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As everything needs a beginning, I would prefer to begin with a short introduction to my short life story. As a matter of fact, many people around me say that I am a good story-teller and speaker. Some go even further, get lost and conclude that I am a good writer. But when I come to my life story, to the moments I have kept deep inside, to sounds which I haven't heard but felt, everything has moved to a different plane and become more difficult. It is so much more difficult to step aside and let others in. My tale will be neither exciting nor breathtaking, there is nothing inspirational or worthy of example. If it were, I would be famous and instead of this Microsoft Word document you would be reading some world-class best-seller based on the true story of my life.

Chuck Palahniuk once said, "Your birth is a mistake you'll spend your whole life trying to correct." In the period when I was born, it was really difficult for a family to have more than one consumer of food. Regardless of the reality of the political situation, Human Character, will and passion took over – and since everyone has to pay for certain things, I was born. It was the 21st of April 1989 and there were no lights to shine, but there were guns to shoot to let others know that I was born. I have no clear memories before my third birthday. I hope you won't be disappointed to miss valuable facts from this time, but if you are, we can have a contest next year called "Born in '70" with my mother as a participant and she will provide you with the missing details.

So now, with your permission, I will switch to the time when I started to look at the world with my own eyes.

The period of 1991-1993 was one of the worst periods in Georgian modern history. There was though a positive side for me as a kid: not only did I play with toy tanks and soldiers, but I could actually see them in the streets, feeling not afraid but excited that my "toy-world" had got much, much bigger. At the time it didn't seem strange to me; I thought that was the way that everyone grew up, eating food which we had to like because it was the only food we had. (Looking back, I now realise why the concept of "The Matrix" is so close to me, since I was closing my eyes and trying to

imagine. But frankly, I was never good enough to bend the spoon.)

As my mother looks back, she remembers the time when I had to eat beans which I couldn't stand. A small boy, eating and bursting into tears while making a speech to the "small", yet "dumb" society of beans: "Dear beans, you know that I don't like you, most probably you don't like me either, but we have no other option, I have to eat you." When my mother tells the story now it is funny, but at the time it was very depressing. It was when I was four years old; it was when I went to kindergarten. Kindergarten was so terrifying for me that I pretended to have a fever, warming the thermometer on the stove before giving it to my mother for inspection.

I really believe that in everything we can find something positive. As difficult as it was, that life made me more thoughtful, more creative, a little bit of a cheater perhaps, but even at the age of five I knew what I wanted and was conscious that getting the juice was worth the squeeze. The reason for my hatred of kindergarten was the direct result of the Soviet regime. For it was, you see, a Russian kindergarten. My mother said that I was a gifted child, but not gifted enough to speak Russian at the age of five. So I was sent to a Russian kindergarten to learn. Everything was nice, the teachers tried to be as nice as they could with the few Georgian words they knew. The result was that I was punished constantly for not obeying the rules or teachers' orders. In fact, it turned out that I was being punished for not knowing Russian. Aside from these complications in translation, there were many bright moments. It was the first time I noticed that Russian girls are more shapely and lovelier than Georgians. I must say that it was my first time to fall in love – and my first real-life experience with love, after which I concluded that love costs a lot.

Life was really harsh. I rarely saw my father who was away on business and saw my mother all the time because she had no job. Doing business at the time was quite strange. My father's income was the stuff with which he did his business. First it was salt, then it changed to nuts, then butter and in

the end it was kerosene. Of course we couldn't eat or drink kerosene, but we could sell it and, as a benefit of this activity, we got a stove which burned kerosene. In those years, there was no electricity, gas or central heating, so warming up the house was difficult. Thus, the stove was the perfect addition. The only problem was that it was really risky to switch it on, as we had to put a flame directly into the canister. Thus every attempt to warm ourselves bore the possibility of losing a father. **That was when I realised that to reach one's goals one must take risks, and that he who has never fallen has never lived.** My father was good at lighting the stove so he never died in an explosion, and every evening we had a warm room full of our neighbours who, needless to say, were in search of free heat. But you know, it was interesting, all the kids together in the corner of the room with the parents sitting in the other corner, discussing politics, books and writers. It was this situation of having conversations about Writers and Art in a dark room lit by the flames of our stove that made me feel passionate about books, roses, romance – and romantic girls with books and roses.

The beginning of school was very interesting. New children, new teachers who spoke Georgian. Nonetheless the winter was very difficult for my family. Because once every two weeks I was on duty, which meant that I had to bring oil to the class to warm up the oil-stove. By then, father had moved out of the petroleum industry because the authorities had discovered that the business was quite profitable – meaning that there could be no place for ordinary people. It was really difficult to buy oil as it was very expensive. Being proud, my mother would collect glass bottles and sell them to shops to earn the money to buy oil for me – not wanting me to feel ashamed in front of my new classmates.

Because of our financial problems I had to move from my parents' house to my grandparents in the village. I actually adored my grandparents, but this change hurt because, at the age of eight, I missed my mother and father. But you know, even this situation had its positive sides. Now I look at friends' relationships with their parents and see that I can express my love for my mother more often than they. I don't feel ashamed of saying "Mother, I love you", at the age of twenty – though my friends consider that mothers know that they love them, so there is no need to say anything. Fools don't understand that one day it will be too late.

From life with my grandparents I remember a scene. I am nine years old, sitting at the table next to my grandma, the oil-lamp on the table lighting up the small space of the room. Grandfather is sitting on the sofa, trying to keep silent as I study English with my grandmother who doubles as an English language teacher. Grandmother is satisfied with my

results while Grandpa is waiting for his turn, as he is a huge lover of literature and wants to give me a new book. He wants to tell me about the book. It smells of warmth and I can hear the sound of wood burning in the fire-place. It smells like family.

Older, I became a fan of conformism. Just like everyone else, I was growing up, making new friends, getting into trouble. I remember every inch of the playground in front of my house where all the kids were gathered and played after they did their homework. There was no point in telling us to go home or to stop playing. But there was one thing which would make us leave at once. It may surprise you that this magical thing was electricity. It was, you see, a very rare occasion when our windows would be lit by electricity and the TV sets were turned on. But when it happened, no matter what we were playing, we would leave everything, whistling with happiness, and run home to re-join "modern" civilization which we knew from television, and which seemed so far away. Now, when looking at photographs, I realise that I was running home not because I wanted to watch TV or to read books at the lamp-lit table; I was running home to see the happy faces of my folks, happy because they felt more productive and more alive when there was electricity. I still don't know the reason for this happiness. Maybe it was that they weren't afraid of my losing my eyesight while studying by the light of an electric lamp, rather than pouring over individual words by the poor light of the lantern.

I sit and write. I am trying to show you what we went through, recounting my bright memories of the past. **Yet the more I think about the consequences of those hardships, the more I look at modern children, at young people who have electricity and running water – the better I understand that nothing happens without reason and that life is short. So forgive quickly, kiss slowly, love truly, laugh uncontrollably and never regret anything that made you smile.** That's about it. I'm trying to live so that one day (hopefully far away from now) I dare to die too.



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