in the journey and in sharing. The Master can prepare small prizes, certificates of participation or other to stimulate the playful aspect and the pleasure of being together. He or she can also organize meetings with family members and present the work done, also promoting small publications.



#### **FOURTH CASE**

*Context:* Hospital, Health facility

*Participants:* Adults

*Master:* external or internal to the structures.

*Recommended number of participants:* consider writing in pairs (Master- player) or, if possible, a small group of maximum five/ six participants.

*Number of meetings and frequency:* once a week for a period varying according to the needs identified by the participants and the hosting facility.

*Duration of a single meeting:* from an hour and a half maximum.

*Recommended game:* individual with the Master. Group game in paper version; in classic or hybrid online version, if possible. The Master, to choose the type of game, will take into account the preferences of the participants, the degree and the type of disability present.

*Deck types:* all those offered on the My Life website.

*Master's role in various game versions:*

*Paper version:* the Master proposes to play as in the game of the goose if he or she uses the numbered cards in black and white, or has each participant draw a card from the deck, especially if he or she chooses to use the colour version, the "loose" cards. He or she stimulates storytelling and invites the participants to write their story on a notebook, a sheet of paper, or on PC.

*Hybrid online version:* the Master chooses the deck and shows on PC or large screen the individual cards inviting participants to elaborate on the same card and write on a notebook, a sheet of paper or on PC.

*Classic online version:* indicated if participants have excellent manual skills in writing.

In the online versions it is important that the Master does not close the game

before he or she has finished all the meetings.

*Tips for the Master:* leave participants free to express themselves, use the toolbox, if necessary, do not rush and pay attention to the narrative context. The Master can organize, with the permission of the facility, meetings with health professionals and family and present the work done, proposing to promote small publications.

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# APPENDIX

## Autobiographical and biographical texts proposed by partners

### ITALY

***Autobiographical fragments from prison. Writing workshops on the authorship of prisoners and free men by Carla Chiappini and Marco Baglio, Ed. Franco Angeli, 2019.***

Being fathers, being children as seen through the short writings of more than a hundred men collected with the autobiographical method studied and promoted by the LUA in five Italian penal institutions. Convicted fathers and free fathers met together in writing workshops to talk about themselves and others, through various suggestions, “the first memory of my father”, “that day I became a father”, “as a child I was” “who are the people I admired” ...”. A journey through memory, emotions, and fragments of personal stories. Men of various ages of different nationalities, sentenced to short or long sentences and free men engaged in different professions shared personal stories with simple and exciting words, which offered insights of reflection and contributions of teachers, researchers and experts. Quotes from the text:

In my long journey - not yet finished - through the prisons of our country, I collected many manuscripts, more or less dense and more or less grammatically correct, many tears, emotions and liberating laughter. Carla Chiappini

**“Love is not enough. A collective autobiography” by Luigi Ciotti, Ed. Giunti 2020.**

Don Luigi Ciotti is the founder of the Abele Group, an example of social commitment for welcoming people with various problems: addiction, prostitution, migration, serious diseases such as AIDS, and economic difficulties. With the Free University of Autobiography of Anghiari, he’s been carrying out the project “*Stories without a home*”.

Since 1995 he has contributed to the birth of “Libera”, which promotes a culture of legality against organized crime. In the book “Love is not enough” Luigi Ciotti tells his life in a choral way, “a life dedicated to us”, through people and meetings that have allowed him to live his life to the fullest. Through his story, described chronologically, it also tells the crucial events of recent Italian political history. Quotes from the book: “...if you want to take care of others, of fragile and oppressed humanity, love is not enough...you need the feeling of justice, that is, a deep empathy for human affairs, you need to feel on your skin skin the wounds of others, that emotions which prevents indifference, judgment and prejudice, poisonous fruits of ignorance. And that makes you feel every form of life worthy of the utmost care and respect, including in the concept of life not only the human one...” (p. 176)

**“The river of life. An inner story” by Eugenio Borgna, 2020**

In this book, the psychiatrist Eugenio Borgna reconstructs his own story. With the guidance of the Confessions of Augustine, Leopardi, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Mann and Virginia Woolf, he follows in the wake of childhood and teenage memories as the return to the great paternal home devastated by the Germans during Nazi occupation. He remembers the time spent in a university clinic in Milan, discovering neurology, and the work at the female asylum at the Maggiore Hospital in Novara. He recounts the revolution of the Basaglia law and the years that followed.

