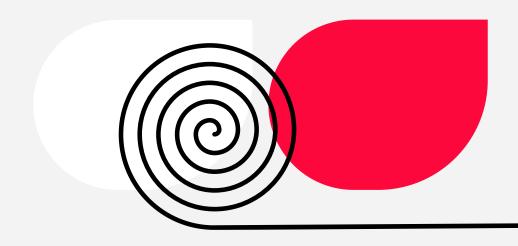
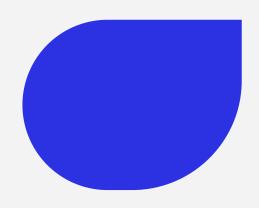
Making HERstory!



ECHOES OF CZECH AND GEORGIAN WOMEN'S VOICES



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This publication was created as part of the project GLOW – support of civic and leadership skills of young women from Czechia and Georgia, which is co-funded by the EU.

Over the course of a year and a half, a group of ten Czech and ten Georgian young women reflected on topics related to gender inequalities, participated in a series of workshops with experts, learned about the culture of the other country, and also organized their own community projects.

As part of the project, the participants also interviewed female role models from their surroundings, and the result can be found in this collection of interviews.

Prague 2024







The project was implemented by the non-profit organisation Agora CE, o.p.s, and the non-profit organisation GLOW Georgia.

Agora CE, o.p.s. is a Czech non-profit organisation and its main mission is to support democracy. Agora works with municipalities and citizens to involve participatory elements in decision-making and also educates adults and youth about active citizenship, media literacy, global responsibility, and gender equality. In addition to the Czech Republic, it operates in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, specifically in Georgia, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Armenia.

GLOW Georgia is a non-profit organisation from Georgia that aims to help girls and women overcome the barriers they face in Georgia. It focuses primarily on young girls from regions, guiding them towards active citizenship and leadership. It seeks to address gender inequalities, especially through informal education and support for girls in their local communities, empowering them to become agents of change and positively transform Georgian society.

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About the Importance of Female Role Models

It was the year 2004. Marc Zuckerberg founded Facebook, the third installment of the Harry Potter film series was being filmed, the Czech Republic joined the European Union, and I was ten years old and desperately in love with books. I was preparing for my first complete presentation in literature class. We were assigned to read an entire book at home, write a journal entry about it, and then present it to the whole class.

My task was to read the iconic Czech classic that my dad, grandfather, and probably great-grandfather grew up with – "Rychlé Šípy" (The Rapid Arrows) by Jaroslav Foglar. I don't remember much from the book, just that it was about a group of five friends, all boys, experiencing great adventures. And I didn't like it at all.

The problem wasn't that it was an old book, written with a somewhat funny language for a ten-year-old child in 2004. The problem was that the adventures in the book were only for boys. I simply couldn't identify with the story. My ten-year-old self missed the element of a brave, smart girl who doesn't sit obediently in the corner but who also experiences adventures. Because I wanted to experience them, and I lacked a role model for that. And it was not only my case.

The "draw a scientist" task was first tested in American and Canadian elementary schools over fifty years ago. It involves a simple assignment – students are asked to draw what they imagine a person engaged in scientific research looks like. Of the five thousand students back then, twenty-eight drew a female scientist – less than one percent. The rest likely depicted a man with a test tube because a scientist could be a dad, uncle, grandfather, male neighbor, or male acquaintance. Just like someone who leads an adventurous life. But not a mom or grandma. You might think it's a sign of the times around 1950 and 2000.

When the same test was given to the same number of American students in 2018, a quarter drew a female scientist. Progress? Yes, but the result mainly highlights how entrenched restrictive gender role stereotypes are and how crucial it is to make female role models visible so that girls can identify with them. Especially those who have succeeded in fields long dominated by men.

In short, seeing is believing. It's difficult to aspire to be for example an astronaut when we've never heard of any female achieving this position. Role models provide and expand the possibilities of what we are capable of. Female role models inspire other women to be more ambitious and aim higher. And last but not least, the experience of another woman can give us a guide on how to achieve our own dreams.

History has long been dominated by stories of men. I am thrilled to now introduce you to the stories of eighteen remarkable women from the Czech Republic and Georgia. These are stories of courage, perseverance, unwavering determination, resilience, self-belief, and dreams. Women from cities and villages, of different ages, but also of diverse life experiences. A nurse, a local politician, a scientist, an athlete, a teacher, a businesswoman, an artist, or a journalist.

Different, yet the same. They all serve as role models to one young participant in our project. They all show that women can be anything they want to be. That female stories from our immediate surroundings are indispensable for our perception of what we can achieve in life. That women belong everywhere.

I wish you to find your own inspiration in their stories as well.

Monika Durajová Project Coordinator



ANNA ABESADZE

Female strength, determination, and perseverance to achieve one's dreams. With a Georgian academic and non-profit worker about work, well-being, local female role models, and gender inequalities.

BY LIZI KHUNDADZE

Anna is a successful academic and coordinator in a non-profit organisation. "In my formative years, while I hadn't settled on a specific profession, I always envisioned myself as an independent woman eager to contribute to an International Organization and drive positive change." She was greatly inspired by GLOW camps. Equally important were the female role models she encountered at home. "These hometown role models have shown me that impactful change can originate from any corner of the world." Despite various challenges, such as battling imposter syndrome and gender stereotypes, she has learned perseverance and confidence in her own abilities over the years. She was also recently nominated among the finalists for the international award for teachers and other educators in the category of Significant Contribution to Education. She aims to inspire in the fight against gender stereotypes but also to celebrate every success on the path to achieving personal goals.

How did you first become interested in your profession? Can you share a pivotal moment that ignited your passion for it?

I currently hold roles as an Adviser to the Rector and Lecturer at Grigol Robakidze University and serve as a Global Governance Coordinator at World Vision International, navigating the complexities of three distinct professions.

Reflecting on my initial inclinations toward this career path, my earliest inspirations trace back to my experience at the GLOW camp. There, I encountered the compelling image of a strong, independent woman passionately dedicated to her work. In my formative years, while I hadn't settled on a specific profession, I always envisioned myself as an independent woman eager to contribute to an International Organi-

zation and drive positive change.

The GLOW camp proved to be a pivotal moment that fortified my interest and for which I am profoundly thankful. During one memorable activity, we listened to Christina Aguilera's empowering song, "I am beauti-ful." The lyrics, particularly the phrase "no matter what they say," resonated deeply with me, illuminating the significance of confidence on the journey I envisioned for myself as a woman. This moment solidified my commitment to pursuing a path of impact and empowerment, shaping my trajectory across multiple professional realms with confidence and purpose.

What were some of the difficulties or obstacles you encountered as a woman pursuing this field? How did you manage to

overcome them?

Navigating the intricate landscape of academia, advisory roles, and global governance as a woman has presented a myriad of challenges. Notably, the enduring prevalence of gender and age-related stereotypes and biases has occasionally cast doubt on the capacity of a young woman to excel in multifaceted roles.

The accompanying struggle with imposter syndrome, a phenomenon where doubt creeps in despite ample evidence of competence and achievements, has been a personal battle. Despite relentless hard work, there were instances when the feeling of not deserving success lingered. Even winning several scholarships, work awards didn't completely dispel this imposter syndrome.

Overcoming these doubts demanded a blend of resilience, determination, and proactive measures. One effective strategy that paid off was infusing my work with passion and a heart-based approach. By authentically staying true to my convictions and leveraging my skills, I successfully transcended age and gender-related obstacles, making meaningful contributions to my respective fields.

Could you recount an incident or experience where you felt discriminated against based on your gender in your career or pursuit? How did you handle that situation?

During academic conferences, I've encountered instances where I felt targeted during question sessions, facing ironic attitudes toward my work. Questions seemed more focused on challenging my research's validity rather than seeking genuine insights.

Responding with composure, I redirected conversations to the substance of my work. I used these experiences to advocate for inclusivity, engaging with conference organisers to promote respectful questioning.

Despite the challenges, these instances fueled personal and professional growth, driving my commitment to a more equitable academic environment.

"Impactful change can originate from any corner of the world."

Share with us an accomplishment or turning point in your journey. What did it signify for you personally?

I'm thrilled to share a recent achievement-being chosen as one of the 13 finalists for the GESS Education Award in the "Outstanding Contribution in Education" category. This recognition marks a significant turning point in my role as the Adviser to the Rector at Grigol Robakidze University, affirming that I'm heading in the right direction professionally.

Standing out among 900 education professionals from 60 countries is both humbling and inspiring. It underscores the positive impact of collective efforts and shared dedication to advancing education globally.

On a personal level, this accomplishment is a source of genuine pride and motivation, reinforcing my commitment to fostering a more equitable academic environment through meaningful contributions to education on a global scale.

Who were the individuals that served as your role models or sources of inspiration during your journey? How did they impact the path you chose?

My inspiration largely stems from local women in my community who achieved significant milestones through hard work and determination. While not widely celebrated on a grand scale, these hometown role models have shown me that impactful change can originate from any corner of

the world. Their stories reinforce my commitment to effecting positive change in my fields, demonstrating that transformative journeys can start close to home.

Would you mind sharing a story or anecdote that exemplifies your dedication and commitment to your work or passion?

During my university years, I was determined to forge ahead, aspiring to outpace myself. In addition to being a Scholar of the President at the University, simultaneously, I navigated a demanding job, an internship, and the challenge of learning a new language.

Driven by an insatiable thirst for success, I found myself immersed in a relentless cycle of work, often burning the midnight oil to prove the tangible results of my efforts. One vivid incident was sending a 3 am email to my boss which got me in trouble.

At the time, I didn't fully grasp the importance of rest and prioritising mental and physical health. Through this journey, I've evolved to appreciate the value of holistic success, encompassing not only professional achievements but also the importance of well-being, family time, and personal vitality. The pursuit of success is meaningful when it embraces all aspects of a fulfilling life.

How has your cultural background and personal experiences influenced the way you approach?

My cultural background and personal experiences have played a pivotal role in shaping an approach that values empathy, cultural intelligence, and a holistic consideration of vulnerabilities, all aimed at fostering positive impact.

I've cultivated a profound appreciation for varied perspectives, fostering an inclusive approach in my professional endeavours. Through personal experiences, I've gained valuable insights into the intricacies of different situations, reinforcing the importance of empathy and consideration for vulnerabilities.

Overcoming gender stereotypes, championing inclusivity, and supporting colleagues facing challenges have all contributed to shaping my approach.

What advice would you give to girls who aspire to follow a path and challenge gender stereotypes?

For girls challenging gender stereotypes, the journey begins with self-belief. Prioritise education and seek mentors who can offer guidance and support. Build a supportive network of like-minded individuals, challenge stereotypes fearlessly, and persist through the inevitable challenges. Advocate for your voice, be a trailblazer in breaking societal norms, and extend support to fellow girls on their journeys. Remember to celebrate every achievement, recognizing the significance of your unique path.

