

Who am I?

A journey
to my past

Liza Martins



Liza
AROUND THE WORLD



Hello! I'm Liza

I'm from Portugal, 50 years old, and I've been traveling the world for more than 9 years. I feel like the most free and happy person I know. During my travels, I've written a few books to share my experiences and what I've learned from these amazing years exploring the world. With each book, I wanted to give a glimpse of who I was before I began this journey, where I came from, and where I hope to go.

→ This is me

Who was I before I started travelling?

I was born on May 12, 1973, in Caracas, Venezuela.

Both of my parents are Portuguese, and they emigrated to Venezuela for approximately 20 years. I am the youngest of four children. I have one brother who is 19 years older than me, another brother who is 13 years older, and a sister who is just 17 months older than me. My father was 47 years old when I was born, and my mother was 40.

Unfortunately, when I was just 2 years old, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Nearly half a century ago, a breast cancer diagnosis was often seen as a grim prognosis, especially when it was as advanced as it was in my mother's case. I vividly recall my father mentioning that her nipple had been protruding for some time. The doctor recommended that my mother relocate to Portugal, as the climate there might provide her with a longer lease on life. In the blink of an eye, we found ourselves living in Portugal.

I have no personal recollections of Venezuela. Instead, I possess a few mental snapshots of stories my father shared with me. There are no memories of my own in that place. My father used to run a café in Caracas, and he recounted how, my sister and I would pester him for cheese. He'd give us a generous slice, and we'd devour it eagerly, resembling two little mice. I can visualize the scene he described, but I don't have any first-hand memories of it.

In Portugal, we relocated to the Algarve, situated in the southern part of the country, which happens to be the ancestral homeland of my entire family. Both of my parents originally hailed from the inland areas of the region, far removed from the coastal beaches, specifically from Salir within the Loulé district.

Interestingly, my father made the decision to establish a clothing business in Olhão. This choice was driven by the town's prominence at the time, as it served as a bustling fishing port with numerous fish canneries. People from all corners of the region flocked to Olhão to purchase fresh seafood.

We settled into a complex designed for expatriates, which resembled a hotel-type environment. The central area featured lush gardens and swimming pools, although the upkeep of the gardens left something to be desired. Nevertheless, it held its own unique beauty. The residences

themselves were on the smaller side. If my memory serves me right, our apartment had just one bedroom, despite housing five individuals: my mother, my father, one of my brothers, my sister, and myself. Curiously, despite having other properties in Portugal that offered more space, my father opted for us to live in these compact quarters perhaps because of its proximity to his clothing shop.

Strangely enough, my earliest memories revolve around waking up with my mom and experiencing a fall from the balcony on the first floor.

I have a vivid image of my mom gently waking me up and handing me a bottle of milk. While seated on her lap, I would innocently inquire, "Mommy, are you going to die?" Her eyes would well up with tears, and I, at that tender age, had no comprehension of the gravity of my question. I had no real understanding of what death meant. It was as if I were asking my mom if she intended to go to the supermarket, just a casual curiosity.

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One of my cherished memories involves my mom preparing mashed potatoes with small pieces of steak mixed in—a simple but comforting meal she made for me.

I remember the day when I fell from the first floor. I had a moment when I wanted to call my sister, who had ventured into the building's garden to retrieve some fallen rags. In my curiosity, I placed one foot on the back of a chair and the other on the balcony railing for a better view. I clutched onto a rope, which was used to hang clothes, in an attempt to steady myself. Unfortunately, the rope broke, and I plummeted into the garden below. It was a near-death experience, and my poor mother was utterly terrified by the ordeal.

I hold onto a memory from the day she was transported by ambulance to Palhavã Hospital in Lisboa, the country's capital. My sister and I stood at the back of the ambulance, tears streaming down our faces, as my mom lay there looking at us. She understood that it might be the last time she'd see us.

Those are the sum of my memories of my mother. On December 23, 1977, she succumbed to cancer, a disease that had ravaged her in the final two years of her life. Remarkably, they say my mom departed this world with a smile on her face.

After her passing, my father arranged for me to stay with his mother in Salir. I resided with my

grandmother, Rosalina, for several months while my father traveled to Venezuela to liquidate his assets there, to avoid any property disputes with the four children, that were to follow in the wake of my mother's death.

My sister, on the other hand, lived with my father's sister, who tragically fell victim to the same

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cancer that had taken my mother's life, years later. My aunt Maria, who shared the same name as my mother, mentioned that my mother was her closest friend. This feeling was shared by several other women whom I affectionately referred to as aunts. My mother was a beloved friend to many. She was joyful, vibrant, and extremely affectionate.

During the time I lived with my grandmother, I experienced an immense sense of joy. At that age, I was blissfully unaware of having lost one of life's most precious possessions. I was a remarkably cheerful child, constantly talking, laughing, and singing. My grandmother's rural life was simple and wholesome. She kept chickens and cooked on a coal stove, and there was no television to distract us. In the evenings, we would gather with the neighbors, and I would sing songs to lift their spirits. I distinctly remember hearing people say, "Poor child, she has just lost her mother and has no idea what is happening to her."

Yet, I didn't feel "poor" in any way. I didn't feel different from anyone else. I was brimming with energy, fully alive, and possessed an unshakeable belief that nothing and nobody could dampen my spirits or keep me from being happy.

I loved taking care of my grandmother's chickens. I took them for walks as if they were dogs. I chatted with them, fed them corn, and made sure their coop was clean. I found it immensely enjoyable to look after them.