*“In this journey my attention- the psychiatrist write- is not addressed to external history, but to the inner history of my life: to anxieties and insecurities, disappointments, sadness and nostalgia, expectations and hopes, the choices and decisions that have been part of it”. Psychiatry becomes an insight into the life of emotions and passions, the phenomenology of the social world. The image of a river is the metaphor of life, background to choices, to dramas, to the great and small epics of individuals.*

*At the end of his story, the author quotes “Alla luna”, by Giacomo Leopardi, where*

*he provides a key to reading what is an autobiography is in his reconnecting the past with the future, with the “redeeming function of memories” and the irreplaceable food of hope as a memory of the future: “Knowing each other, knowing how to escape the bewitched charm of the present, the distraction and carelessness of today, the banal everyday life and how recover the past, those memories revive, giving meaning to the feverish and fatal passing of years”.*

**“I’m still alive” by Roberto Saviano and Asaf Hanuka, Bao Publishing, 2019.**

The writer, journalist and screenwriter Roberto Saviano, after the publication of his debut novel Gomorrah, inspired by real situations in the criminal world of the Camorra and death threats directed to him, has been living under escort since 2006. “I’m still alive” is the story of his second life, which began in 2006. Saviano is a survivor who does not give up and who continues to write true stories, of denunciation, of organized crime. The novel ranks between a travel diary of his life and graphic journalism, comic books’ journalism. “I’m still alive” is in the form of a comic illustrated by Israeli cartoonist and illustrator Asaf Hanuka.

Quote from the book:

*I wanted to scream, I wanted to scream, I wanted to tear my lungs, like Papillon, with all the strength of my stomach, breaking my windpipe, with all the voice that my throat could still pump: “Damn bastards, I’m still alive!” Saviano*

**“My home is where I am” by Igiaba Scego, Rizzoli 2010**

In the book, the writer and journalist Igiaba Scego, born in Rome, intertwines the memories of her life in Rome with the history of her family (her father was an important Somali politician, who chose to go with her family to Rome after the coup of Siad Barre)

and the history of Somalia in its various periods (pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, independent Somalia, Somali Democratic Republic and Somalia as it is today). Igiaba speaks of the differences and similarities between Rome and Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia and all the hardships that she and her family have faced. Of her Roman childhood she recalls the insults of her classmates for the colour of her skin, and when she went at night to Trastevere with her mother to look for some food and some clothes from the neighborhood's associations. The author also talks about the stories that were told to her as a child by her mother, born in Somalia and raised as a nomad, and compares them to the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, in particular to that of Snow White. She tries to discover, by exploring her city, the deep bond between the country in which she lives and the one from which her people come from. At the end of her physical and interior explorations, Igiaba manages to reconstruct her own existential map, to accept her identity as black Italian, linked to Mogadishu but a fan of Roma's football team. Above all, she understands the importance of telling oneself as a tool for understanding and sharing one's personal story: *"This was the key. It was useless to try to fill the suspension points of definitions. It was a lost battle from the start. Those dots would have haunted us all our lives. It was better to do like the Cardinal: try to tell the journey that you've been on up until now; and perhaps the journey of those who we feel really close to us. (p. 160)"* Scego.

## **PORTOGALLO**

### ***Contra Mim* di Valter Hugo Mãe ,2020.**

Valter Hugo Mãe begins by telling, in essence, about his origin, that is, the hidden and innocent love of his parents who would end up marrying and moving to Angola where he was later born. Throughout the book, he talks about daily life episodes that somehow marked him. He relates that, out of stubbornness, he discovered, in a pile of garbage, an illuminated Christ. His family soon declared that he became a writer because he saw a light of Christ that no one else would have been able to

see, hastily calling himself a „call from God“. In keeping with this idea, he makes reference to topics such as religion, God, and all the mystery that surrounded him. It still retains today the fluorescent Christ and the idea that God existed and was made of paper - the bible. Stories force us to create mental images of what we read and want to enter them to feel the written words. They leave us wondering and trying to dress up the childhood that doesn't belong to us.

The descriptions are fluid, as if we were listening directly and exclusively to the narrator. They are also full of boyishness and deep innocence. All the deconstructed and explained thoughts are fundamental, not only to understand the unique way he sees things, but also for the richness of content, as quite interesting and peculiar philosophies are developed.