In what ways do you believe gender barriers have evolved in your country or region over time and what challenges still persist today?

In Georgia, particularly in the capital city of Tbilisi, gender barriers have undergone significant evolution over time, reflecting both societal progress and persistent challenges. Historically, Georgia has experienced a traditional societal structure, with defined gender roles. However, in recent decades, notable changes have taken place, driven by societal shifts, legislative reforms, and increased awareness.

One aspect of positive evolution is the increasing representation of women in education and the workforce. Women in Georgia, including those in Tbilisi, have made substantial strides in pursuing higher education and entering diverse professional

fields. This shift has contributed to a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly in the realms of gender-based violence, unequal representation in leadership positions, and societal expectations. Despite legal advancements and initiatives to address domestic violence, its prevalence remains a concern. Additionally, women's access to leadership roles in both public and private sectors faces obstacles, reflecting deeply ingrained gender biases.

Societal expectations around traditional gender roles and the persistence of stereotypes pose ongoing challenges. Cultural norms may still influence perceptions of women's roles, impacting career choices and opportunities. Therefore, fostering a comprehensive cultural shift and addressing these deeply rooted biases remain crucial steps towards achieving gender equality in Georgia and Tbilisi. While progress is evident, sustained efforts are necessary to dismantle remaining barriers and promote a more equitable society.

What message or lessons would you like to convey to readers through this interview?

A message of resilience, empowerment, and the importance of embracing one's unique journey. My experiences navigating the complexities of academia, advisory roles, and global governance as a woman have taught me the value of staying true to my convictions. I want readers, especially aspiring women professionals, to recognize that challenges are inherent but surmountable. The journey may involve facing stereotypes, doubts, or even discrimination, but by infusing passion and heart into our work, we can transcend these obstacles. Embracing a holistic approach to success, valuing well-being, family, and personal vitality, is equally vital.

Additionally, my journey reflects the impact of cultural background and personal experiences, emphasising the significance of empathy and cultural intelligence. It is a call to challenge gender stereotypes fearlessly, persist through challenges, and celebrate every achievement along the way. By doing so, we contribute to the ongoing evolution of gender barriers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.



ZUZANA BOBEKOVÁ

"Every person has the ability of empathy within them; we just don't guide men towards it as a society," says school psychologist.

BY NIKOLA BOBEKOVÁ

Zuzana Bobeková, a school psychologist with rich experiences from managerial environments, motherhood, and a personal battle with breast cancer, brings emotional education and experience into the school environment. Her life story illustrates how personal crises can lead to an awareness of the value of time and the meaning of life. "I refuse to waste time and passively allow life to unfold. I am determined to actively shape my life and steer it in a purposeful direction," she affirms. She also discusses supporting women's return to work after childbirth. Bobeková thinks that women, after maternity leave, are ready to achieve their potential and make positive changes in society using their skills in organization, adaptability, and quick decision-making.

What was your journey to psychology like?

When I was deciding where to go to college after high school, I knew I wanted to work with people. Essentially, I could imagine attending any school because I would find something enjoyable in every job. I think if I hadn't studied psychology, I would have pursued it as a hobby. I am very interested in how the human soul works, in emotions, relationships with others, and with oneself.

I think the impetus for me to finally decide to study psychology was that I needed to prove to myself that I could get in. Perhaps it was also supported by the fact that I was seeking recognition from the outside at that time. How I appeared in the eyes of others meant a lot to me back then. In high school, I worked as a model and felt the need to balance it intellectually.

Why did you ultimately choose to

specialize as a school psychologist?

The path to becoming a school psychol-ogist was not easy. When I started, school psychology wasn't very common. I was the first and only school psychologist in my city. I had to find my own way of doing this job, and without life and work experience, it was quite difficult.

I was very focused on performance at that time, so after a few years, I went to work for an international company, where I eventually be-came a manager for employee development and education. Success and progress motivated me a lot. You deliver performance, present yourself, and get recognition, money, status, and other benefits.

So, it was difficult for me to go on maternity leave with my oldest daughter. I felt like my work wasn't visible. I took care of the baby and the household, and it was physically and energetically difficult for me to manage the first year. And still, I felt like the result wasn't visible, that I wasn't doing it as well as the exemplary supermothers.

In your opinion, are women on maternity leave sufficiently appreciated in society?

Definitely not. Society teaches us from elementary school to focus on quick performance and its recognition. Taking care of a small baby is a slow process that is incredibly demanding. A woman adapts to her new role, prioritizes, searches. Those who have experienced it can better imagine what it's like. I think men should be allowed to go on parental leave if they want to. It's an invaluable experience.

I would like to see society making better use of the potential of women after maternity leave. Because after giving birth, women really move forward in their thinking and in their view of life. It changes them for the better, into a more perfect version of themselves. After maternity leave, women are ready to realize themselves, they have better organizing skills, improvisation, and they make responsible decisions faster.

What is your opinion from the perspective of a psychologist on the fact that qualities such as empathy or the ability to take care of someone are attributed to women? Is it natural, or does society influence it?

Every person has the ability of empathy within them; we just don't guide men towards it as a society. As a school psychologist, I try to talk about emotions already in kindergartens, how they are natural for all people. I emphasize that all emo-tions are okay, for girls and boys alike. We learn with children to gradually recognize and handle emotions. We teach children tolerance, so for example, I take pictures of different children from different backgrounds for discussion.

In schools, we discuss whether some sports are just for men or just for women. Children themselves come to realize that if they enjoy a particular sport, we shouldn't condemn them if it doesn't fit society's idea of who should or shouldn't do it.

"I refuse to waste time and passively allow life to unfold. I am determined to actively shape my life and steer it in a purposeful direction."

Your husband was on parental leave; what is your experience with that?

After the first year of maternity leave, I returned to work, and my husband stayed home with our daughter. My husband dedicated himself to our daughter 100%, but other household chores, which I would normally have time for if I were at home. It really disrupted our stereotypical functioning of the household, and we were confused because at that time we couldn't define who would take care of what. We are quite adventurous types and like to improvise, but it was demanding for both of us.

However, I think that in those eighteen years, things have changed a lot. At that time, we lacked a role model; society didn't talk about it enough. My husband works for a Swedish company that already strongly supported paternal leave at that time. It's quite possible that if he were in a different company, he wouldn't have received sufficient support from the employer. The reaction of our extended family wasn't entirely supportive initially. They were shocked; my mom was disappointed. They needed time to accept this fact.

You have three children, how did your experience with motherhood continue?

After about three years, I went on maternity leave again. At that time, there was an economic crisis worldwide, so I was somewhat reassured that nothing was escaping me at work. So, I devoted much more time to motherhood, upbringing, and household chores. And I smoothly stayed at home with the third child. I managed to better organize my time with my family, enjoy it, and consciously find things that are meaningful, useful, and fulfilling for me. I was sure that this is my role now, where I belong.

Society somewhat pushes women towards the ideal of how they should look, and it's difficult to achieve this ideal after childbirth; how do you view this?

After childbirth, I didn't have any problems getting back in shape, so I didn't focus much on it. Rather, I focused on practical things that come with a baby. I think this issue is absolutely unnecessary, and it's sad that it even exists.

But I have a comparison with another personal experience related to body image and societal pressure. I went through cancer, and how a woman looks after childbirth is incomparable to how she looks after oncological treatment. Losing overall appearance, such as hair, eyelashes, and especially breasts during illness and treatment, affects a woman much more than gaining a few pounds and having loose skin after childbirth.

It must have been really difficult to lose typically feminine things, how did you deal with that?

To my surprise, I processed those physical changes quite well. Of course, it took some time, and it was painful, but it wasn't as difficult for me as the impact on my role as a mother. Much harder than losing hair is realizing that maybe I won't be able to pass on everything I want to my children. I wanted to tell them so much, teach them a lot, and the thought that I might not be

able to do it all is terrible. Maybe that's why when I got through that, my approach to family and life in general changed a lot. It's different and more conscious. Before, I approached parenting more intuitively. I refuse to waste time and passively allow life to unfold. I am determined to actively shape my life and steer it in a purposeful direction.

During that time, I truly got to know myself, and I no longer needed to find my value in relation to others or seek confirmation from them. I came to the realization that I am my only critic, albeit a very kind one. I try to let the gentle feedback I give myself help me make meaningful use of my talents, gifts, and opportunities.

Did the women in your surroundings help you to overcome difficult times and your disease?

My closest family was the biggest support; we went through a challenging year together. During treatment, I also felt tremendous support from my female friends, almost a concentration of female strength from afar, as I have many friends in Slovakia and around the world. We stayed in touch through social networks, and some even came to visit me. I don't want to diminish their efforts because they truly did everything they could to keep me afloat, but I hope they never have to go through such an experience themselves. That's why it meant a lot to me when I reached out to the Bellis initiative, which is a project of the Alliance of Women with Breast Cancer.

"Every person has the ability of empathy within them; we just don't guide men towards it as a society."

Bellis focuses on helping and supporting young patients in their productive age who are going through or have undergone treatment associated

with breast cancer. They all share the same experience, so they can provide each other with emotional support and practical advice. Sometimes, we overlook emotional support and focus solely on solutions, but sharing our experiences and feeling understood is crucial. I'm grateful that Bellis exists. It's essential to have someone who says, 'you're not alone, we're here with you, we're here for you, you can do it.' Additionally, the presence of many recovered patients in the community gives hope to newcomers.

How did you return to psychology after all of this?

After the treatment, I found a job where I feel fulfilled, with a great team of colleagues. I enjoy what I do and I feel a great meaning in this job, especially because I see the difference I can make. I decided that if I'm going to work somewhere, it should align with my desires and values. While I have training in cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy, I'm more drawn to music therapy. Therefore, I took the leap and enriched my psychological practice by incorporating music and sounds. This allows me to work with children in a better way, assist in processing classroom situations, and alleviate stress, which is often prevalent in schools.

You engage in other activities with children, such as organizing children's summer camps. What motivates you to do that?

My motivation stems from the need for self-realization. I've had this idea for a long time. I've collected many games from various teambuilding activities that children would enjoy and benefit from, but there is often no time or space for them in schools. Additionally, when I started the camps, my children were in primary school, so I enjoyed having them with me and providing them with the experience of team activities. It has become a cherished tradition, now in its sixth year, from which I've learned a lot.

Do you have any ambitions for the next ten years, any dreams you would like to fulfill?

I aspire to focus more on music therapy, an area where I already have training and experience but believe there is still room for growth. Music is powerful and can facilitate therapy without words. This is more of a professional goal. Personally, I aim to allow myself more time for self-care and rest. I would love to learn to go to bed earlier, but for now, I am still a night owl.



