

Searching For The Broken „The Self“

Project „Searching For the Broken The Self“ is returning back to the earlier stages of personal development (Sociological Theory Erikson´s Model Stages 1-5) and how the incomplete-incorrect-pathological course of these stages influence our further life and searching for „the self“ and identity. This project further continues in my own „the self study“ which began with the project Maternal Exile (2015-2020, Personal Diary, Self-Documentary). Project „Searching For The Broken The Self“ describes how I have started to look/search for myself and identity after I recognized how my pathological childhood and prenatal period have influenced my whole life, including the absence of finding identity and „who I am“ during adolescence (Erikson´s Stage 5 of Psychosocial Development). I also confront in the project the term „badly born child“ and open the task whether even „badly born“ child has a chance to live happily ever after. For this Project, I returned once again to my hometown to take pictures of melting ice on water dam with its structure which represents something broken in the past, but with the structure of the past growing in the personality into the present. The Project will be a part of the unpublished essay for my study of „Therapeutic Photography“ postgradual program at Robert Gordon University in Scotland.

Part 1. Lost Childhood.



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Even now, when I am over it, I feel sometimes sadness about what everything could be different if ... For my whole life I was a big searcher for love, I did not know why, but I was still missing love in myself, I was missing a piece of a puzzle, even if I would not be a complete person, I felt rather lost in life ... About three years ago I finally unraveled the ball of my childhood and I found the reason ... When my mum was expecting me, my father beat her. When I was born, mum tried to poison herself, she had been hospitalised almost still and no one knows who cared for me at the time from my birth to the age of three. My father abused me and mentally humiliated me. If I look on it from the point of view of psychosocial development I was not enabled to be given even hope, will, purpose or competency during the early stages of my childhood development (Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development 1-4 Stage) and my neurobiological development during prenatal period was disturbed.

Part 2. Too Early Maternity. Role Confusion.



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After my complicated childhood I was seriously ill. During the whole adolescence I had been fighting with a severe form of Anorexia Nervosa. I was self-destructive and almost killed myself with no food intake and excessive physical activity. It was a kind of my personal fight for being loved and to leak from „home“. During the period of adolescence (12-18 years) I spent together more than two years being hospitalised on different Clinics where they tried to save my life. However, every time I returned back to my family environment, the situation repeated and I quickly found myself back on the verge of severe malnutrition and the edge of death. So, I had no chance during my adolescence to find the identity, to find who I am, to find my „The Self“ (Stage 5 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Model) resulted in absence of fidelity, I was still searching for ... I did not know for what. I lost myself somewhere behind the walls of the hospitals, isolated by the disease from my peers. Everybody also expected that as a consequence of long-term severe malnutrition I will never be able to expect a baby. When I left my hometown and met the first man who wanted me I did not know any of my needs, I was just glad that somebody wants to love me and I got pregnant even if mentally I was still a child. I was a broken child who expected a child. I had no money, no plans what to do next with my life and the life of my baby. I studied University, despite all, I had always been a very good student, I was studying with a kind of perfectionism. To be loved. Because from my childhood I got the pattern that love is something you have to deserve, for what you have to fight for.

Part 3. Who I Am.



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In the period between my 18-40 years when I should be able to feel and understand love – to enable others to love me and mainly to be able to give love, I felt somehow isolated, like a working machine hiding and searching for her real face, I was not able to let others to get closer to me. I pleased others for love, in some cases pathologically (psychological phenomenon „Daughters Of Silence“), however at the same time stayed closed to them. I was not oriented in relationships. I was more and more leaning to a dreamy world where I predominantly lived for many years isolated from the real social world with which I could not handle with. I saw myself as a mother, but was not able to find my role in life as a woman to feel happy and complete. Often, I felt naive and too childlike in comparison with the people in my age, I was also very quiet and introverted and had problems to fit somewhere and to belong somewhere, I felt like no one was accepting me. I was also not able to clearly define my personal borders. I did not understand what “to love” means. What for other people seemed to be natural, such as sharing and supporting each other, working in a community, was for me a great challenge. I was not able of deep, intimate relationships (Erikson’s Stage 6 Intimacy vs. Isolation). These times a camera started to be my kind of communication and my best friend. At the period after my 35 when I very slowly started to discover the secrets of my childhood, I started to think and use the term „badly born children“. Do the children who were not enabled to go through the early stages of psychosocial and neurobiological development in a right way following the naturally following stages and steps have a chance to live „happily and fully“? How to find who you are?

Part 4. Where To Go. From Isolation Towards Love.