“Contra Mim” is written with particular subtlety, without ever softening a theme. The writing is captivating and holds the reader by the ordinary but incomparable way in which the narratives are told. There is always something beyond what is said, there is always something else to explain and analyze, and Valter Hugo Mãe goes into these details, hidden at first sight, in an almost unnoticeable way. Moreover, there is always a great desire on the part of the reader to follow this guided tour of childhood, without requiring pauses to rest the view.

In the lives of some writers everything seems to conspire toward the inevitability of writing. Every detail, no matter how erratic or disguised as unimportant, is already building the fascination for the text, something that is intertwined with survival, with all its difficulty and joy.

Valter Hugo Mãe, in an “introspective year”, as he says, returns with the story of his own childhood and the deep magic of growing up making ‘words’ his food, company, place, waiting, or pieces of God.

A book made of brief and open-hearted stories that will allow us to access Valter Hugo Mãe's timeline, getting to know many of the places and characters that shaped him as a man and a writer. And that, once completed, will have allowed Valter to

return to an older motivation and certainty: that there will always be beauty. And poems. Most liked sentences:

*“Estamos sempre à procura das nossas grandes crianças. Essas que começámos por ser e que se tornam paulatinamente inacessíveis, como irreais e até proibidas. Crianças que caducaram, partiram, tantas por ofensa, tantas apenas por esquecimento.”*

*“We are always looking for our great children. Those we started out to be and who gradually become inaccessible, as unreal and even forbidden. Children who have lapsed, gone, so many by offense, so many just by forgetfulness.”*

**Amália nas suas palavras di Amália Rodrigues and Manuel da Fonseca, Porto Editora, 2020.**

In 1973, Arcádia Publishing commissioned the writer Manuel da Fonseca to write a biography of Amália Rodrigues. The idea seemed brilliant - to have a famous writer, known for his communist militancy, profiling the woman who was then considered the icon of Fado and one of the “pillars” of the regime’s propaganda. This biography was never written, but long hours of conversation between the two were recorded, whether in the house on Rua de São Bento or on Amália’s estate in Brejão. However, Arcádia ended and the recordings were forgotten. Until now...

In this book, which will certainly be the most important published on Amália’s centennial, that conversation - which has remained unpublished until today - is finally revealed, allowing us to follow the life of Amália, in her own words, from the poverty in which she was born and raised to the peak of her artistic career.

**Cebola Crua com Sal e Broa – da infância para o mundo di Miguel Sousa Tavares, Ed. Clube do Autor, 2018**

An eternal storyteller, the author brings to life his early years: from childhood

to youth, from newspapers to politics. The testimony of a unique life with the contemporary history of Portugal as background. In a new book, Miguel Sousa Tavares shares his earliest memories - of his childhood, his family and the world he saw. Of the painful separation of his parents when he was six years old, of his first trip to Madrid as a special envoy for RTP, of his family life, chaotic and without rules, of his trips around the world and his loves. But also of the frozen sea to the North and the sea that cleanses the soul to the South, of the Jesuit school he attended for eight years in a long and deep hatred, of Law School, of politics. Of Chico Buarque, Jorge de Sena, Ruy Belo, frequent visitors in a house where freedom was always breathed. Most liked sentences:

*“Mas sim, tive sempre uma escola alternativa, que era a casa dos meus pais. Aquilo era um universo anárquico, irracional por vezes, fascinante muitas outras. Mas não era um mundo fácil para se crescer como adolescente: ou se aproveitava o que era fascinante e se ultrapassava o resto, ou se sucumbia.*

(...)

*Crescemos e aprendemos a viver num ambiente que era estranho e incompreensível a todos os meus amigos de então. Era uma casa sem horários, sem rotinas, sem nada daquilo que dá segurança às crianças. Nunca se sabia quando é que o meu pai vinha jantar, quando é que a minha mãe deixaria de recitar poesia ou de dançar como uma bailarina pela noite fora ou de entrar pelo meu quarto adentro a meio da noite, para ver se não haveria um ladrão debaixo da minha cama.”*

*“But yes, I always had an alternative school, which was my parents’ home. That was an anarchic universe, irrational at times, fascinating many others. But it was not an easy world to grow up in as a teenager: you either took advantage of what was fascinating and overcame the rest, or you succumbed.*

(...)