KETEVAN KHITARISHVILI

"I wish there were no big gender gap in professions," says a Georgian civic education teacher.

BY MARIAM SAMARJISHVILI

Ketevan Khitarishvili is a thirty-four-year-old civic education teacher in a small Georgian town. She sees teaching as a calling, and she strives to leave a positive impact on future generations through her work with children. According to her, teachers have a huge influence on society. "If there is good quality communication between a teacher and a student, together they generate amazing ideas and information, which becomes apparent in society later," she says. One of the areas she is trying to change is gender stereotypes regarding career choices. "Some people still define people's areas of work and personality based on gender. This is the result of stereotypes and I disagree with this. What's the difference between a male and female brain? A brain is a brain and a profession is a profession."

Was becoming a teacher your long-term dream or a spontaneous decision?

I had been thinking about this profession for a long time. For a while, I thought that teaching was not a profession that could bring success, and I hesitated a bit, but I still chose teaching in the end since it was my childhood passion and dream. The current circumstances contributed to my decision.

What is the most interesting part of this job?

Communicating with children is the most interesting part of all. It is like a culture that is untouched and undiscovered, so you never know what is awaiting you there, whether it is drama, humor, satire, or the carefree and uninhibited environment that every kid creates around you.

What kind of impact does teaching have on the world?

My profession plays a crucial role in the formation of a person. The time that a child spends at school is the source of deep knowledge, skills, and experience. They learn a lot of things, make various observations, and change and grow on a personal level, which is reflected in society and the community. If there is good quality communication between a teacher and a student, together they generate amazing ideas and information, which becomes apparent in society later.

What role does society play in teaching?

It is a myth that the teacher must have superpowers, but there is some truth in it. We, teachers, must meet society's expectations to some degree, and sometimes we don't manage to do this. I think that society evaluates us accordingly and this provides motivation for us to be better.

Have you encountered gender stereotypes during your career?

I still hear phrases like "How can a man be a teacher?" and "Men's brains are different for math," and so on. Some people still define others' areas of work and personality according to their gender. This is the result of stereotypes, and I disagree with this. Such stereotypes exist in every field, and we are not excluded either. As a result, nowadays there are more women among teachers and more men working in tech fields, which is very sad. What's the difference between a male and a female brain? A brain is a brain, and a profession is a profession

Do you think equal involvement of both genders in different professions will break stereotypes?

Yes, of course! If everyone finds their roles, they will not act based on social beliefs. Then people will be less judgmental, and those who want to be teachers will not be hindered, embarrassed, or ashamed. It will not be surprising for boys to be music or art teachers. Why should it be? I do not understand.

If we give people accurate information about professions and genders, then these two will not contradict each other. The lack of information prevents people from shaping the right opinion and forms a stereotypical mindset. I wish there were no big gender gap in professions.

Have you ever considered changing your profession?

Never! I love what I do. I like the choice and this

journey which I dedicate to children. I always work to improve myself and to make a positive impact on the future generation.

What else motivates you to stay in this field?

Students are my source of motivation, new hopes, new examples, and discoveries. New visions, ideas, and evaluations come from them. It is exciting to have discussions with them, to exchange ideas, and communicate. We teachers want to see the world through their eyes. This is a great stimulus, indeed.

"I wish there were no big gender gap in professions."

What would you advise the people considering teaching as their future profession?

Be patient! This is what it takes. They need professional education and most importantly, they need to listen only to themselves and not the people around them, this can be fatal. Being a teacher is not as bad as a part of society sees it.



MIRA KOŠŤÁLKOVÁ

"Every student should try entrepreneurship," says the successful Czech café owner, who has built a vibrant community center in a peripheral urban district.

BY MARTINA IVA ŠOLTOVÁ

From studying adult education and working in the corporate world to owning a café, which has become the pulsating center of a suburban district in Prague, is sometimes a journey of fulfilling a lifelong dream and sometimes it's a matter of luck. In 2015, Mira Košťálková purchased a café in Braník, a suburban area of Prague, aptly named Periferie Cafe. However, the beginnings of entrepreneurship were not easy. Nine years later, it stands as a vibrant place with premium coffee, full of community activities, serving as a neighborhood meeting spot. "I am simply convinced that when we do it well, people will find their way to us. No one wants to travel far just to have a good coffee and cake," says Mira.

What was your journey from andragogy and HR work to entrepreneurship in gastronomy?

I have a classic story of a girl from the corporate world. When I was pregnant for the second time, we had the opportunity to buy a café here in Braník, which I initially refused.

What made you change your mind? Did you always dream of owning a café?

No, not at all. I always had a positive relationship with gastronomy, I enjoyed eating and drinking, but that alone isn't enough to run a successful café. In fact, I didn't know anything about gastronomy, but my husband said at the time that this was an opportunity we simply couldn't refuse and one we had to seize. So we went for it.

What were the beginnings like?

So, there were two years when I had two small children, was starting the café, and still working for the company as an HR manager, and I actually don't remember anything from that period. It was very demanding. But my husband and I encouraged each other and said we could do it. We thought that all you need is common sense, information, and courage, and then learning about coffee will be easy. And we really did it. I'm very grateful for that. Sure, I've aged by twenty years and not just the nine we've had this café but I still believe in what we do and it makes sense to me. I really realized that doing good gastronomy means working diligently and humbly, being interested in new trends, and understanding our customers. But that actually applies in every field.

Wasn't it difficult to start a business without prior experience?

Well, it was insane. I think all students should try running a business for a year. It was a completely different world, but everything I learned in the corporate world, I could use here. Except that whatever I did or didn't do here always came back to me. In the corporate world, things just always worked out somehow.

"Every student should try entrepreneurship."

Your café is at the center of the action in the Prague neighborhood of Braník. What are your main activities here at the café, and what else do you do apart from your entrepreneurial activities?

In Periferie, we regularly hold exhibitions, concerts, various bazaars, and other neighborhood events and gatherings. I organize a small book fair and also record a community podcast. I thought about how to support the greater impact of what we do. And since podcasts are a modern platform available to everyone, which simply spreads the idea further, it made sense to start that way too. Plus, not many people do community podcasts, so I see double added value in that.

I also engage in education. I collaborate with the non-profit organization Center for Civic Education on a project where we teach democratic culture not only to children but also to their parents or teachers. I have coaching training and facilitation training, so I sometimes engage in that, but unfortunately, there isn't much time for it anymore. And I also write for the beautiful magazine EDUCA - for me, it's a completely groundbreaking magazine in the field of education.

Did you want to make a community center from the beginning?

I don't know if it was intentional. I realized that I've been living in Braník all my life, but I actually didn't know it at all. I was actually a resident of Braník who lives here in the sense of being physically here, but doesn't really engage in the life here.

This phenomenon is often described. One of the reasons why people don't spend their free time in their place of residence may be the absence of quality businesses and meeting places in general. However, entrepreneurs often feel that establishing businesses outside the city center is unprofitable.

And we did the opposite, we were actually pioneers. I remember Lukáš Hejlík (Czech influencer in gastronomy) writing about us, saying that it's just awesome, and that starting businesses on the periphery has enormous potential. And I can sign under that. I am simply convinced that when we do it well, people will find their way to us. Afterall, we're next to their house. No one wants to travel far just to have a good coffee and cake. Actually, I can't imagine traveling long distances for something like that anymore. It would have to be something exceptional. But I see that exceptionality now in completely different things - in meeting people I love here, mostly my neighbors, having great coffee in the place where I live. With my café, I'm actually creating a focal point for our neighborhood.

Do you have any recommendations for creating such businesses on the outskirts of cities?

I think that when people are enthusiastic and can handle all the bureaucracy and everything that it means to start a community business, then it's possible. Besides, one must have enough energy, endurance, and be hardworking to handle it. It's not fun at all. When something doesn't go well, it's crucial to endure it and move on. This generally applies in life as well - anyone can start new things, but ensuring that they work in the long run is the hardest part.

In any case, I think there's enormous potential in it.

People increasingly want to stay where they live. Employment opportunities have also changed many people work from home, or they are digital nomads and often change their place of residence, so it's necessary to create alternative working environments alongside offices. That's why, in my opinion, such businesses have a great chance. I don't have much insight into how it works elsewhere, and it probably won't be easy. But I know that new cafés are emerging on the outskirts of bigger cities and they are working. The question is how long they'll last because you must never stop. You always have to be one step ahead of your customers. And it's hard to endure for a long time also from the perspective that the Czech legislation doesn't favor small entrepreneurs much. It's demanding to endure it.

So what were the biggest problems that arose?

Navigating through the legislation, what we can and cannot do. And managing people, because I bought this café along with the people, in debt and in terrible condition. But I wanted to preserve the genius loci that was already, in my opinion, there at that time. That was achieved, but we're actually a completely different business now.

"This generally applies in life as well - anyone can start new things, but ensuring that they work in the long run is the hardest part."

Do you feel that you had a different experience with entrepreneurship because you are a woman?

I come across this often. I was completely blind to it and truly believed it wasn't the case. However, lately I've realized, and it's not just subjective, that it is indeed the case. I often encounter distrust in my knowledge, abilities, intelligence – I understand

that I may not come across as the smartest, but I've achieved some results, so it's probably unnecessary for anyone to doubt me.

Why do you think you don't come across as intelligent?

It has various implications. For example, I think people don't associate gastronomy with smart people, which is a terrible mistake. But I don't know, I've never claimed to be an intellectual. On the other hand, I know I'm not completely stupid. So it naturally bothers me when someone underestimates me, especially men. In practice, it often looks like instead of explaining things to me or helping me, they throw sticks in my wheels and say those classic lines like, "Well, you're just a woman!" I often see disrespect toward women behind this behavior.

Does it affect your confidence? Do you tend to underestimate yourself because of this approach?

No, I've sorted it out now; mostly I just laugh it off. I'm also at a certain age already, and I know what I've been through and what I can and cannot do. But it took me some time to get here. I have to say that such behavior used to sadden me, but nowadays I don't deal with such people anymore. For me, it's important for people to treat each other with decency - regardless of gender, age, nationality. I simply perceive that the male world still dominates, and I don't think it's entirely good. I think emotions in women may be limiting - I also perceive it in myself, but it's not wrong to have emotions. It saddens me that ego is not handled well, yet both men and women have egos. I think my ego is quite fine, and if it ever starts to get over my head, I always get a slap in the face, which is good. It's also good to say that it definitely doesn't apply to all men - I have wonderful support from men around me as well.



KETEVAN OKRUASHVILI

"When you discover your passion that charges you with vital energy, you want to hold onto it," says a young Georgian actress about theater and acting.