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As I skipped or did not experience some crucial stages of life to find who I am and where I am going in my life, such as adolescence, I felt often in the period between 18-40 years lost, like drowning in water of misunderstanding and expectations. I started to swim a lot, as I could find myself in the water breathing, and a series of self-portraits „Swimmer No.“ has arisen. I tried hard to find the way to others and to myself, but I often felt to fail. I did not know how to express my thoughts, I somehow lost my voice in the adolescence, maybe before, so I took my camera and have started to document every step of my life. Behind the camera I felt save, not to be either judged or stigmatized by others. Sometimes I felt like a white balloon searching between shadow and light. White balloon which is not able to find the direction of rolling downhill or which stays on the same place like waiter to collapse. I was almost 40 when I gathered the courage to start putting the shards of my lost “the self” together.

Part 5. Looking For Self-Acceptance And Self-Esteem.



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During my whole life I had had some doubts about my body. Even many years after I left home and was healed from Anorexia Nervosa, I felt that I somehow had “no relationship to myself”, I neither hated nor liked my body, rather I did not see myself, I was not able to look at myself, and I fought with low self-esteem. When I was a small girl I remember one situation when I asked my mum whether I am nice. I think that I needed to simply hear: “You are beautiful, My Dear.” But my mum said: “You are normal, not as bad, but not as good. And if you weren't born, I wouldn't have gone crazy, that's your main problem.” From that day I thought about myself that “I am a kind of a problem”. Even after I became a mum of two beautiful boys and was loved by my husband I was still not able to accept and love myself as I was, as I am. I was hardly working on to be able to find the way to myself, I did not believe when men wanted to be with me, telling me that I am beautiful – who could love “a problem”? I had to step by step learn how to accept myself physically, learn how to love myself as a woman. Learn to smile and give love. And I did it. I started to photograph women, both healthy and ill, and I found that every of them is beautiful, as she is, as I am, due to our uniqueness. Slowly, very slowly, I started to recognize that even “badly born” child can live happily ever after. But only when such “a child” is strong enough, and more. The moment you accept all your scars and see them as making you a beautiful and deep person, you won. I won. I “My Broken The Self” began to float to the surface between the shards of ice melting on the dam in my hometown. Like after forty years of winter, spring came.

Part 6. Remnants. Footprints.



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I remember like today how hard it was to be a child patient diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa in Children's Hospitals shortly after the year 1989, the year of Velvet Revolution in then Czechoslovakia which meant the end of the communist regime, when awareness about Eating Disorders and its treatment was very poor in then Czechoslovakia, the patients were stigmatized and their treatment in hospitals was often beyond the ethics and dignity. Two years ago, I started to write a book about it, about what had been happening behind the walls of the children's hospitals, about what I experienced here as a girl (1993-1997). Even now when I come back to my hometown looking at prefabricated housing estates, remnants of the communist regime there, I feel a kind of a slight anxiety. Even if I thought that I am over my childhood, I still and maybe forever will bear with me, like the footprints in the soul, fear of my own children so that they never go through what I went through, and due what my 13-years-old niece committed suicide in 2015. It is frightening what effects the pathological environment of the family can have (Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model, Microsystem). However, all remnants and footprints are losing sharp outlines over time.

Part 7. Starting Line At Zero.



Part 7. Starting Line At Zero. Ready With Stage 5 (Identity) In Forty-Three.

Such a strange feeling. You are standing on the bank of the dam in your hometown looking at melting ice which clearly separates the ending winter from the onset of spring and you are feeling happy for the first time here. You are forty-three and finally you feel as a complete person, you stay on the same starting line as a child who passed non-pathologically through Erikson's 1-4 Stages Of Psychosocial Development, you are like a newly born, different person, who rewrote formulas of his childhood and underwent through "normal" adolescence. The process was painful. You know who you are, what you expect from your life, yourself and others, you are able to give and accept love. When the pain was gone, joy and goodness remained. You are calm, non-judging, accepting life as it is and with love. You are starting the first chapter of a new life. Breathing deeply and freely in a newly discovered world, the old one stayed deeply hidden in the water shadow.

Part 8. Hold My Hand. Intimacy.