*We grew up and learned to live in an environment that was strange and incomprehensible to all my friends back then. It was a house without schedules, without routines, without any of the things that give children security. You never knew when my father would come to dinner, when my mother would stop reciting poetry or dancing like a ballerina through the night, or sneaking into my room in the middle of the night to see if there was a thief under my bed."*

### **Eu, Carolina di Carolina Salgado , 2006**

More than an autobiography, this book is a personal, unassuming and surprisingly frank testimony about the life of an independent and passionate woman, about the backstage and intricacies of Portuguese soccer, about nightlife, about events we know told in other ways.

*Fernando Pessoa, uma quase auto-biografia* di José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho, Ed. Universidade Falada, 2013.

A copious, but no less enjoyable biography reveals itself to be the most complete reconstitution of the sad, suffering, and confused life of the greatest poet of the Portuguese language. The most complete and detailed reconstitution ever made of the author's life. It is 712 pages of a book that is absolutely amazing and will be the talk of the town. Enamoured of this figure with a novel yet to be written and an immense body of work that needs no introduction, José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho set out to discover the man he presents here, in full body: a multifaceted Fernando Pessoa, a vain man with gifts as an inventor and astrologer, with unbridled ambitions and a modest existence; an ordinary and sad life for a truly universal work.

From the reconstitution of the cultural spheres of the time to the details of daily life, Cavalcanti deciphers the life behind the words, the solitary multitude of a single Pessoa.

### **ROMANIA**

#### ***Diary of a Short - Sighted Adolescent* di Mircea Eliade Ed. Istros Books, 2018.**

Mircea Eliade (1906-1986) was one of the most Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer and philosopher, he lived most of his life abroad and he was professor at the University of Chicago). It is a short novel based on Eliade's time in high-school, written in the 1920s when Eliade was still a teenager. It was discovered after the author's death and published in 1989 in Romania (an English translation was published in 2016 in the UK). As written in a review in The Guardian "*Eliade may be describing the life of a student in a Romanian lycée of almost a century ago, but anyone who has ever been at school, full of ideals but also too shy to speak to the opposite sex, or incapable of revising for an exam until the very last minute, will relate to this. As will anyone who has ever committed their private thoughts to paper, as the true record of their soul and a rebuke to posterity.*"

There is evidence of this self-confident, resentful attitude within Eliade's writing, especially in the contempt shown for teachers, and the general institution of the school. The unnamed narrator is under threat of having to retake his school year and, like millions of adolescents before and since, 'suffers from being misunderstood'. The primary source of his angst is the gap between his own self-image ('I know who I am') and the litany of failures that mark his school-life. Like a true Romantic hero, he is plagued by 'my soul, which suffers unbeknown to anyone, my mind that struggles on, yearning for things that the idiots around me have never even heard of'. In his mind, he is a sensitive genius surrounded by mediocrity: 'I hated these uncultured, characterless adolescents with broad foreheads who always did their homework'. Most liked sentences:

*"But every time I tried to read the first chapter, I either found that my pencil wasn't sharp enough, or that my logarithmic tables weren't easy to grasp. Or that the window squeaked, my legs weren't in the right position, my shirt collar was uncomfortable, the paper covering the desk was stained, my icon hadn't been dusted since Thomas Sunday,*

*the ink in the inkwell had dried up, or that I didn't have enough paper, etc."* (he was talking about his effort to learn trigonometry for an exam. I love this paragraph because this happened to me - an I think to anyone - when I need to do a task I don't like).

*I'm not like other adolescents, a naïve dreamer, sickly, foolish, sentimental and ridiculous. My soul is made of sterner stuff. My will might be absurd, yet it is still firm, formidable, thrusting aside and choking off all that stands in its path.*

**Journal 1935-1944 di Mihail Sebastian, Ed. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.**

Mihail Sebastian was a promising young Jewish writer in inter-war Bucharest, a novelist, playwright, poet and journalist who counted among his friends the leading intellectuals and social luminaries of a sophisticated Eastern European culture.