BY MARIAM GOGINASHVILI

Ketevan Okruashvili was in the theater for the first time when she was two years old. "I was bitten by the theater bug that day and ever since, when they asked me what I would be when I grew up, the answer was always an actress," she says. Although acting has always been her dream, the journey towards it has not always been easy. "As a woman, you need to work harder to prove that you are reliable." According to her, women in theater are judged much more strictly, partly due to their potential motherhood. Despite this, acting is more than just a job for her. Theater is a tool for spreading awareness about social issues, and standing on stage gives her vital energy. To everyone considering a career in theater, she says: don't give up and don't compete with anyone else, only with yourself.

When did you get interested in your profession and what was the reason for it?

I was lucky, my work found me. My mom loved theatre from a very young age and whenever the opportunity came up, she would always attend performances and take me with her. I was 2 years old when I first went to the theatre. Ushers were expecting me to cry and they were taken by surprise when I was watching the mesmerizing performance without blinking. They were playing "Salome", where they were beheading one character. I spent half of the play staring at the stage and the other half looking at the "beheaded" actor who had moved to the hall, not understanding how a man who just had his head chopped off could stay alive and continue sitting in the hall. As they say, I was bitten by the theater bug that day and ever since, when they asked me what I would be when I grew up, the answer was always an actress.

What are the main obstacles when taking the first steps in this new field, in this case, theatre?

The first challenge that young people come across is convincing their parents. Parents often worry that if their children become artists, they will not be able to sustain themselves and will suffer. Artists in our country do not have financial security and support, which is sad but true.

The second obstacle is that, no matter how talented a person is, they need to be in the right place at the right time. If artists want to establish themselves, they must constantly network and seek new connections.

The third and main difficulty is finding the right "school". It is not worth studying just anywhere and with just anyone. A teacher can either

refine or ruin a student.

What were the challenges that existed and still exist in this field and how did you handle them?

For me, the biggest challenge was the attitude towards women as potential mothers. "One day she will get married and leave the stage so it is not worth relying on her." I have never heard such a phrase said to men. As a woman, you need to work harder to prove that you are reliable.

The second obstacle is status. Historically, a woman on stage was not perceived as virtuous or was often the object of jealousy. It took more effort for women to protect themselves. Only very famous people were forgiven for their lifestyle by society. Such an approach became part of my life too. I belong to the generation of millennials, which means that other people's deep-seated stereotypes have affected us. Gladly, as years pass by, such stereotypical approaches are getting lost, and the environment is much gentler for the new generation.

As for overcoming challenges, some came naturally, and some from experience, observation, and reading. I continue to work on myself and on improving my communication skills.

What are the necessary qualities for a person to succeed in this field?

They need to be hard-working, determined, curious, thirsty for knowledge, observant, empathetic and fearless, and they should not be afraid to face their own and others' emotions. People are more honest when acting; they experience every nuance of their characters' lives, feeling every story and every word on a deep emotional level, but if an actor is afraid to face their own emotions, they will avoid others' too. Acting with technique but without emotion comes across as inauthentic to the audience.

Was there anyone from this field who gave you a helping hand in the hardest times?

There were those who always told me it would not work out and that I was very weak, but I would always meet very kind people who made me who I am today. I must mention my mother, who walked me everywhere during the difficult years in the nineties and who often stayed hungry all day so I could get to the university, eat, and get an education.

My school and music teachers helped me a lot, as well as choreographers. Now my biggest supporters are my director and his precious spouse. Mr. Gogi taught me everything selflessly, brought me up and I often call him my second father. I am also very grateful to Mr. Giorgi Gomurashvili and all the kind people I have met on my way.

No matter what challenges I encounter along the way, I know that this kindness is never lost and I pay it forward.

"When you find your passion that fills you with vital energy, you want to stick with it."

Why are directing, scenography, and choreography interesting to you? What do you see in them that captivate and intrigue you?

When you see drawings, frames, and ideas floating in the air demanding shapes, and images, you want to bring them to life.

I love the process of research, discovering depths and unveiling secrets; every word, every event has its secrets. I love seeing an actor's face light up when they make a discovery together with the director, and when they come across a mystical depth. I love seeing the ecstasy of an actor when

they can accept and unpack these secrets. What a great joy it is to release them on the stage, onto a sea of emotion.

This is why I cannot agree when I hear it said that applause is the best part of the whole process. Clearly it's pleasing, but the greatest joy is the process itself and its result.

"No matter where you go.

If you know what you want,
the universe will find a way
somehow to get you there."

What is your vision about directing in Georgia nowadays? What do you like, what would you change and what are the challenges?

I would rather not comment on others' work. That is the job of a theatre critic. Everything has its journey, including theatre. Experimental modern theatre is sometimes good and sometimes not, but there will not be development without it.

How do you see your future in this profession?

I am not used to planning the future anymore. Today I am here, I know what is happening here, and the future will take care of itself. I want to continue in my lovely job, express myself and grow more, continue improving and give more to others than I can give today. As for my future career, only time will tell.

Have you ever had to choose between this and other professions and what was your decision-making process like?

There were many cases when I was offered better-paying jobs in Georgia or abroad which would have provided me with peace and security, but I was not able to put financial stability above theatre. When you find your passion that fills you

with vital energy, you want to stick with it and be happy.

The time before I chose my profession was the hardest. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, but there were always responsibilities to my family and loved ones. Psychology is a great tool, no matter where you go. If you know what you want, the universe will find a way somehow to get you there.

What would you advise young actors and directors?

You often hear that the theatre world is merciless. I don't agree. I believe in hard work and loving what you do. I believe in respecting and recognizing others' talent, not in stepping on others to promote yourself.

To anyone choosing this profession, I would say that, no matter what happens, never give up and never compete with anyone but yourself. Development and education have no limits, and you can continue improving every day.

Theatre has always been a powerful tool for raising awareness in public, not just a place for entertainment. Its main purpose is catharsis and growth, and so people in this field must constantly work on their personal growth.



MARKÉTA MARKOVÁ

The teacher has the power to influence the lives of their students, says the teacher, biologist, and animal lover.

BY KLÁRA POLÍVKOVÁ

Markéta Marková is a biology teacher at an elementary school in a small Czech town. In the monotony of the slower pace of a small town, she served as an inspiration to her students not only through her supportive and progressive approach but also through her sympathies towards feminism. A graduate biologist and zoologist, she came to teaching by leaving a career in science and never regretted her decision. Although she is currently on maternity leave, she is looking forward to returning to the teaching profession. According to her, the teaching profession is underestimated. "People don't realize the extent to which a teacher can influence lives. A bad teacher can truly ruin a lot. If someone had soured my experience with biology, I would have never pursued it further."

How are you?

Right now, I'm having a conversation with my kids between a horse and a gnome (laughs). Motherhood is demanding; I imag-ined it somewhat differently, perhaps easier. The fact that I moved far from my family doesn't help much, so I'm pretty much relying on myself for everything.

You have always been a very active person; we were amazed by the fact that you had many animals at home, you radiated positive energy, and you never hesitated to speak your mind. Although you probably have less time now, is there something you are currently focusing on?

I still really enjoy and find fulfillment in music. And I also started sewing. As for animals, I used to run an animal club in our school back then, so I later shifted some of the animals from my home to the club. Here in Rychnov, where I currently

live, I only brought a gecko and a newt with me. But recently, I started a breeding station for Australian Shepherds. In June 2023, we had puppies; they were amazing.

How did you get into teaching?

During my bachelor's studies, I studied general biology, then I specialized in zoology. I was particularly interested in ethology, which is the study of animal behavior. It comes in handy with dogs too. But unfortunately, science is centered in Prague, the capital city, and commuting wasn't realistic anymore. So I didn't finish my doctorate. Then I got a teaching certificate and started teaching, and I enjoyed it so much. I fell in love with teaching and want to continue. And then I had children, so I don't see much future with science. Besides, I wanted to be a good mom and devote myself to the kids one hundred percent, even though it's a bit of a step back. Nevertheless, life doesn't end; kids grow up, and then we'll see.

You have always openly identified with feminism. How do you perceive motherhood from a feminist perspective now?

Well, motherhood and feminism, it's obviously limiting. Plus, I'm the kind of person who doesn't ask for help. I have a bit of a problem coping with that strange dependency on men. I'm not used to it.

"The teacher has the power to influence the lives of their students."

How do you remember your early days as a teacher?

You were my first class; I tried a lot of teaching methods on you back then. Maybe I started too abruptly, wanting too much from you. But I'm very happy that you remember the time as a positive one; as you wrote to me, I showed it to my mom, and I was deeply touched. And she told me that just a

teacher. My dad doesn't appreciate teachers. Maybe he never met good ones, or he always saw them as annoying people who wanted something from him. People don't realize the extent to which a teacher can influence lives. A bad teacher can truly ruin a lot. If someone had soured my experience with biology, I would have never pursued it further. I can't wait to get back to it.

If you could give advice to your younger self, what would it be?

Don't move for a guy. I'm obviously joking, it would probably be something related to the time when I started teaching. That advice would definitely come in handy then.

Did you have any women who inspired you during your adolescence?

Again, I'm coming back to how much influence teachers can have. Definitely Mrs. Černá, my biology teacher.



MANANA KAPETIVADZE

"Challenges are opportunities for growth," says the award-winning English teacher from Georgia.

BY NINO JABIDZE

Manana Kapetivadze, an English teacher from Georgia, has had a fascinating journey to her dream profession. Since childhood, she has longed to teach English, a language that wasn't very sought after in the former Soviet Union. She experienced periods of deep economic crisis in Georgia, when there was no fuel to heat the classrooms, and she had to walk over four kilometers to school daily, even in severe cold. "We almost didn't get paid for the job we were doing, but I had never thought of quitting teaching. Teaching children is the love of my life. " She studied in the United States and upon her return, she also started organizing summer camps for youth as a volunteer. Her dedication and passion were rewarded when she won the Georgian national award for the best teacher. Her story is an inspiration to all who strive to achieve their dreams and positively transform the world of education.

Could you tell us about your work? What inspired you to become a teacher?

As far as I can remember, I have always wanted to be a teacher. When I first heard the English language in the fifth grade, I was immediately mesmerized and decided to become an English teacher. I attended high school in the 1970s at a Russian school in Kutaisi. At that time, Georgia was under the USSR, and English was not very popular. I discovered an English course at our local university, secretly applied, and was accepted. At 16, I was the youngest in the group; the other students were at least thirty years old. Later, I studied foreign languages at university, majoring in English and minoring in German.

At the age of 22, I began my teaching career in a village in Russia. It was an unforgettable experience as I was the first English teacher in the village. The children loved learning the

language, and I created many resources to make learning fun. After a year of teaching in Russia, I returned to Georgia and started working in local schools.