Simple, home-cooked meals were the norm in my grandmother's household. Maize porridge with sugar was one of my absolute favorites, and every time we had it, it felt like a celebration. Life in my grandmother's world was refreshingly uncomplicated.

When it came to laundry, we would make a trip to the municipal pond by the river. One day, while my grandmother was busy with the wash, I played and splashed around in the water. Suddenly, a man I didn't recognize approached me. My grandmother inquired if I knew who he was, and I mistakenly thought he might be the husband of the aunt who cared for my sister. At that age, he was the only male reference I had in my mind. But, as it turned out, the man I didn't recognize was



my father. The truth is, at that tender age, a few months without seeing my father were enough for me to forget what he looked like. I was merely four years old, while my father was 51.

My father had a house in Faro, where the four of us relocated: myself, my sister, my middle brother, and my father. My eldest brother had moved to Brazil after my mother's passing.

I have some cherished memories from that period when we lived with my father. I recall him patiently teaching me how to wash dishes, and I can still picture the joyous moments when I used his tummy as a makeshift trampoline while he reclined on the sofa in the living room.

In that house, I also remember encountering a kind of scorpions, and the presence of many gypsies living in the vicinity who used to instill a sense of fear in me.

I remember spending a lot of time chatting with a neighbor who lived in the building across from our house. I would often sit on a rock and engage in lengthy conversations with her. It was only later that I discovered she was the mother of one of my close friends from my teenage years.

These are the vivid memories I have from that period. At that time, my sister and I attended an after-school program located near our home. I used to escort my sister to school frequently, as she had started a year ahead of me.

Life with my stepmother

One particular day, we received a visit from a Jehovah's Witness lady. My mother was already a member of that religion, but my father was not. This kind lady came over to offer assistance to my father. She was a widow, well aware that my father had recently experienced a loss as well.

She resided in a spacious house with her daughter and rented a room to a flight attendant employed by the Portuguese airline TAP. She also looked after children while her teenage daughter worked in a supermarket. With time, that lady won my father's heart and after a short time they got married and we moved into her house.

In essence my sister and I existed primarily for each other for our studies and for the upkeep of the house



Living in her house was initially a delightful experience for me. Before she became my stepmother, she appeared to be a kind and playful person, often showing affection towards me. However, my older brothers were less than enthusiastic about the idea of her marriage to our father.

The reality was that once they were married, she changed drastically. She transitioned from being loving to becoming rather strict. She began instructing my sister and me on how to manage all the household chores, and soon enough, we found ourselves responsible for these tasks on a daily basis. Our duties included cleaning the entire house, tending to the front door, cooking, and doing the laundry. It was as if we had stepped into our own version of the Cinderella story.

Strangely enough, I felt content with this routine because I didn't know any different reality, and I derived satisfaction from feeling useful. However, my sister wasn't as content, as she understood that it wasn't typical for six-year-old children to be responsible for cooking, doing laundry, and working throughout the day.

During that time, we became deeply involved in my stepmother's religion, actively participating in all its activities. We went door-to-door, sharing what we had learned, attended all the meetings, and primarily interacted with fellow members of the same faith.

One of the fundamental tenets of this religion is the prohibition against associating with individuals who do not share the same beliefs. This rule effectively isolated us from others who were not part of our faith community. At school, we found it challenging to make friends, and in our religious community, we couldn't truly connect with them because my father never allowed us to visit friends' houses or invite them over.

In essence, my sister and I existed primarily for each other, for our studies, and for the upkeep of the house. On weekends and holidays, one of us would stay home to handle chores like cleaning and cooking, while the other would assist my father at his clothing shop in Olhão. We never truly experienced the joy of playing all day like most children do.

Meanwhile, my father expanded his business by acquiring another clothing shop in Faro. Although it was smaller and generated lower sales, Faro being the regional capital was gaining commercial significance.

My middle brother, who had been assisting my father in managing the shops and was the strategic mind behind the business, approached my father with a request. He asked for ownership of one of the shops, with the promise that my father had made him. This promise stemmed from the fact that, since my mother had fallen ill, my brother had taken charge of the business and worked tirelessly from the young age of 16.

When my brother reached adulthood, he decided it was time to reclaim what rightfully belonged

to him. He was aware of my stepmother's inclination to acquire whatever she could from her stepchildren. Previously, my father had already gifted him a comfortable apartment and a car, which he had promised to provide for my sister and me as well when we came of age. However, as my brother sought to assert his rights, a legal dispute ensued between my father and him. In a peculiar turn of events, this dispute even extended to the most trivial of items, such as pairs of socks. Ultimately, my brother emerged victorious in this legal battle, gaining ownership of the Faro shop and a half-share in the entire enterprise of both shops.

Due to this feud, my brother became an enemy in my father's eyes, and he forbade us from seeing him. However, with the passage of time, emotions cooled, and we gradually reconnected with my brother. During the weekends when he invited us to his home, my sister and I were absolutely elated. It's difficult to convey just how much joy we experienced in his company. Despite being considerably older than us and almost a father figure, he was also young at heart, and it was from him that we learned about contemporary and everyday matters.

In our own home, we had a father who seemed as old as a grandfather, and we adhered to a traditional and conservative religious lifestyle. We were restricted from enjoying simple pleasures like listening to music or watching movies, as these were prohibited by our religious beliefs. Even television was limited to just one hour a day, and we rarely ventured outside the confines of our religious meetings.