After being kicked out of his home due to the new antisemitic laws, Sebastian moved into a tenement slum where he continued his writing. On August 23, 1944, the Romanian government of Ion Antonescu was overthrown, and Romania joined the Allies

As previous novel of Mircea Eliade, Sebastian's journal (written between 1935-1944) was published in 1996. His journal records the mounting persecution he endured and documents the disdain former friends began showing him in Romania's increasingly antisemitic socio-political landscape.

Sebastian's Journal offers not only a chronicle of the darkest years of European anti-Semitism but a lucid and finely shaded analysis of erotic and social life, a reader's notebook, and a music lover's journal. Above all, it is a measured but blistering account of the major Romanian intellectuals, Sebastian's friends, writers and thinkers who were mesmerised by the Nazi-fascist delirium of Europe's 'reactionary revolution'. In poignant and memorable sequences, Sebastian touches on the progression of the machinery of brutalisation and on the historical context that lay behind it. (see Romania during World War II). Most liked sentences:

*I am not willing to be disappointed. I don't accept that I have any such right. The*

*Germans and Hitlerism have croaked. That's enough. I always knew deep down that I'd happily have died to bring Germany's collapse a fraction of an inch closer. Germany has collapsed – and I am alive. What more can I ask? So many have died without seeing the beast perish with their own eyes! We who remain alive have had that immense good fortune. (this diary note dates from the end of 1944, after Romania turned the weapons against Germany and is a great model of calm and serenity, incredible when it comes from a person who suffered lie Mihail Sebastian)*

*I will never cease to be a Jew, of course (...) This is not a position I can resign from. It's not a matter of pride or shame. (I love this quote because I have often serious quarrels with different people, sometimes with good friends, about "the pride of being Romanian" and I try to explain that the simply appurtenance to a certain nation, whatever it is, is not a matter of pride or shame. You were simply born like this, you have any merit or guilt)*

**The Story of My Life di Marie, Queen of Romania, Ed. Independently published, 2019**

Born an English princess, Marie Queen of Roumania, in this life story has given us a human document that is fascinatingly interesting. Daughter of the Duke of Edinburgh and the Grand Duchess Marie, grand-daughter of Queen Victoria and the Tsar Alexander II, she was related to most of the old European royalties.

The story of her life embraces nearly half a century of some of the most momentous years in history and she has told this story with a depth of feeling, a sense of character, a high-spirited good humour and a straightforward charm which make it not merely an historic record of importance but a vital and moving human document. Born in a royal family, the young girl grew up equally familiar with the court life of Russia and of England, where the family made its residence.

Her pictures of childish days in England, and at Malta, where her father, 'The Sailor Prince,' was stationed, are overflowing with life and high spirits and filled with brilliant portraits of men and women, then in their youth, who were later to play their part in



the tragic days of the War.

Her descriptions of life at the Imperial Russian Court, of the coronation of Nicholas II and Alexandra, of winter festivities in St. Petersburg are unforgettable, as are the pages in which she tells of her marriage at seventeen to Ferdinand, heir apparent of Romania, and her life in the strange, almost mythic country over which she was to rule - with his white-haired poet queen and stern ascetic king.

Great names stud the pages of this book. Great men and women - and some not so great but just as fascinating - flash through its chapters, seen, not as 'personages,' but as human beings with all their faults and foibles. It is the picture of a lost world - the stupendous imperial world of Europe which is at an end; a society that is dead with a time which has been wiped off the face of the earth. Here is the intimate self-revelation of a woman and a queen. Most liked sentences:

*Fashion exists for women with no taste, etiquette for people with no breeding* (This really touched my soul, as I am an "anti-fashionist" and "anti-etiquette". And when a queen say this... is brilliant).

*There are great dreamers and there are great workers in the world! When a dreamer is also a worker, he is working for today and for tomorrow as well. For he is building for those who come after us.* (this is also relevant for me, as I am defining myself as a dreamer and worker)

### **Childhood Memories di Ion Creangă , Ed. Tiberian Press , 2019.**

The spell of the *Childhood Memories* (also known as *Memories of My Boyhood*) lies in its picture of village life and traditional customs, and in its recording of Moldavian speech patterns in the last century. Family life, childish pranks, methods of school-teaching, church festivals, carolling on festive days, country fairs, the beauty of the countryside - everything is brought back with a quiet nostalgia, tempered by wisdom and humour.