In 2001, we experienced hard times. There was no electricity, no gas, no heating. We had a wooden stove called a "pechi" in classrooms and houses, and very little wood for heating. I lived about 4 kilometers from my school and had to get up very early to walk back and forth every day, even in the cold. There was no public transportation and no gas for cars. Despite these hardships, we did many activities for the children and attended numerous training sessions and workshops. We were barely paid for our work, but I never thought of quitting. Teaching children is the love of my life.

You also studied in the United States. How did you get there and why did you choose

the US? How did this study abroad experience influence your later work?

In 2002, I applied for the Teaching Excellence Awards program announced by American Councils. The application process was long and difficult, as I didn't have a computer and, of course, no internet. I had to handwrite the application at night in a cold room after feeding my family and putting my kids to bed. I developed nephritis from sitting in the cold room for so long. After many cold nights of work, I learned that I was selected as a finalist. I was the happiest person in the world!

I was accepted to Montana State University and attended a 12 month training program there. My school received its first personal computer in its history, which had a huge impact on the entire community. I created a resource room with books, a printer, and a computer for other teachers to use. I invited trainers to share experiences with local teachers. I was nominated for the Order of Honor (the highest appreciation medal in Georgia) for my contributions to the school and the community. From then on, I became a respected person in my village and among the teachers of Georgia.

If I could name one achievement that makes me worthy of winning the prize, it would be the 16 of my former students who are now fabulous English teachers around Georgia, as well as my Peace Corps Volunteer, Ari Venteicher, who decided to become a teacher in the USA after teaching with me.

Besides being a teacher, you are also a very active trainer and a volunteer. Could you tell us about your volunteering projects? Your youth camps are always very popular among youngsters, and many active young people made their first steps in self-development at your camps. I am curious if you are planning to organize youth camps in the near future.

As a teacher, I find great joy in extending my passion for education beyond the classroom through various

volunteer projects. One of my most fulfilling endeavors has been organizing youth summer camps aimed at fostering personal development and active citizenship among young people. So far, I had several youth camps for younger learners, such as "Reading Camp", "Innovation Summer Camp," "Learn English with M&M" with my Peace Corps Volunteer, and "Active Citizenship Camp" for teenagers with my outstanding student Nino Jabidze, where she was a facilitator of different activities.

In these camps, we created a dynamic and inclusive environment where participants could explore their interests, develop valuable life skills, and build meaningful connections with their peers. Through a combination of interactive workshops, team-building activities, and inspirational speakers, we strived to empower young individuals to realize their full potential and become active contributors to society.

I'm delighted that these camps have resonated positively with the participants, and it's heartening to witness many of them embracing personal growth and taking on leadership roles in their communities. While specific plans for future youth camps are not set in stone, I am always eager to continue creating opportunities for young people to learn, connect, and thrive.

Let us go back to your profession. You won the National Teachers Prize in 2018. Please, share your main motivation for applying for this prize. What would you advise the teachers who are preparing for this important stage?

Applying for such a prestigious recognition was motivated by a deep commitment to advancing education, popularizing the teaching profession, and a genuine desire to make a positive impact on students' lives. The main driving force behind the application was the belief that the journey of teaching extends far beyond the classroom, and every effort to innovate, inspire, and connect with students deserves acknowledgment.



For teachers aspiring to apply for such awards, my advice would be to reflect sincerely on your teaching journey. Identify the unique approaches, projects, or initiatives that have significantly impacted your students and the learning environment. Showcase your passion for education, dedication to students' growth, and commitment to continuous improvement. Emphasize how your teaching philosophy aligns with the broader goals of education and the positive outcomes you have witnessed in your students; talk about collaboration and community engagement, as these aspects often play a crucial role in enriching the educational experience. Provide concrete examples of how you've gone above and beyond to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

You need to remember that the application process is an opportunity to share your story and the transformative power of education. Be genuine, highlight your strengths, and demonstrate the effect of your efforts on both individual students and the broader educational community. Finally, stay true to your passion for teaching, and let that truth shine through in your application.

"Acknowledge and celebrate the successes, no matter how small."

What is the important advice/experience you always share with your students?

Teaching is a noble and rewarding profession, and one piece of advice I consistently share with my students is the importance of fostering a growth mindset. I encourage them to embrace challenges and setbacks as opportunities for learning and personal development. In the face of difficulties, maintaining a positive and resilient attitude can make a significant difference in their journey.

Being a teacher is a huge responsibility. It can also be pretty challenging at times. What advice would you give to the young people,

who are willing to pursue this profession?

Teaching is indeed a profession filled with challenges, but it is also incredibly fulfilling. My advice to young people aspiring to master this profession would be the following: View challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. Understand that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process, and resilience in the face of setbacks is key to professional development.

Establish meaningful connections with your students. Understanding their unique strengths, challenges, and interests not only enhances the learning experience but also creates a supportive classroom environment.

Stay curious and committed to lifelong learning. Embrace new teaching methodologies, technologies, and pedagogical approaches to stay relevant and effective.

Teaching is a collaborative effort. Engage with fellow educators to share ideas, strategies, and experiences. Collaborative learning among teachers can lead to innovative solutions and a stronger sense of professional community.

Teaching can be demanding, both emotionally and physically. Remember to take care of yourself. Prioritize self-care to maintain your well-being and sustain your passion for education over the long term. Acknowledge and celebrate the successes, no matter how small. Recognizing achievements, whether personal or student-related, contributes to a positive mindset and reinforces the impact of your efforts.



LUCIE JARKOVSKÁ

"Feminism is absolutely crucial today, especially for preserving what we have already achieved for the future," says sociologist and stand-up comedian.

BY MICHAELA JELENOVÁ

Sociologist Lucie Jarkovská has made gender equality her professional and personal focus. She works as a scientist at the Institute for Research on Inclusive Education at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University in Brno. Her specialization is gender and sexuality in education, and she is also one of the founders of the field of Gender Studies at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University. In addition to her scientific work, she also dedicates her time to popularizing feminist topics and gender equality across the wider public – together with her colleague Kateřina Lišková, they created a stand-up comedy duo, and even published a book titled "Becoming a Feminist Easily and Quickly" last year.

Feminism – sometimes a controversial term, with slighty different meaning for everyone. You identify yourself as a feminist. What does that mean to you?

Personally, I don't see any controversy in feminism. We live in a society that tries to achieve gender equality, and feminism is a movement and a ideological current that advocates for this equality. In the past, it has corrected many injustices, women gained the right to vote and equality in terms of law and access to various spheres. Currently, it often reveals various subtle mechanisms that still maintain inequalities despite the equality declared by laws.

When did you realize that feminism and gender equality topics were important to you? Was there a specific incident or experience, or was it rather a journey where you gradually identified with the term 'feminist'?

After arriving at university in Brno, I enrolled in gender courses and their content appealed to me greatly. The teachers also played a significant role, especially Iva Šmídová, with whom we started organizing various events and later founded the Gender Center.

You are half of the Duo Docentky (translated as Two Docents), which combines humor and scientific research in the field of gender equality and feminism through stand-up perfor-mances. How did you come up with this concept? Whose idea was it to humorously link these areas?

Kateřina Lišková and I have been collaborating since our student days, including in the aforementioned Gender Center. Once we had a presentation at a conference on opponents of sexual education, and the contribution was so brisk, packed, and funny that the audience told us we should perform with it. Then it took about 10 more years, but eventually, we got into it.

People in Brno are very interested in your performances. I feel like you've come up with a new concept and a way to bring these topics closer to the general public. Why do you think this particular form works and has such an impact?

After our last performance, a friend came up with this slogan: Duo Docentky – a show that will make you laugh at your own misfortune. We talk about things that aren't really funny. But by presenting them in a certain light and with comedic shortcuts, it really prompts people to laugh, and laughter is immensely healing and empowering. In the case of our humor, it doesn't lead to people dismissing those things, but quite the opposite. It releases certain negative emotions, tunes into the positive ones, and gives people more capacity to face all those inequalities, injustices, and frustrations.

This year, as the Duo Docentky, you even released a book called 'Becoming a Feminist Easily and Quickly,' which provides arguments for debates with family and friends. What led you to publish the book, and where did you draw inspiration from during the writing process – can we find your own experiences from debates with your loved ones in it?

We were approached by the editor of czech publishing house Luxor, Anna Musilová, if we would like to write a book as the Duo Docentky. I had already been carrying that idea in my head for some time. During the time of Covid, people spent a lot of time in Facebook debates, and in those about feminism, the same arguments kept coming up. That we'll talk about equality when women start carrying washing machines up to the sixth floor by themselves, that feminists fight against men holding doors open for women, and so on. Engaging in such debates is exhausting, but then if you don't, there might be an impression that those who make such claims are right and everyone agrees with them. So, I wanted to write a book that would contain wellformulated counterarguments that one could maybe just copy or read and not waste time repeatedly formulating a response.

Since you move in academic and scientific circles, which are often dominated by men, could you share some experiences in the area of 'women and science' that stick in your mind? For example, any positive or negative approaches or comments from colleagues? How do your colleagues perceive your work as the Duo Docentky?

I work in sociology and education and there are many women. But I have one curious experience when we applied for a grant for a sexual education project for marginalized groups. Our team consisted only of women, and the project lost points because gender balance in the team was not ensured. In the justification under the team diversity column, I explained that team diversity lies in the age diversity of the team, as well as in having women from different fields (academia, NGOs, and arts), and the purpose of this measure is primarily to increase the number of women in science. Moreover, few men engage with this topic because it is marginalized, underfunded, and of low prestige. However, this explanation was not accepted by the grant agency. They told us that next time, we are supposed to find some men.

"Feminism is absolutely crucial today, especially for preserving what we have already achieved for the future."

What issues concern you the most at the moment? What topics are you currently preparing for or already organizing performances on?

Our latest program focuses on the topics of work and money. We delve into questions of pay gap and wage disparities, perceptions of male and female-dominated fields, and the intersection of work and family. We also touch upon the specter of feminization, which some fields greatly fear. For example, medicine. Some prominent doctors in the Czech Republic lament how their field is becoming

feminized and blame women for the loss of prestige. However, women don't enter these fields to undermine prestige. On the contrary, they often enter because the prestige of the field has already declined, there's less money, and women often rescue the situation.

Do you have any advice or wishes for young women regarding their engagement in society and fight against gender inequality?

To not let others to intimidate or undermine them. In our latest program on work and money, for example, we show how in the case of women who ask for higher pay or generally a decent wage, employers try to avoid giving them more money by appealing to the fact that their demands ruin the good atmosphere and friendly relationships. This is a mechanism that generally prevents women from speaking up when they're dissatisfied with something. The value of good relationships is important to them. We emphasize that the discussion about money should remain a discussion about money, women shouldn't be made to feel that they've ruined something because they speak up.

Do you have hope that we will ever achieve gender equality? Is there a future in which feminism may no longer be necessary?