My brother introduced us to a world of joy, taking us to splendid places and upscale restaurants, teaching us the art of wearing fine perfume, serenading us with his guitar and organ skills, and introducing us to the captivating sounds of the Bee Gees and Michael Jackson while showing us how to dance. He was an absolute blast, and his home was a modern heaven, always exuding a delightful fragrance. Everything about those times felt magical.

Whenever he dropped us back at our own home, we eagerly hoped for the next opportunity to spend time with him. He even took us on two memorable trips to Spain, each with a different girlfriend. The way these girlfriends treated us held significant weight for my brother. It often seemed as though he was a father figure searching for a mother for his little sisters, even though he was just our brother.

Today, I openly acknowledge my admiration for his unwavering patience and dedication to us. He didn't have to be concerned; we had a father and a stepmother. We weren't alone in the world. Yet, for him, we were immensely important, and we played an active role in his life.

Over the years, our lives revolved around a cycle of disputes between my father and brother, domestic chores, assisting in my father's shop, excelling in our studies, devotion to our religion, and little else.

When we went to High School and started studying Philosophy and Psychology, we began to question the religion we had grown up in. Its unidirectional view of the world and life began to seem limiting to us.

Simultaneously my father was beginning to show that we were a burden in his and my stepmother's life. Around this time, it was common for us to argue over unfair things. My stepmother sometimes said that she had asked us to do something at home that we had not done. My father believed her and argued with us.

During that period, my father's treatment of me took a hurtful turn as he began hurting me verbally. He would say hurtful things, expressing that I had not been desired, that my sister had been their final attempt to have a girl, and that they had no intention of having any more children. I later discovered that he had asked my mother to undergo an abortion, but my mom had declined his request. He also said that I could have been the cause of my mother's cancer, as she had been breastfeeding me up until the time she found out she was sick.

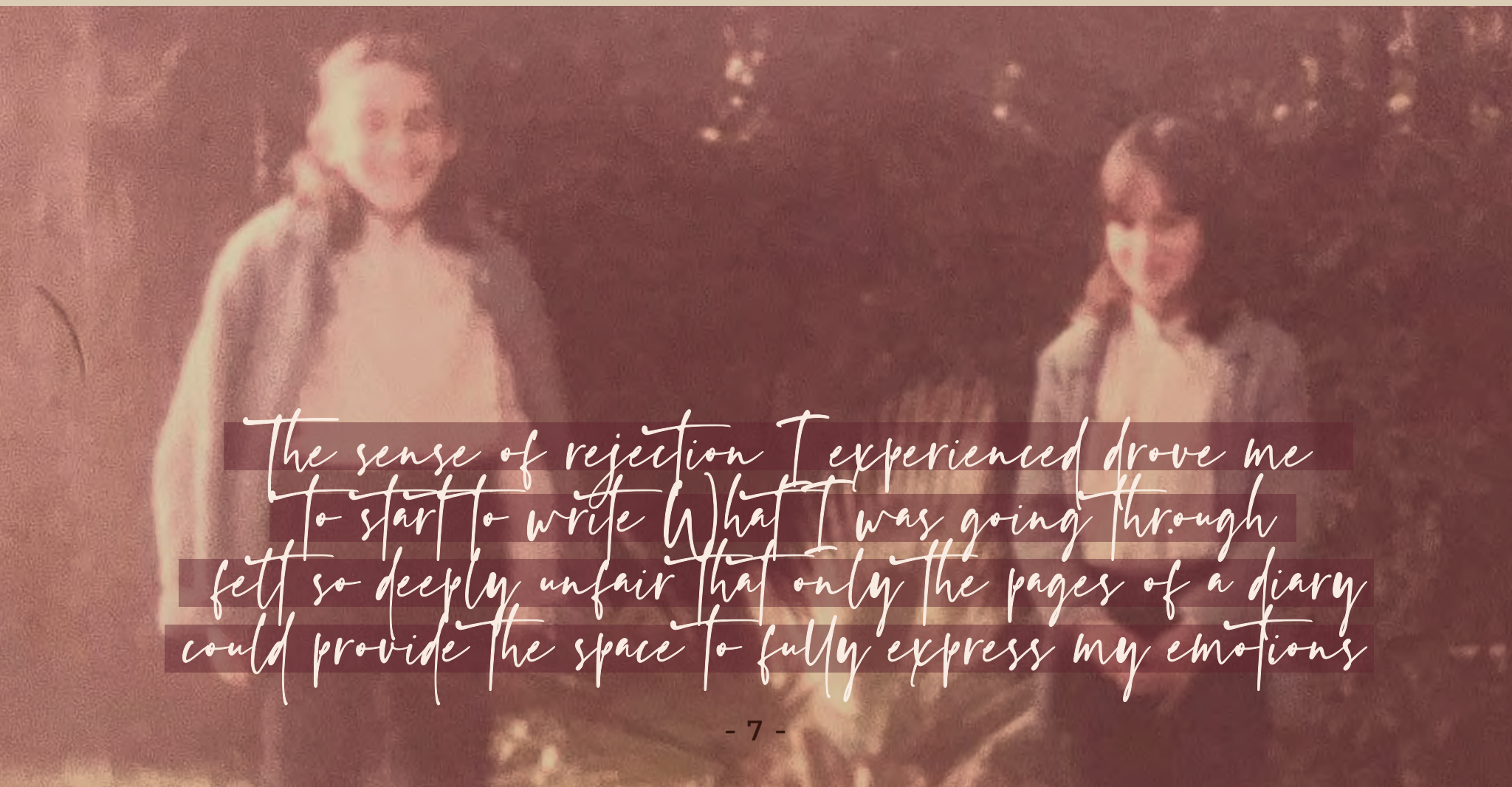
At the age of 12 or 13, still just a teenager, I found myself frequently in tears and overwhelmed by sadness. During those difficult moments, my sister became my source of comfort, reminding me of how empty her life and the lives of everyone else would be if I weren't a part of it. The pain and sense of rejection I experienced during that time drove me to take up writing as an outlet. What I was going through felt so deeply unfair and difficult to convey that only the pages of a diary could provide the space to fully express and comprehend my emotions. Thus, at the age of 14, I began the habit of keeping a diary, a practice I've continued to this day. If you're reading these memoirs now, you have my father to thank for inadvertently sparking this journey of self-expression.