Like Swift or Mark Twain, Creanga is more than a story-teller for children or simply

a humourist. His work is a human and social document of the ways of thinking and the life of a Romanian village in the nineteenth century. It may seem of restricted interest, owing to the local peasant setting, as well as to the language in which it was written; it carries nevertheless all the joy and pathos of a book of universal significance. Creanga's *Memories* symbolically picture the destiny of every child walking the path toward maturity and experience. The work inaugurates an original formula in the art of memoir writing, and represents a monument of high spirits and verbal abundance. A jovial verbal torrent, a kind of lexical spree, generously flushes this rhapsody of perennial childhood.

Most liked sentences:

*I don't pretend to know what other people are like, but for myself, I seem to feel my heart throb with joy even to this day when I remember my birthplace, my home at Humulesti, the post supporting the flue of the stove, round which mother used to tie a piece of string with tassels at the end of it, with which the cats played till they dropped exhausted, the flat ledge of the stove that I used to cling to when I was pulling myself up and learning to walk, the place on top of the stove where I used to hide when we children played at hide-and-seek, as well as other games and delights full of childlike fun and charm.* (this book was - and still is in the educational curricula and I learnt about it in primary school. My childhood wasn't very happy but this quote - I heard about when I was 8 or 9 years old - has always remembered me that happiness means to enjoy the little things in life)

*If they were all to turn out full of book learning, as you think they should, there'd be no one left to pull off our boots. Haven't you heard the story of the chap that went to Paris, wherever that may be? He went an ox and came back a cow! Now, there's Grigore, son of Petre and grandson of Luca, in our village. What schools did he go to to learn to make such witty speeches and to act as usher-and reciter of the nuptial poem at weddings? Can't you see that if a fellow has no nous, he just hasn't, and that's the end of the matter?* (this is the answer Ion's father gave to Ion's mother when she insisted that her son be a priest. It is an example of cultural wisdom versus formal institutions and schools)

**Petrache Poenaru di George Potra (the main biographer of Petrache Poenaru),  
Editura: Stiintifica , 1963**

*Petrache Poenaru*, the founder of the education system in our country, was a very interesting personality of our country. He was an inventor, mathematician, physicist, engineer, teacher, agronomist, politician, zoo technologist, philanthropist, engineer. This great Romanian man was born in Benești, Vâlcea, five kilometres distance from our school, on 10 January 1799. He was the nephew of the Otetelișanu boyars, who supported him during his school activity in our country and in Europe. During his education path he was studying Greek, Latin, French, Italian and English. Studying in France , he invented the, “*never-ending portable pen, which recharges itself with ink*”, his invention being registered with the code number 3208 on 25th May 1827. After the studies ended, he came back in Romania as a teacher. In 1830 he became the Minister of Education, for ten years. In this period of time he founded the education sistem in schools from countryside were the children didn't have the possibility to study. This is the reason why we call him the father of the education system, in our country. Poenaru was a man of the Enlightenment era. He gave the poor children the right to study, he tried to opened the mind of the people, against the will of the conservative boyars, his dangerous enemies. It was the beginning of the Romanian school.

Poenaru was also the founder of the Philharmonic Society, the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest, and the Botanical Gardens.

Most liked sentences:

*“...Petrache Poenaru, the one who passed through this world doing only good, pertansiit benefaciendo, was during his life, and he will always be in everyone's Memory, a real Father of our Romanian School”*

*“Every child is born a good person, but only his mother can keep intact this kindness offered by the Mother Nature”*

**POLONIA**

***Holland. Biography all over again***

No Polish director has achieved such great success in the cinema as her. She is an icon and - as younger people sometimes call her - the godmother of a whole generation of filmmakers.

In this book, she reveals the truth about her life for the first time.

What was it like to work and create in the male world of cinema? What was her childhood like after the tragic death of her father? Why, among the many talented Polish filmmakers, she made a career in the West? How did she find herself in Paris as a single mother of a refugee? How did she come to Hollywood under the wing of such celebrities as Coppola?

Karolina Pasternak, a film journalist, was able to create a biography of the director full of unknown and surprising facts thanks to her unusual relationship with the protagonist of this book.

***Wedel. The Chocolate Empire***

Carl Wedel came to Warsaw from Berlin and in 1851 he opened his first confectionery on Miodowa Street. Emil, and later Jan Wedel, representatives of the next generations of this dynasty, turned a small confectionery into a huge factory and achieved success on an unprecedented scale, exceeding the financial dimension - their products became a permanent symbol of delicious taste for Poles. They themselves, on the other hand, grew deeper and deeper into the Warsaw landscape, engaging with all their heart (and sometimes with their wallet) in Polish affairs. They were Poles by choice.