The older I get, the more I focus on the present moment. I consider feminism to be absolutely crucial today, especially for preserving what we have already achieved for the future. We see appalling attacks on reproductive rights in the USA and Poland. These rights are fundamental for women. Authoritarian regimes, which are gaining strength even in some European Union states, are actively working with gender issues, presenting them as family protection, but in reality, they reinforce the oppression of women and people with non-mainstream gender identities. Instead of drawing strength from the belief in a future society of equality, I find strength in small everyday joys. Like when someone writes to me about how our book made them laugh and how, thanks to it, they are having discussions with their parents or children. We received a lot of such feedback. I believe in solidarity and relationships that can be built in various ways, for example, by singing in a choir, being a member of a gardening club, and so on. There, one can experience solidarity with people who may have completely different opinions and



MANANA BARBAKADZE

A Georgian politician sends a message: "Youth is our future, we must listen to them."

BY MARIAM BERADZE

The path of Manana Barbakadze, a local politician and chairwoman of the city council in Kharagauli, Georgia, into politics was not straightforward. As a child, she wanted to become a judge, and a large part of her career was ultimately dedicated to the police force. However, when she encountered the unjust treatment that the former political leadership in her community exhibited towards its citizens, she decided to enter politics herself. She endeavors to involve young people in decision-making – for the fifth year in a row, the council has a board composed exclusively of local teenagers. "I enjoy interacting with young people as they have a different perspective and insight," she says, advocating for active citizenship among young people.

What is your personal story? How have you gotten to where you are today? What barriers did you have to overcome?

I was born in a small village, our family was not rich and we were four kids. My father was a railway worker, my mother was a housewife. I was distinguished from other children by the fact that I loved leadership from childhood, and I loved books. I couldn't sleep without reading a book. I want to tell you that I still have this quality today. It was my father who made me fall in love with books. He had a very big library, and I had almost read this entire library two or three times.

When I finished school, I really wanted to be a prosecutor or a judge, because I was very fond of detective books and watching investigative movies. I graduated from high school and I started to work. In the meantime, I also enrolled in a three-year law school, so I was working and studying at the same time. Of course, this

road was not strewn with roses. I was a young girl from a village, and I ended up in a very big city, in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi. For years I lived on rent, worked and raised my daughter. After completing the three-year school, I entered the police academy, which was five years, and worked in the force for 29 years.

In 2003, the Rose Revolution took place in Georgia. I was in an oppositional mood because I always stood up for the truth and rights both at work and in friendships. When the government changed, I was suddenly dismissed from my position, because I was a person with a different opinion. I returned to my village and started to build a temple. My actions were always prevented and blocked by the heads of the local self-government ruled by the The National Movement party. Mentally, their negative attitude towards me and this case brought me to the opposition. In 2014, I ran for office in nine rural communities, where I defeated this party and got into the council. In

2023, I was elected the deputy chairman of the Sakrebulo, and in 2017, I became the chairman of the city council.

Why did you get interested in politics? What or who was your main source of motivation?

The reason I entered politics was the injustice and the wrong approach from the previous government, both toward me personally and toward others. This is exactly what motivated me to get into politics.

What makes you a good leader?

A leader must be correct and free, capable of guiding their team through all situations so that they do not become confused in crisis situations. They should not make decisions alone but should work with the team to resolve issues collaboratively.

What example do you set in your work for young girls and women to become leaders?

We have had a youth council in the municipality for the past five years. I appreciate that they, as well as I, enjoy seeing them evolve into leaders and independent individuals who understand the meaning of local self-government, its functions, and obligations. Young people are truly engaged in these aspects. They plan their agendas meticulously and work across various sectors. I must highlight the outstanding contributions of those young people who are involved in healthcare, education, culture, and sports. I hope these young individuals will continue their active cooperation with us even after my tenure.

What is the importance of the role of local politics in solving various problems, including the elimination of gender discrimination?

The local self-government plays a significant role because it has direct contact with the citizens. For several years, we have been implementing the citizen program, in which local residents choose the projects that the council will undertake. I want to mention that during the meetings where citizens select their projects, there used to be a gender imbalance, with more men attending and expressing their views. However, now women predominate as it has become necessary to address various issues.

How is it to be a local politician in Kharagauli?

Leadership means a lot, they say. What might be easy for an ordinary citizen or resident to decide, as a leading lady, I cannot make such decisions easily or act freely. I must be a role model for those around me and behave in a manner that is acceptable to them. Women also have weaknesses that we must overcome.

What have you been able to do for the municipality during your career?

I believe that my true word has stayed with me to this day. I have found that in my role as a directly elected representative, as a village deputy, I've been able to offer individual assistance. I allocate a portion of my salary to aid my constituents. Of course, I cannot address every issue in the same manner; there are various obstacles. Some matters require thoughtful consideration, while others demand prompt resolution. I strive to assist elderly individuals and newly married families, as well as families with many children. In many instances, my efforts yield positive results, and when I am able to help and see it succeed, I feel joy akin to that of a child.

What are you most proud of?

I take pride in fulfilling my promises to my constituents or residents. Witnessing their joy and gratitude when I fulfill those promises brings me satisfaction. Let me give you an example: our team pledged to provide public transportation at discounted rates in the track area, and we

delivered on that promise. When we assumed power in the Kharagauli self-government, there was no hospital or adequate polyclinics. Today, you can see the functioning of our hospital. Numerous infrastructural projects have been

"Youth is our future, we must listen to them."

completed, yet there is still much work to be done.

What advice would you give to young girls who, like you, are interested in politics and want to become leaders?

If you encounter obstacles in your life, don't think, "How will I manage this? How will I cope?" Let me share my example. I was raising a child, working,

and studying simultaneously. I would hold a book in one hand while attending to my child. There were times when I overslept because I had to prepare for exams while balancing work and childcare responsibilities. However, if you are determined and eager to learn, nothing can stop you. This is the message I want to convey to young girls. I urge them to postpone marriage at a young age. While the decision is theirs, as a mother and grandmother, I advise against early marriage. There is always a solution to every obstacle, except death. I want to remind young people that they are the future generation who will replace us. Therefore, I wish them all success. I enjoy interacting with young people as they have a different perspective and insight. I often ask my children and grandchildren about their vision for the future. I cherish the youth deeply!



JANA JEBAVÁ

Art as a Lifelong Journey - Artist, Teacher, Lecturer, and the Turbulent Histories of Czechia.

BY KATEŘINA KUBIŠOVÁ

Jana Jebavá has dedicated her entire life to art. She taught at the university, lectures on art history, used art to help individuals with physical and mental disabilities, and also pursues her own art projects – she paints, does graphics, illustration, and she also write books. The tumultuous history of Czechoslovakia and modern-day Czech Republic has left its mark on her life and career as well. Her story serves as an inspiration to all artists, showing that art can be a source of lifelong work, passion, and hobby.

How did you get into art? Were you drawn to it from childhood?

I first came into contact with art through nuns, who worked with children in our city. I used to help them, maybe with cleaning, and the sisters took care of me as well. They showed me my first films, which I still remember. I could read since I was four years old. My elementary school classmates used to tell me: "Oh Jana, we always loved having you in elementary school, thanks to you, we always got an A in art, you managed to draw sketches for everyone in an hour." Even so, I didn't get into an art high school. But my classmates who I helped to prepare for the entrance exams did. I told myself, Jano, you can't do this, you have to fight for yourself. Eventually, I went to a general high school where I dreamed of illustrating and writing books.

But eventually, you did study art, didn't you?

After graduation, I applied to five universities,

but I wasn't accepted anywhere again. They said I needed to improve my personell record, so political reasons, I don't know why. After appealing, I finally got into the Faculty of Arts in Olomouc, where I studied art history and Czech philology. That's why I have a soft spot for universities that aren't in Prague because all the inconvenient professors from Prague were moved here to Olomouc by the regime. So, I got to know people I wouldn't have met otherwise. But towards the end of my studies, I ran into trouble; the school administration didn't want to accept my thesis, which I had worked on for three years. There were people in it who had signed Charter 77 (note: a document written by the civic organisation, criticizing the communist regime's human rights violations, signing it was considered a political crime). But how could I have known? I didn't let it go and applied to a professional art competition, where I won first prize.

You also taught at an elementary art school. What was your journey to the teaching profession like?

After graduation, the unwritten rule was to start elsewhere. Or rather, they sent me away, to the other part of the Czech Republic, city Most. My husband and I had to sign that we would stay there for ten years. I worked at the local art school. I always said I would never teach, I wanted to do research, I wanted to paint. But the children got to me with their immediacy; they wanted fairy tales, they wanted stories. So, I threw away all the fancy words I learned at university and tried this new fairy tale world.

"Lectures should be like theater performances; it should be an experience, and that's what I strive for in my work."

How do you remember life in communist Czechoslovakia?

The time before the revolution wasn't very happy, but we were able to create protective communities for those of us who didn't emigrate and stayed. Larger social ties, that held us together. But they weren't secret societies, just regular people who were also displaced, and I mostly taught their children.

The revolution came in November 1989. Were you involved in it?

Before the November revolution, I happened to go to an exhibition in Prague, and when I arrived, I couldn't go anywhere; there were water cannons and soldiers everywhere. Only later did I find out what was actually happening. After finding out, I returned to demonstrations in Prague and coincidentally, I was briefly at the head of the Civic Forum (the political movement at the time, from which the first Czech president Václav Havel came), but it was only because there was no one else to take it back then. I'm certainly not a politician.

During your professional life, you've changed several art professions, and you even got into helping through art - art therapy.

Yes, that's right, and not just in art. After the revolution, with the first breath of freedom, I applied to an advertisement – the university in Prague was looking for a teacher, I won the competition and got a job as a teacher of aesthetics. Gradually, within the university, I started giving lectures and teaching a new type of study for people with various disabilities – art therapy and occupational therapy.

Over the years, I taught at several art schools, and as I jokingly say, I raised a generation of architects and designers. While working at one high school, I had the opportunity to travel to Terezín, the former Jewish ghetto, and educate myself on the world problem of the Holocaust. I completed my studies in Jerusalem and became a lecturer in Terezín.

Art is still your great passion. What exactly do you do now?

Currently, I am mostly dedicated to art history lectures, I am enthusiastically traveling around the whole country. Lectures should be like theater performances; it should be an experience, and that's what I strive for in my work. I think the most important thing is to work on a popular level, telling stories is the best way to teach people something.



MANANA MODEBADZE

"A woman can achieve the pinnacle of success in any field and even more, go even farther," says a Georgian language teacher.