Today I understand very well why my father used to say all those things to me. He had no intention of hurting me. He was expressing his own insecurities and doubts about my mother's death. And my physical and temperamental resemblance to my mother also contributed to this. Before being a father, he was a human being. And he wasn't perfect, as none of us are. I'm even deeply grateful to him. What I am today is largely due to every episode we experienced together. My father passed away on 30 October 2019 at the age of 93 years, saying that my stepmother had been his great love. So, I am also grateful to her for taking care of my father until the end. And I have no doubt that he is also watching over me and protecting me right now.

My sister was the first to break away from our religion, and shortly afterward, I too ceased attending religious gatherings. This decision triggered a significant shift in our circumstances. My father stopped providing for us, including clothing, food, and books.

I started working when I was 14 to buy some shoes because my father refused to give them to me. It was illegal to work at 14 and the only place that accepted me was a hairdresser's salon, where I washed heads and took care of towels.

During that Christmas holiday, I felt the dual sensations that came with being at work. On one hand, I embraced the discipline of punctuality and commitment. While my schoolmates enjoyed sleeping in until noon and spending their days having fun on town terraces, I was laboring from dawn till dusk, six days a week. However, on the flip side, I also tasted the sweet flavor of freedom. I was earning my own money, and I no longer felt confined to my father's house. At home, my father had imposed strict limits on our outings, tightly controlling our every move. Yet,



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when it came to work, he allowed us the liberty to come and go as we pleased, asking no questions about it.

Working became a refuge for me, and I eagerly sought employment during every school holiday. I took on a variety of roles and experiences. I assisted a close friend in her hairdressing salon, served as a secretary for a photographer, worked in clothing stores, and even found myself at a water park.

One summer, during the transition from 15 to 16, I embarked on a memorable and life-altering journey at the water park. I began as a lifeguard and eventually ascended to the position of head of publicity. It was a summer I will never forget. I earned a substantial income, relished the newfound freedom since my father had no knowledge of my work hours or whereabouts, and, most importantly, I was embraced by my coworkers, who regarded me as their cherished mascot.

The atmosphere at home was getting worse and worse. There was no dialogue. There was no food. There was no interest. All of us felt like strangers. My sister and I became self-sufficient, managing to buy our own schoolbooks, clothing, and food.

However, tensions at home reached a breaking point one day, leading to a heated argument outside the house, witnessed by neighbors and even the parents of one of my classmates. It was during this tumultuous time that my sister and I informed our father of our intention to leave home on the day she turned 18, which marked the age of majority in Portugal.



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Surprisingly, my father agreed to our decision. In a way, it was a relief for everyone involved. My father and stepmother couldn't have us in the house once we had stopped attending the religious meetings, as their faith compelled them to separate from children who did not share their beliefs. Looking back, I later realized how challenging it must have been for them to have us at home while feeling like they were betraying their faith. Regardless of our personal beliefs, it's important to respect the choices and convictions of others without judgment.

My sister and I were essentially only benefiting from having a roof over our heads, as we were financially supporting ourselves in every other aspect of our lives. Moreover, we were already occupying what was arguably the least desirable room in the house – the one located in the stairwell, furnished with a bunk bed and little else. It was evident that we could easily find a better living arrangement.

Although we didn't manage to leave on my sister's birthday as originally planned, we did so just eight days later. On December 29, 1989, we bid farewell to a decade marked by a challenging life devoid of love, affection, and, above all, freedom.

When we left home

When I woke up on the morning of December 30 in our new shared house with other girls, I felt an overwhelming sense of hope and a joy that will forever remain etched in my memory. I went over to my sister's bed and gently woke her up, saying, "Sis, we are free. Starting today, we have the power to shape our lives as we see fit. We just need to work, study, be responsible, and maintain discipline, but we will no longer endure anyone oppressing us."

My sister's perspective on our departure was different, and she felt a sense of sadness. We are inherently distinct individuals, and it's crucial to remember that she had shouldered the responsibility for me until I came of age, which would only happen 17 months later. Perhaps that's why leaving home held a different shade of emotion for her than it did for me.

For me, it was undeniably one of the most significant moments in my life. I can vividly recall the sensation of lightness, an overwhelming joy, and a profound sense of faith that accompanied our departure. I had an unshakable belief that everything would fall into place, solely dependent on my efforts. It was the first time I had truly tasted freedom, and I made a promise to myself: I would never let it slip away again. I was determined never to experience unhappiness, sadness, or any form of confinement in my life ever again.