The Wedel family were not afraid of new technologies and innovative forms of promotion for those times. But they also had to find their place in the new social reality - more and more women fought for their place on the labor market, and there

were more and more strikes by workers demanding an improvement in their living conditions. And then came the war that changed everything.

The author takes us to the workshop of nineteenth-century confectionery masters, former chocolate factories, to the offices of Warsaw factory owners and factory halls, and at the same time tells a bittersweet piece of our history.

### **Maria Czubaszek. You have to disbelieve something**

Her interlocutors were afraid of her sharp retort. She was only afraid of the mice.

Maria Czubaszek, an exceptional figure, controversial for many, a mistress of sharp judgments and tender mockery, stole the hearts of millions of Poles. She was reluctant to talk about herself, using a few anecdotes on duty. She did not like children, healthy lifestyle, traveling, she loved smoking and dogs.

Wojciech Karolak has not changed anything in his wife's room since her death. Violetta Ozminowski managed to enter this stopped world, get to know the satirist's archive and persuade her loved ones to talk frankly. Thanks to this, she was able to tell the story of a fascinating woman who hid loneliness, sadness and sometimes despair under a smile.

Maria Czubaszek was not associated with suffering. We remember her as a hellishly intelligent and witty old lady with a cigarette. Always smiling, always ready to stick a sensitive pin. At the beginning of her career, it was doubted whether she even existed. It was suspected that there were several prominent satirists behind her name. There was a perverse truth in it, because she herself would never happen to the world, as her mother once shouted at her. She didn't mind, anyway, because she was kept alive knowing that when she really had enough, she would commit suicide. In her youth, she tried to kill herself twice, at the end of her life she quietly died in front of all Poland. Smiling, she said outright that life had stopped amusing her, and we took it as another joke. She always said what she thought, she was a

free woman and she paid a high price for it, but thanks to her maybe we all take life less seriously at times.

### **"Children of the ghetto", Łucyan Magda, Znak Horyzont, 2021.**

They were sentenced to death even before their birth.

*"The outbreak of the war destroyed my world, my sense of security. I spent three and a half years in the ghetto. It was three and a half years in hell," recalls Krystyna, the only survivor of a family of ten.*

*At the beginning we were all together, we had no idea our days were numbered. We did not know what fear, hunger and the struggle for life were - this is how Józef remembers his interrupted childhood.*

*We get used to it over time. To the sight of the corpses on the sidewalks and to the thought that perhaps I will be next - Marian confesses years later. "*

The world they knew suddenly disappeared with the invasion of Poland by the Germans. Almost immediately, they and their families became subhumans for the occupiers. Repressions grew from month to month, and more rights were taken away from them, and finally the most basic one - the right to life - was taken away from them.

All Jews were ordered to be closed in designated, tightly closed districts. In the ghettos. There, every day they were accompanied by a terrible hunger, overwhelming fear and fear of losing a loved one. Looking at death and suffering became their everyday life. They could only be glad that they still had enough strength to survive the next day.

There are fewer and fewer witnesses to these terrible events every day. We are

the last generation that has the opportunity to hear first-hand stories about the most tragic events of the Second World War. Let us hear their voices and prevent these stories from ever being repeated.

“War is the worst thing that can happen to mankind, therefore: never again.”

### **Red Night Heron. Wojciech Jaruzelski's biography**

It is a biography of the most important figure of the Polish People's Republic, a man who stayed at the top of power longer than any other figure in the communist establishment. He owed it to his intelligence, cunning, ruthlessness towards enemies and friends, and obedience to Moscow.

Bierut and Gomułka formed the foundations of communist Poland. History has assigned Jaruzelski to the role of her defender - first in Czechoslovakia in 1968, then in December 1970 and finally in 1981. After eight years of Jaruzelski's dictatorial power, there was nothing to defend ...

He was a silent admirer of Piłsudski, he was engrossed in Polish romantic literature, unlike other generals and he avoided alcohol. Wildly hard-working, he believed that by reading wiretaps of opposition activists and closest collaborators, and even actors, organizing meetings and listening in a Leninist way to the “wise voice of the working class”, he would save communism. The communism that killed his father and deprived him of his family home.