BY ANA GHUGHUNISHVILI

Manana Modebadze, a Georgian language teacher from western Georgia, says that the world has changed since her youth. "Years ago we could not even imagine that a woman could be a driver, but this stigma is now broken and nowadays many women are involved in the types of professions that were not acceptable during my time." Her progressive views and dedication to work serve as an inspiration to her students. To anyone who wants to fulfill a dream, she says: "When we achieve something easily, it loses its charm. Never think you cannot do it."

Please, tell us about yourself.

I am Manana Modebadze, a teacher of Georgian language at Darkveti Public School. As with any child, when I was a pupil, my interests were changing too, I was into different things at different ages but ever since I grew up and understood that teaching was what I wanted to do, I have been very determined and have not stopped pursuing my goal. I finished school in 1984 and graduated from the Pushkin Pedagogical Institute in 1989, as it was called at the time. I have been working at school for 35 years.

Has your gender ever prevented you from achieving your goals?

No, being a woman has never prevented me from anything and I do not think that a school teacher needs to be a man. The idea that masculine strictness is necessary in a class is absurd. I consider that both males and females

have the same rights to work at school.

Do you consider that there are female and male professions?

No, absolutely not. When I was a pupil, many teachers thought that some professions were not suitable for women, for example, engineering. A woman had to be a tailor, but I do not think there are male and female professions. Years ago we could not even imagine that a woman could be a driver, but this stigma is now broken and nowadays many women are involved in the types of professions that were not acceptable during my time.

There is an opinion that men are smarter than women. What do you think about that?

I think that smart people can be found among both males and females. We have great examples of this in art, if you will, in sports,



science, or politics. The Curie family gives me the ground to say that. Marie and her daughter Irene won The Nobel Prize several times. We have exciting characters in the history of politics too, The Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher, Queen Elizabeth, Angela Merkel. A woman can achieve the pinnacle of success in any field and even more, go even farther. We have Paralympics who made their names in sport.

"A woman can achieve the pinnacle of success in any field."

What would you advise to young girls, who are just starting to fight for their dreams?

First of all, you have to have your goal determined to a certain degree, and then, you should never stop fighting for your dreams. You can face a lot of challenges but we should remember that that's life and be ready to overcome all the challenges. Nothing is easy. The harder the struggle, the sweeter the victory.

When we achieve something easily, it loses its charm. Never think you cannot do it. Yes, life is brutally hard but not impossible.



IVANA KOLMAŠOVÁ

Raising three children and embarking on a scientific career. The satellite she collaborated on is now heading for Jupiter.

BY MARKÉTA PLEŠKOVÁ

"I took the doctoral entrance exams at the age of 48," says Czech physicist Ivana Kolmašová. Her journey into science was long and convoluted, and she never initially intended to pursue it. Today, she is a respected figure in space physics, specializing in plasma physics and focusing on both terrestrial and planetary lightning. Moreover, a satellite she collaborated on with an international team is currently going to Jupiter.

Was space physics something that interested you since you were a child? How did you actually get into researching lightning and satellites?

Originally, I wanted to study medical electronics and work in a hospital, but they didn't open the specialization for my year. So I went into a more general field of Radio-electronic Devices and Instruments. I completed those five years; back then there were no bachelor's and master's studies, it was a five-year engineering program. I finished it with honors, but professors told me that nobody would ask about that, I could easily go work in a hospital. So I tried to find a job. And I simply couldn't find one.

What do you think were the reasons behind that? Did the fact that you were one of the few women in this field back then play a role?

When I was trying to find a job in the hospital, it was the first and last time I encountered an employer who didn't want a woman for a technical position. Back then, it was more

about them not thinking that a woman could be a technician. But since then, I think things have changed a lot.

So the rejection from the hospital directed you towards science.

Yes, at that time, I found a position at the Geophysical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, they were looking for an engineer for the team that launched the first Czechoslovak satellite, Magion, in 1978. It's not like I was completely enthusiastic about space, but at that moment, I found the work interesting. I joined the team, which consisted of about eleven or twelve engineers and technicians. Anyway, I was the only woman in that team, and I was very satisfied there.

Apart from physics, do you have any interesting hobbies?

After starting work, as an engineer, I also did soldering, which combined my love for handicrafts with my job. Not only did I sew, but I also threaded beads and made jewelry, and I still make various Christmas and Easter handmade

cards. Soldering was a very dear work to me; I really liked it because those components are tiny, like jewelry work. Plus, I love the smell of rosin.

How did motherhood influence your work?

I have three children, and I was at home with them, with breaks, for almost ten years. Then I worked part-time for several more years. I really devoted a lot of time to those children, taking them to school, swimming, ceramics, and violin classes. And I really returned to full-time work only when the youngest was ten.

"I took the doctoral entrance exams at the age of 48."

You started your doctoral studies only after your children were already in school. What led you back to university classrooms?

When I returned to work, I was working on the development of electronics for the Taranis satellite. It was a device being developed in the Czech Republic in collaboration with French colleagues; it was supposed to measure electromagnetic radiation and study lightning. At that moment, I realized that I was starting to mind not knowing exactly what I was measuring. I was missing the physics for that. And around 2012, I also realized that if I wanted to move forward in science, it probably wouldn't happen without a doctorate because the opportunities without a doctorate are quite limited, both in terms of salary progression and especially in acquiring grant funds. I took the doctoral entrance exams at the age of 48.

You've also had a scientific stay in the United States. What did this foreign experience give you?

After completing my doctorate, which I managed alongside full-time work in two and a half years, I

had the opportunity to spend six months in the United States. I worked at two American universities, the University of Iowa and the University of Mississippi. One specialized in terrestrial lightning, and the other had built an instrument flying around Jupiter on the Juno probe. We managed to publish our results from measuring electromagnetic waves originating from lightning discharges in Jupiter's atmosphere in two journals from the Nature series, Nature Astronomy, and Nature Communications. I was very pleased with that; it received attention abroad as well.

What are you focusing on in your work now?

Most of my time is taken up by lightning research, but I also try to popularize science. I give lectures, write articles about new discoveries, and recently I also founded an association to support women in radio science. The International Union of Radio Science, where I am the president of the Czech committee, aims to support female scientists and establish women's associations in member states.

How do you support Czech female scientists within this group?

Similar groups already exist in several countries within the International Union of Radio Science. I didn't want the Czech Republic to lag behind. Since there are very few of us, I am currently looking for ways to support young Czech women studying or working in radio science. I recently managed to connect with a group of girls at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering who organize courses for children. I offered to help them with a lecture, with some building kits for children, to make those female activities visible. I also want to reach out to younger children to encourage them to choose physics or radio science. There aren't many of us women here. So I want young girls not to be afraid of it. I want them to say, well, it's actually quite good.



MARIAM PAVLIASHVILI

"I certainly wish for more strong, intelligent women in the education system of Georgia," says a Georgian teacher and deputy school director to all who are considering a career as teachers.

BY TATIA SVIMONISHVILI

Mariam Pavliashvili is a Georgian language and literature teacher, tutor, and deputy school director at a school in eastern Georgia. However, the path to professional success in education was not easy for her; she had to study with her first-born daughter, and Georgia was in a huge energy and economic crisis at that time. "My desire to be a teacher was so powerful that it would not allow me to notice any obstacles," she says. Despite her career achievements, she describes herself primarily as a mother of two children and a grandmother to little Thomas. She sees her role in raising strong and independent women and believes that in Georgia such young girls are emerging who will have their say. I know that women and girls will be as independent and free as they wish to be". She transmits this belief to her students.

Hello, first of all, could you tell us a bit about yourself? Who are you and what do you do?

Hello, I am Mariam Pavliashvili. Almost everyone calls me Marika. When people ask me who I am, I reply that I am a mother of two and a grandmother of six-year-old Toma. I am also a teacher of Georgian language and literature at Akhalsopeli 2nd public school. I also have private students, mainly high-school seniors preparing for the university entrance exams. Besides that, I work in the Akhalsopeli Youth Center, where I am in charge of the literature club.

What motivated you to become a teacher and what was your journey like?

It was a long and difficult road to become a teacher, as I got married very young. Soon we had a daughter, Medea, and I had to attend

lectures with her, juggling between being a student and motherhood, which required hard work and dedication. My desire to be a teacher was so powerful that it would not allow me to notice any obstacles. I was always telling myself: Marika, you go, girl, you must be strong, you have a goal and you must achieve it. That period was hard as well, with no electricity and extreme poverty. Regardless, I still became a teacher.

You mentioned your goal; can you remember what challenges you came across on the way to achieving your goal and at what moment you felt you were proud of yourself?

I faced a lot of challenges, especially when I decided to not only be a teacher but also take exams to become a vice-principal and combine those two jobs. This is when I experienced the feeling of pride that you



mentioned when I proved to everyone that yes, I could be a school administrator, a teacher, a mother, and a good housewife all at the same time. It was immensely hard for a mother of two already to start studying again to pass professional exams, while at the same time I was preparing students for national exams. This was a very interesting process for me and I am glad it all turned out just as I wanted it to. I am also glad that others could see my hard work, and could see that I dedicated my heart and soul to it, and that my students and their parents come and praise me, as this means the world to me.

"I certainly wish for more strong, intelligent women in the education system of Georgia."

What would you say about your profession? Would you advise young girls to become teachers?

I certainly wish for more strong, intelligent women in the education system of Georgia. Being a teacher is an all-consuming job that requires a lot of willpower and responsibility. But when you see your students' faces light up when they hear something that sparks their curiosity and you are the one providing them with that information, you understand it is all worth it. Nowadays my profession is somewhat underappreciated, but I have faith in women and girls. I think we will do anything so that our children can live in a better Georgia.

If you could tell us based on your example, what skills and competencies you have that make you a great leader?

I am a little shy about talking about this but I think, in general, what makes a good leader is a constant desire to improve oneself, intolerance of injustice and bringing positive change, qualities which I think I have to a certain degree. A leader must be confident and should believe that they

can move mountains.

What would you wish for young female leaders of the future based on your experience?

I believe that the future belongs to us and in our country, girls are emerging who will have their say, as Malala did in her time. I know that women and girls will be as independent and free as they wish to be. When it comes to young female leaders, I would suggest they never give up and always think of their worthwhile goals to which the road is leading; it is not easy but it is greatly rewarding. I would advise every girl to find strength in themselves and to do everything to obtain an education to ensure a successful future.



IVANA DVOŘÁKOVÁ

The desire to help people and the determination to do things right: A career at the Red Cross.

BY MARKÉTA RICHTEROVÁ

Ivana Dvořáková is an example that initial apparent failure should not deter anyone from pursuing their dreams. The former director of the regional branch of the Czech Red Cross in the small Czech town of Mělník did not have a straightforward path to healthcare and humanitarian aid. As a teenager, she dreamed of becoming a nurse, and even though she did not succeed in the entrance exams for nursing school due to an allergy, she did not give up on her dream of helping people. Over the years, she worked her way up to become the director of the local branch of the globally renowned organization, the Red Cross. For her dedicated service, she received numerous medals not only from the city but also the highest honor, the Alice Masaryk Award, which the Czech Red Cross bestows upon significant individuals who spread its principles, values, and ideas.