In February, I secured a job at Faro airport, specifically at the Four Seasons, which was one of the most sought-after positions in our city at the time. It was a part-time role, offering excellent pay, ease of work, and the flexibility to balance work with my studies. This newfound stability allowed us to move swiftly into an apartment designed for just the two of us.

I was engaged, occupied, and immensely content with my life. I worked at the airport in a role that not only provided enjoyment but also allowed me to form strong bonds with my colleagues. Simultaneously, I was excelling in my studies, consistently ranking at the top of my class and earning the admiration and love of my teachers. I also dedicated time to fitness, attending the gym regularly. Each day, I spent quality time with my close-knit group of friends, predominantly men, who had become like family to me.

Even during the summers when I didn't have school, I took on two jobs. I simply didn't know how to have idle time. Staying occupied



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and earning a living gave me a sense of purpose and fulfillment. I genuinely relished the act of working. From my very first job, I always went above and beyond, putting in more hours than required and approaching each position as if it were my own business. Growing up with a father who was a business owner gave me a profound understanding of the challenges of entrepreneurship, which led me to hold great respect for my bosses and managers. This attitude was consistently appreciated, and I was always welcome to return to work at any place I had previously been.

During the summer of 1990, a significant event unfolded in my life—I met my first love, Pedro. Initially he was in love with a good friend of mine. But she had no interest in him. She saw him as a brother. The day I met him I liked him straight away. He was just my type of man at the time. Brunette, dark straight hair, almost black, and a few different features playing the Asian.

We went out that night to a disco on Faro Island called Barracuda. And we spent the whole night chatting. A few days later Pedro picked me up at my house, we walked around the city, and sitting on a bench in Faro's central garden, near the bandstand and the boat dock, he asked me to commit and became his girlfriend. So, we began a teenage relationship (I was 17 and he was 18) of great passion, great complicity, where I felt very loved, desired, and admired. Pedro loved me a lot and I loved him.

Pedro was from Lisboa, or rather Sintra, where he lived with his mother and stepfather. His father was absent. Between his trips to Faro and mine to Lisboa, letters that we sent by post and others that we left each other when we said goodbye, we lived this relationship that lasted more than 6 months. It may seem a short time, but for a teenager, half a year was a lifetime.

I was already in 12th grade, about to go to university, and I wanted to pursue my studies. It was clear to me that only by studying could I be the successful professional I dreamt of.

Even though I cherished working and maintained excellent academic performance while doing so, it was clear that obtaining a degree through university education was the right path for me.

I had contemplated taking a year off from studying to save money before enrolling in university. To prepare for this transition, I decided to take the general entrance examination (PGA) that year, giving me an opportunity to become familiar with it and understand what to expect the following year.

On the day I took the exam, I made the decision to end my relationship with Pedro. My heart was already set on the future, particularly in Porto, the city I had always envisioned myself studying in. Pedro no longer fit into those plans of mine, and my feelings for him had faded away.

When I received the results of that test and saw that I had achieved a score of 93%, which was the second-best mark in the city of Faro, I was stunned. I realized that I couldn't afford to let this remarkable grade slip away. The moment I saw it, I knew that I had to make my way to Porto as soon as possible.

My sister, as always, provided me with unwavering support. Despite the fact that supporting my decision meant she would lose not only my presence but also the financial help I provided to maintain the household, she didn't hesitate for a moment. She assured me that she would stand by me and assist me in any way I needed.

I rolled up my sleeves and intensified my efforts. At the airport, I requested two shifts a day, and they granted my request. On top of that, my colleagues occasionally handed over their shifts to me when they needed to be absent. That summer, in addition to preparing for the university entrance exams I had chosen to apply for, I worked tirelessly, putting in 12 to 18 hours a day.

But I was content. I was pursuing a dream, and even without any support from my father or brother, I was determined to study and work my way through university, eventually earning my degree through my own hard work. As for my brother, whom I mentioned earlier, he had also distanced himself from us, primarily due to our differing religious beliefs.

My life in Porto

In October, my university classes commenced in Porto, and I continued working until the day before my move to the new city. Once in Porto, I already had a job waiting for me as a secretary at a Ballet Academy. The academy's owner happened to be the mother of my friend's girlfriend



from Faro, and upon meeting me, she readily hired me as her secretary.

My life in Porto became incredibly hectic. University life brought with it an incredibly busy schedule. I would wake up at 6 am, leave home by 6:30 am, and traverse the entire city, relying on three different buses for my commute. My classes would commence at 8 am, and I'd wrap them up at 2 pm. Immediately after, at 3 pm, I would head to the Ballet Academy to begin my evening job, which concluded at 9 pm. Following work, I would walk back home, have dinner, and then dive into my studies. There were nights when I found myself studying until as late as 3 am, only to rise at 6 am and begin the cycle anew.



On Saturday mornings, I would continue to work, and oftentimes, I would join one of my colleagues on a trip to their hometown. They knew that I didn't return home on weekends since it was quite a distance away. At that time, the bus journey from Porto to the Algarve took approximately 12 hours, compared to today's much shorter 5-hour duration.

The majority of my classmates hailed from Northern Portugal, places like Famalicão, Póvoa de Varzim, Viana do Castelo, Aveiro, and Porto. I was also the sole student juggling work and studies, with no family support to rely on. Despite these challenges, I was the most engaged student. My notebooks were exemplary, always meticulously organized, and neat. I quickly forged numerous friendships within my class and garnered many admirers.