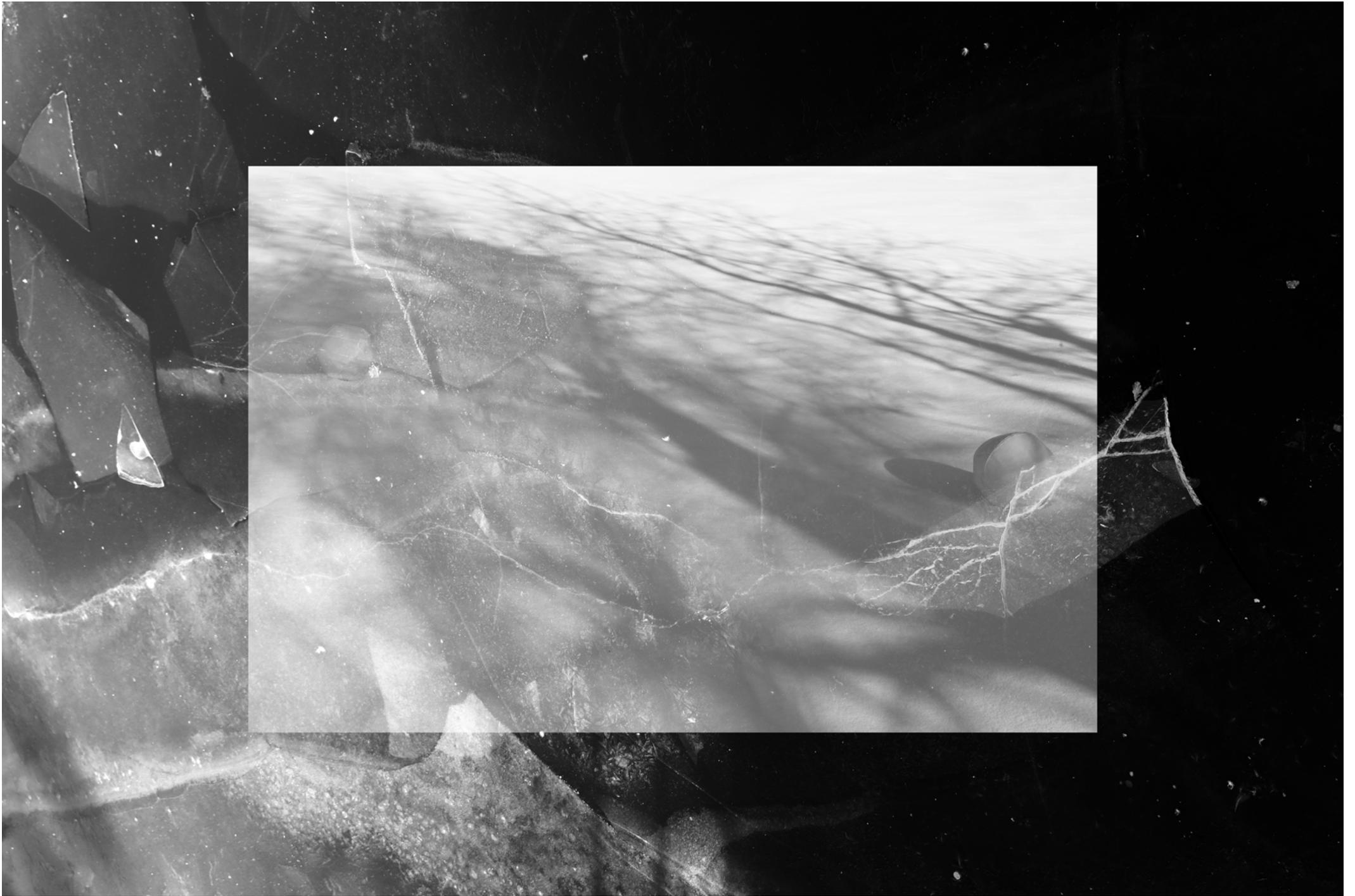


Part 8. Hold My Hand. Intimacy.

Finally, after such a long journey, you have opened yourself to intimacy. Such a kind of relief, to share.

„Will you ... Hold my hand for a little while? I don't need you to save me. No need for you to fix anything. No need for you to hold my pain. But will you simply hold my hand? I do not need your words, your thoughts, nor your shoulders to carry me. But will you sit here for a while with me? Whilst my tears they stream. Whilst my heart it shatters. Whilst my mind plays tricks on me. Will you with your presence let me know that I am not alone, whilst I wander into my inner unknown? For my darkness is mine to face. My pain is mine to feel. And my wounds are mine to heal. But will you sit with me here, while I courageously show up for it all my dear?“ Zoe Johansen
Stage 6 Erikson's Psychosocial Model. Intimacy vs. Isolation and the basic virtue is love. Once again you have to go through this stage, this time not in isolation, but with intimacy. You are not twenty to experience your first true love, you are forty-three, but you would like to experience the same.

Part 9. Love.



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So simple, so difficult, things which you were not be able to do, to feel, you suddenly do and feel. Searching and the feeling of lostness disappeared like they would never exist. 2022, the year when one „badly born“ child found love. Two white balls, two pure souls, two white lovers trying to find the way to the deepest of the other.

Part 10. Flowers In A Vase.

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For me, flowers in a vase mean a memory, a symbol of care, as if I end bad memories with care. I buried what I went through with humility and love and placed a vase of flowers on it. At the same time, flowers are a symbol of spring, a new life, if you put clean water in a vase often enough, they will last for a very long time. And when they fade, it's up to me to refill the vase with fresh flowers and clean water.



“There are butterflies whose wings have been ripped off before they got a chance to grow. Such butterflies will either die because they cannot exist without wings, or they will learn to fly without wings.”

From my book “The Girl With A Crown Of Shame”,
Part I. Tearing of the wings of an as yet unhatched butterfly