With his rule, he built Poland in a substitute packaging - poor, squalid, always obediently following the Kremlin satrapy step by step. Was he a Russian “matryoshka”, an agent of the Soviet special services dressed in the uniform of a Polish soldier, or was he just broken by the communist power, an obedient executor of the “eternally living” ideas of Lenin and Stalin?



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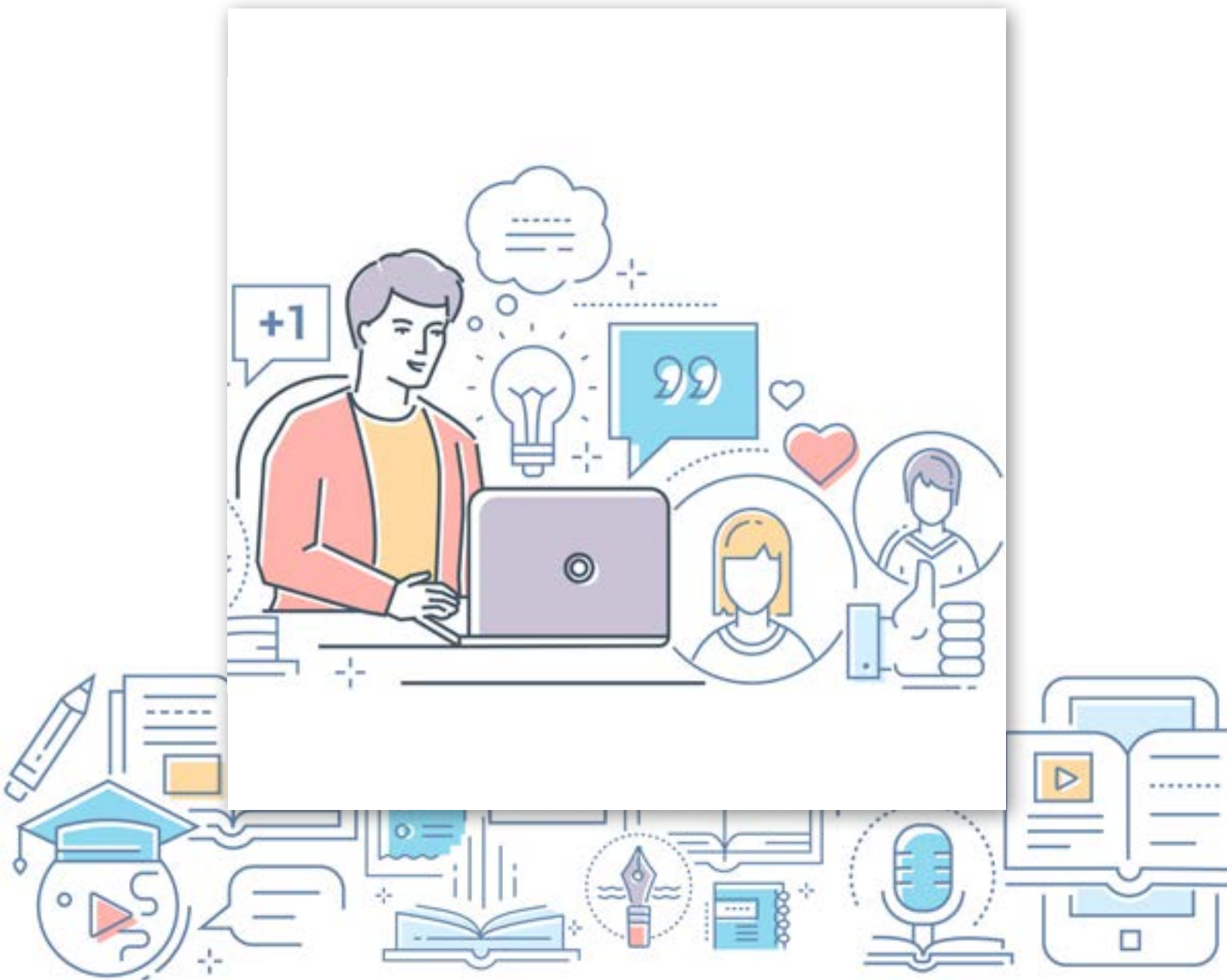
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