However, in January, I received a diagnosis of brain exhaustion. The doctor prescribed 15 iron injections to help repair the damage in my brain. Within two weeks, I began to feel significantly better. The doctor explained that this breakdown had been brewing since the day my mother passed away, and I had managed to conceal it remarkably well, especially considering the profound loss I had endured at such a young age.

Nonetheless, he also cautioned me against attending morning classes, emphasizing the importance of rest, longer sleep hours, and recovery from all the strenuous efforts I had been putting in since I began working and studying at the age of 14. The ground seemed to shift beneath my feet when I was advised to stop attending morning classes, something I had done every day. I feared that this change might jeopardize the realization of the dream that had brought me to university.

In a conversation with my sister, she offered a glimmer of hope and said, "Take it slow, sis. It's better to progress steadily, even if it takes longer, than to give up. If you abandon your dream, you'll never forgive yourself." She was absolutely right. I had become so fixated on the idea of being the best student and completing the course in the shortest possible time that I had forgotten that there was no strict timeline. Whether I finished it in 5 or 10 years was inconsequential compared to not pursuing it at all. This realization eased my anxiety, and I began to let go of my perfectionism. As it turned out, I completed the year with good grades and just one subject remaining.

During this period, I took up swimming, as suggested by my doctor. He believed that being in the water would be immensely beneficial for me. Swimming quickly became my greatest passion in sports.

That summer, when the Ballet Academy was also closed, I visited my sister's home in the Algarve. I cycled extensively to regain my fitness, as I had gained a few extra kilos due to medication and an increased appetite.

During that period, while visiting my father and stepmother, I experienced a sense of welcome

and understanding that had been missing for a long time. It became clear to me why certain things had to happen, and I made the decision to visit them whenever I returned to the Algarve. I felt a deep need to have a positive relationship with my father and to stay informed about how he was doing.

Upon my return to Porto, I felt completely rejuvenated and recovered from my earlier breakdown, ready to face life's challenges once more.

However, I reached a point where I felt tired of my job at the Ballet Academy. I had absorbed everything I could, and it seemed like I was stagnating. I yearned for new challenges. Although I had developed strong bonds with the owner's family, and everyone treated me exceptionally well, I was absorbing so much at the University that I believed I was capable of achieving more.

I explored various job opportunities, including time-sharing sales, which ultimately led me to my second boyfriend, Manuel Jorge. He was five years my senior, tall, incredibly handsome, and exuded self-assuredness. Manuel Jorge became infatuated with me and pursued me with unwavering determination. Eventually, we began dating.

During the post-burnout phase, he was a tremendous source of support. He had a car and frequently chauffeured me around, reducing the time I spent commuting. He would pick me up from university, take me to work, and often pick me up from work, ensuring we spent quality time together.

Once again, I felt deeply loved by this man. He proposed marriage multiple times, and his passion for me was undeniable. I reciprocated those feelings for a while, but after two years, I began to yearn for solitude, as I ultimately felt more complete and happier when alone.

Meanwhile at the University, a fellow student asked for my Curriculum Vitae (CV). She mentioned that she had recently joined the call center department of Nova Rede, the youngest and most modern bank in the country, and she thought I should consider applying for a job there. A few days later, I received a call for an interview, and I accepted the offer.

I wasn't employed directly by the Bank; instead, I worked as a service provider. Nonetheless, this job was perfect for me. I worked four hours a day and earned twice as much as I had at the Ballet Academy. Landing a position at a company like BCP - Banco Comercial Português - especially given that I wasn't from Porto and had no notable connections or a famous surname, felt like an



impossible achievement for someone like me, who always had to work hard for everything. However, I secured the position, and in just nine months, I went from being a Team Leader to becoming a Coordinating Manager. I excelled at my job throughout the two years I was in the call center, all while continuing to study and work simultaneously.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, I received an invitation to join the Bank's staff. Over those two years, I encountered opinions from people who believed that no matter how diligently I worked and how dedicated I was, I would never be able to secure a permanent position at the Bank. The Bank had a reputation for being an elite institution, and it was widely believed that only individuals with personal connections to those in charge, typically men, were admitted. It was predominantly a male-oriented institution, with the few women who did work there often relegated to roles in the central services, away from public view. Despite the prevailing belief that I couldn't make it, I always had faith in myself. I gave my absolute best every day, believing that I could achieve my goal.

Then, unexpectedly, a call I made caught the attention of a very influential Director, and he personally took it upon himself to help me secure a position within the Bank.

I became one of the first women to work in the Bank's branches, joining at the age of 22 as a Home Loans Process Manager.

Being both young and a woman, I faced numerous challenges. Many clients initially refused to believe that I was indeed from the Bank. Once again, I had to work harder than anyone else. Not only did I lack personal connections within the Bank to support me, but I also had to contend with the additional challenge of being a young woman.

Despite the prevailing belief that I couldn't make it, I always had faith in myself. I gave my absolute best every day, believing that I could achieve my goal.



Throughout this period, I continued to study without ever requesting a day off or even an hour for that purpose. Students had various labor rights at the time, including the ability to take a day off for exams or the day before. However, I chose not to use these privileges. I felt it wouldn't be fair to my colleagues if I frequently took time off for studying. I believed it was my responsibility to organize my schedule effectively. My dedication to the Bank and my willingness to work much harder than required also drew criticism. However, this dedication paid off when, on the day I defended my final coursework, I was invited to become a Head of Branch. I became the youngest Branch Manager at that time.

After two years as the Head of two different branches in Porto, I received an invitation to return to my hometown, Faro, to manage a branch and oversee the real estate business in two regions, the Algarve and Baixo Alentejo. I accepted the challenge, bidding farewell to Porto, the city where

I had lived for nearly a decade and formed some of the best friendships that endure to this day.

Back to the Algarve

Returning to the Algarve was comforting because I had many friends there, my sister, and it was my place of origin. However, the work at the Bank proved to be quite demanding. I was met with a team of individuals who were older than me, had more years of experience at the Bank, and had been performing the same roles for over a decade. I arrived with a wealth of new ideas but initially encountered resistance. The agency's performance saw a boost shortly after my arrival, with revenues increasing fivefold. This success ignited enthusiasm among the team, as everyone became more engaged in their work.

However, after a year at the agency, I began to yearn for a change. I was full of creative energy and a desire for new challenges. Despite the different location and unique circumstances, I found myself repeating the same tasks that I had been doing in Porto.

One day I saw that a Communication Department had been created within the Bank and I offered to work there. My director refused and said that I remain in the Algarve for at least three years because he believed I was doing an excellent job and should not change roles.

Despite my dissatisfaction at work, I must confess that life was going well for me during this time. By then, I had already purchased a house from my sister, who was getting married. I had sold my house in Porto and, with the profit, bought a good car. I was earning well and spent my weekends away with friends.

During one of these weekends, on the island of Tavira, I encountered my third boyfriend, and it was as though Cupid's arrow had struck me. André came to me at a time when I was telling my friends that the last thing I wanted was to fall in love. The day he met me on the boardwalk on the beach at Ilha de Tavira I knew he was going to be mine. That night we introduced ourselves. The next day we had our first kiss. 3 days later we went to bed and 3 months later we were living together.

It was the healthiest relationship I have ever known. We were very happy. We felt very loved by each other, very wanted, very complete. We rarely encountered any problems, and when we did, they were usually related to external factors, such as family and friends. Between us, it was pure love and mutual respect. Every aspect of our relationship, from making love to sleeping, talking, walking, traveling, cooking, and eating, was wonderful.

After being together for about three years, I received an





Loyalty, commitment, responsibility, and humility are values that have consistently guided me throughout my life. They are the principles by which I work and live.

invitation at a Christmas dinner hosted by the Bank's Director of Communication. He asked me to join him in Lisboa and work alongside him.

When I shared the opportunity in Lisboa with André, he offered unconditional support despite the fact that it meant we would be physically apart. He understood that this was my greatest dream, one I had never concealed, and for him, seeing me fulfil that dream was sufficient.

It took nearly a year for my transfer to the Communication Department to be arranged. During that summer, I went to the United States to attend a Communication course at Boston University, and in September, I relocated to Lisboa.

Life in Lisboa

Upon my arrival, I encountered some resistance. The position I was entering was highly sought-after, as the Bank's Communication Department was known for being the most enjoyable area in which to work. Suddenly, an unknown woman with no connections or prominent surnames appeared, and not only did she start working effectively, but she also quickly became the Director's favored team member.

Loyalty, commitment, responsibility, and humility are values that have consistently guided me throughout my life. They are the principles by which I work and live, whether I'm washing hair in a hair salon, managing a team, organizing a campaign, or providing a massage. These qualities are appreciated by any employer, as they contribute to a professional and productive work environment.

After working in Lisboa for two years and traveling back to the Algarve every weekend, André and I made the decision to part ways. Besides realizing that we were content living in different regions of the country, André was beginning to express his desire to have children, a life choice that was never part of my plans.

Our separation was amicable, and we continued to love each other deeply, understanding that it was the best decision for both of us.

The feeling of relief that followed was immense. It's challenging to put into words just how much I cherish being alone. Throughout my life, I rarely felt lonely. I might miss someone, particularly my sister, but I've never experienced the need to have someone in my life to avoid feeling truly alone. I've always felt whole on my own, and it might be because I've always sensed that my mother is with me in some way. This might explain why my top three relationships in life have been so healthy and fulfilling. I've never needed anyone to be happy; I've always found happiness within myself. Any love that came into my life only added to that happiness and made me even happier. I've never made my happiness and joy dependent on anyone else.

Following my breakup with André, I purchased a house in Lisboa and established my dream life. My apartment was designed to my exact taste and was truly beautiful. It featured an all-white decor, wooden floors, and white furniture. It was located just two streets away from Lisboa's most prestigious avenue, Avenida da Liberdade. The Bank was only a 20-minute walk away, and in between, there was a gym where I swam every day.

At work, I continued to thrive and was even offered the opportunity to work in Romania, although that didn't eventually materialize. I oversaw the Bank's main advertising accounts and was considered a trusted person by all those in charge. I was the only one on the team with direct banking experience, having worked directly with customers in a Bank branch. This experience helped me to understand what customers wanted to read in our communication materials and what was important to convey to capture their attention.

In the meantime, I decided to attend a master's in marketing management, and I gained even more admiration from everyone.

I spent almost a decade in the Communication Department of the Bank doing things I really liked and leading a very happy life. I worked a lot, but I had a great social life. I went out and had a lot of fun with my friends. We spent weekends away. Despite my professional excellence, there was another side to me – the adventurous Liza who used all her holidays to explore different parts of the world.

When I resigned from the Bank

However, in 2012, Portugal and Southern Europe were dealing with a severe financial crisis. My Bank had a troubled operation in Greece that was negatively impacting its financial stability. The Bank ultimately decided to sell its Greek operations but had to initiate a redundancy process. However, before initiating the redundancy process, the Bank offered a voluntary exit program, enticing employees to leave with an attractive benefits package.

At the time, I was 39 years old and had spent two decades working at the Bank. While the job in the Communication Department had been interesting, it had ceased to be challenging.

After a series of sleepless nights, doing calculations and weighing the options, I made a solitary

decision. I chose to become a volunteer and leave the Bank. It was a significant decision that I didn't share with anyone, as it was too important and personal to seek others' opinions. Leaving behind a job that would be a dream for most people – working in a prestigious company, doing enjoyable work, and living in the heart of Lisboa, one of Europe's cities known for its high quality of life. Working at the Bank provided me with a level of stability and security that I had never experienced before, and I had never even dreamed of having. In many ways, the Bank had been like a father figure to me.

However, I felt like that opportunity was the train of life passing in front of my eyes and that I would either jump on it or stay at the station wondering what it would be like if I had.

To make the compensation package last longer, I made significant cuts to non-essential expenses, such as cancelling my gym membership, letting go of the maid, discontinuing cable TV, and giving up expensive skincare products, among other things. However, all these sacrifices paled in comparison to the curiosity I had about what lay on the other side of fear. I was eager to explore all the possibilities that could unfold in my life by embracing such a radical change.

But above all, this decision opened the door to the realization of my most cherished dream: to travel the world without a return ticket.

What does it feel like to be without employment after dedicating 25 years to work and education?

Having time is one of the most valuable things in life.

The savings associated with having free time are remarkable. It becomes apparent that a significant portion of our earnings goes towards compensating for our lack of time, and if we were to work less, we might earn less but find that we don't need to earn more. Our perspective undergoes a transformation, and it feels as though we are experiencing a newfound awakening. We see how society is set up in a way that it seems there is no alternative. But when we experience something different and see how it works so well, we understand something that was invisible to us before.

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Not for a minute did I miss working at the Bank, the routine I had and the life I led. Even today! After leaving the Bank, I remained in Portugal for nearly two years. During that time, I worked as a TV and cinema extra and promoted various products. I also took numerous courses and rented out my house to foreigners to increase my savings.

I returned to live with one of my dearest friends, someone who had already welcomed me into her home in Porto and always had a couch available for me. These kinds of people do exist – they are rare, but they exist, and I am fortunate to have one of them as my friend and a sister at heart.

In October 2014, just one day after celebrating another close friend's birthday, I boarded a flight to Brazil, embarking on the grandest adventure of my life. The initial plan was to travel for a year, exploring approximately 15 countries across four continents.

I've been traveling around the world for more than 9 years and I can't imagine stopping anytime soon.

How did I manage it?

I managed my savings, seeking to maximize their utility. I volunteered, worked wherever opportunities arose, continued my studies, and honed my skills to generate income while traveling.

Over the course of my journey, I explored 550 locations in 45 distinct countries spanning five continents. I even revisited several countries along the way.

The Covid pandemic left me stranded in India for two years. In hindsight, this turned out to be one of the most valuable experiences. During this time, I immersed myself in learning Yoga, Ayurveda, and Reiki – disciplines that I now share during my global travels, my books and through my website.

One of the most precious lessons I've learnt in this new life was to discover that the secret of wealth is not having more but needing less.



I live with a 7kilo backpack, half a dozen changes of clothes, a yoga mat, and a computer.

I now prefer staying in private rooms, but I spent five years staying in dormitories, and I never once considered giving up this incredible journey. The truth is, I've gained so much more from my experiences than I ever did when I was working 14 hours a day. While traveling, I can save money. When I was working I couldn't.

Travel has given me the gift of time. Time to breathe, to observe, to listen, to share, to exercise and to care for myself. And that is my best retirement.

"Man, spends his health to make money and then spends that money to get his health back." says Dalai Lama. "He lives as if he is not going to die, and he dies as if he has never lived" he continues when asked what surprises him most about humanity.

Where do I want to go?

Every day, I am deeply moved when I reflect on the journey of that four-year-old girl who sang for the elderly in Salir, the teenager who began washing hair at 14, the young woman who ventured alone to Porto at 18 without any safety net, and the one who left a thriving career in Portugal's largest private bank. It is I, that same person, who has been embracing this incredible adventure for the past nine years.

And it's because I feel so blessed, and because I believe that my story can inspire other people to follow their hearts, that I've decided to share, in the three main languages, a little of what I've experienced and learnt over these nine years.

I've written a Book with the Memories of my first 3 around-the-world trips.

A Travelers Guide with all the tips I've learned for travelling for so long.

Curiosities about Ayurveda, the Indian medicine, with everything I've learnt to lead a healthier and more balanced life.

A Yoga Bible that makes it easy to understand this philosophy of life and even set up a yoga class.

I recorded a Massage Course to show how you can give an unforgettable massage on any bed.

A Book of Travel Relationships, where I open my heart and present all the sisters I've gained and the passions and affairs I've had over the last 9 years.

But I'll have much more to share in the future, as the journey has only just begun. I started this project a year ago, aware that it will never end.

I sincerely appreciate your interest in getting to know me and reading my story thus far.

If you are interested in any of the books but cannot afford to purchase them, please send me a message. I don't want anyone to miss out on reading them. For those who are willing to purchase any of the available offers, your support will enable me to continue learning from the world and bring its wonders closer to you.

To all you wonderful readers, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks for joining me on this journey. Here's to more adventures together!



Namaste!

Ligaroundtheworld

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