The Red Cross is one of the most well-known healthcare and humanitarian organizations worldwide. What was your career journey like and was it your intention to work there?

My dream was to become a nurse in a maternity ward or an infant care facility. I successfully passed the entrance exams, but during the medical examination, I was excluded due to an allergy to one of the medications. After that, I worked in marketing and education. However, the desire to help others was always within me. During the floods that hit the Czech Republic in 2002, I got involved in volunteering for another organization and also got acquainted with the Czech Red Cross, which was also providing assistance during the floods.

You have been with the Red Cross since 2002; what positions have you held during that time?

After helping during the floods in 2002, I worked as an occasional volunteer. My involvement there gradually deepened, and in 2011, I became a regular employee in an administrative position, and in 2012, I became the director. I served in this role until the end of my career.

What do you remember most fondly from your work for the Czech Red Cross?

Working for the Czech Red Cross always felt meaningful to me. It's diverse, and everyone can find their own way to help others. However, the main activity of this organization is home healthcare, which employs nurses. These women are literal angels for many patients in their homes, and they were a reason for me not to give up even during some difficult times. They are great partners and colleagues, and I could always rely on them, and I hope it was mutual. I have often said that I was rightfully proud of this team – both the nursing team and

my colleagues in the office, with whom we managed many difficult tasks.

The work of the Czech Red Cross has many branches and tasks, and all of them are important. The work of our amazing volunteers is also indispensable; some activities and projects would not be possible without them. I owe a huge debt to everyone, and by everyone, I mean it with great emphasis to ensure I don't forget anyone. Without them, it simply wouldn't work. They are all dear to me, and I remain in contact with many of them.

"Now, I spread the idea in my mind that this personal time I have left is my reward, and it's up to me how I use it."

Did you face any challenges during your career? How did you deal with them?

With hindsight, I might not use the word challenges but rather situations that required extraordinary effort or non-standard solutions and also a lot of extra time. I dealt with them as best as I could at that moment

You may be retired, but do you still collaborate with the Red Cross? Do you engage in volunteer activities?

I have remained involved as a volunteer, a member of the Humanitarian Unit for assistance in extraordinary events. I also help coordinate volunteers and try to be available whenever needed. I am delighted that this organization continues to thrive in the right direction with youthful initiatives and enthusiasm. I am happy to return to them. Now, I spread the idea in my mind that this personal time I have left is my reward, and it's up to me how I use it. I believe I will enjoy many more things; life is good. My time is mostly filled with my family, to whom I owe gratitude for supporting me throughout my career, and now I try to give back to them. They deserve thanks for allowing me to devote myself to my work.



MARIAM POTSKHVERASHVILI

Judo, the Olympics, and equality. A young Georgian judoka breaks gender stereotypes in a predominantly male sport.

BY NINI KOCHALIDZE

Mariam Potskhverashvili is a 19-year-old judoka from a small Georgian town of Aspindza. While restlessly working her way up to the Olympics, she breaks down stereotypes towards sportswomen, neglects popular opinions about body image, and thinks that, regardless of all the challenges, women can be successful at sports and also get an education, take care of a family, even handle motherhood. "Judo cannot be without girls. Our daring and courage are necessary. I broke down stereotypes. Encountering stereotypical attitudes motivates and empowers me even more."

Please briefly tell me about your journey in judo. What encouraged you to pursue this martial art?

I attended an International judo tournament organized in Aspindza by Goderdzi Velijanashvili. Impressed by the competition, I decided to try my luck. Initially, I thought I would only remain in this sport for a short period but I was wrong. I became fascinated by it, and judo is still my great passion.

Judo puts a lot of emphasis on discipline and respect. How did practicing judo influence your character and daily life?

Judo had a great influence on my personality. I improved my communication skills, I got close to many people and I think I improved overall.

Could you name a memorable moment or match from your Judo career that had a great impact on you?

The Youth Olympics was the most memorable for me. In the team competition, we finished third and I won the decisive bout against the Italians, which made me happy as I was able to go to the next round.

What is your training routine like and how do you balance sport, work, and education?

In general, finding a good sport-work-education balance is hard. In this sport, we should give our all to achieve more. Judo requires a lot of focus and dedication. This is why I could not keep up with my education as much as I should have, but I try to find a balance. I still dedicate more time to judo than to education because that is what top-level sport demands.

Judo is famous for its technical aspects. Could you explain the meaning of a specific technique or principle, which is particularly important to you, or which is the most effective?

My favorite is rotation. I find this move very special and I often use it. When it comes to Judo techniques, they are truly sophisticated and interesting to me. They are different from other sports.

How do you mentally prepare for a judo tournament and what strategies do you use to concentrate and stay calm during the match?

I do not have any unique tricks. Headphones and Georgian music help me the best. I try to psych myself up as well.

Judo is often described as a sport that empowers individuals. In what way has it made you stronger physically or mentally?

What I notice in myself is that I have become more observant as well as physically stronger. What challenges have you come across as a female judoka? The first challenge we come across is people's stereotypical approach to sportswomen. I think every female judoka will agree with me on this. Many people think that we have no business competing in judo and that we should take up other hobbies like dancing or singing. I think I broke down those stereotypes, I think that, for me, encountering this sort of attitude motivates and empowers me even more.

What would you suggest to young girls who are interested in Judo or martial arts, generally?

My first advice to girls would be to not listen to outdated ideas of people: "Girls in judo?" "Girls in sport?". If they get into judo, they should try their luck. I would like them to develop their skills and overcome difficulties. I am sure many of them will join judo and there will be a lot of us, because judo cannot be without girls. Our daring and courage is necessary for mixed groups, at least.

Judo is an Olympic sport. Do you have particular plans for participating in the Olympics or other big international tournaments?

I do have a goal. Like every judoka and every athlete, my dream is to become an Olympic champion. We prepare for this the whole life. Unfortunately, I do not have good enough results to qualify for the 2024 Olympics. I will prepare for 2028 and I will do my best to score well enough to get there.

Do you plan to coach or mentor other judo enthusiasts, particularly young girls who are just starting their journey in sport?

I am planning to go to the State University of Sports' coaching faculty. I would like to become a coach for girls and raise future champions.

"I am sure many of them will join judo and there will be a lot of us, because judo cannot be without airls."

Can you share an example of personal growth and empowerment, that is a result of your judo practice for you as a woman?

I have learned self-defense, which is the most important thing for girls, and I have learned to believe in myself.

Women in sports often encounter issues related to body image and self-esteem. How do you handle those challenges in sports?

I have been told that big muscles do not look suit me, as a girl. I do not think it is a flaw, on the contrary, as a sportsman I think that the trained body is beautiful.

Some sportwomen also experience challenges related to motherhood and family responsibilities. How will you balance your judo career and personal life, if that is even possible?

Of course, it is possible. We have a lot of women in Judo with lovely children. They combine everything perfectly well. So, I think that I will not have a hard time either.



DANIELA NOVÁKOVÁ

"Life is too short to hold ourselves back," says a nurse who began studying her dream field at the age of thirty-seven.

BY JASMINE EL WELAILY

Czech Nurse Daniela Nováková spent twenty years in Egypt, where she followed her Egyptian husband. "Egypt is a beautiful country, but women are expected to stay at home and take care of the family." However, she had always dreamed of helping people. Now she fulfills her aspirations by working in healthcare and continuing her studies in the field of addiction. "Women should pursue their dreams," she says to everyone.

What does it feel like to study at an older age? What is the most challenging aspect of it?

At first, I couldn't even imagine it, but I decided to give it a try. The most challenging part is the time management. Balancing household chores, studying, and work was definitely challenging, but over time, I got used to it and started enjoying it. I realized that when we want something, we can achieve it even if it seems impossible in the beginning. Age should definitely not limit us.

What was your biggest motivation?

I wanted to work in healthcare since I was a child, but during my life in Egypt, it was out of the question. There, it is expected that a woman will be a full-time homemaker. So through studying, I fulfilled and continue to fulfill my dream.

What is Egypt like, and how did you feel there?

Egypt is a beautiful country, but women are expected to stay at home and take care of the family. The local people are very friendly and kind. I spent twenty years there and I can say I was really happy there. My husband is Muslim, but he never forced me to live according to religious traditions. He had no problem with me working in education before our daughter was born, but unfortunately, the financial reward was way too small. We have to realize that in every country, we find negative as well as positive things. I always try to focus only on the positive things.

So what are the negatives of Egypt?

Even though my husband is very open-minded and progressive, Egyptian society is generally quite patriarchal. Most women stay at home; some have only basic education, lack work opportunities, and are restricted by their husbands. While I speak Arabic, as a foreigner, I would have trouble building a career.

The economic situation in the country is currently not good either. Inflation is rising sharply, and prices are going up with it. It used to be different before; now the middle class has almost disappeared. For a good life in Egypt, you need more and more finances, and that also applies to education. Public schools are of poor quality, and private ones cost a fortune but cannot match the European standards. That was the main reason for my return to the Czech Republic.

Were you afraid to return? What were your plans?

I knew I would have to establish myself in Prague. I seized the opportunity and made the most of it. I started fulfilling my dream, which was and is working in healthcare. I started preparing for entrance exams when I was 37, while still in Egypt. When I learned the results of the entrance exam, I was very surprised – I ranked first out of three hundred applicants at the 2nd and 3rd Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague in the field of nursing.

How did you feel when you found out you were accepted?

I was proud of myself; at my age, I didn't expect it. I opened a biology book after twenty years. I felt that the impossible had become possible.

How was the studying process?

I enjoyed it a lot. It was challenging for me to balance school and household duties, but I would say I completed it successfully. I even received a scholarship for excellent results every year, and at the end of my studies, I received the Dean's Award.

You are currently completing a degree in addiction studies; how did you get into it?

Right after finishing school, I started working as a nurse in a hospice, but I still felt I wanted something more. Originally, I wanted to work with psychiatric patients, but as a nurse, I would have limited options. So, I decided to pursue further studies, and this time, I chose addiction studies. After completing my bachelor's degree, I got an offer to work on a new project aimed at opening a new addiction service that does not yet exist in the Czech Republic. This project will expand harm reduction services, which minimize the harmful consequences of intrauterine drug use. I am currently completing a master's degree in addiction studies and want to focus primarily on

working with families of addicted patients..

What is your driving force?

The idea that age is just a number and not an obstacle. If we have goals and set the right values and path, anything is achievable.

Were you afraid of failing?

Yes, I was afraid, but if you don't try, you won't discover your possibilities. You must not let fear limit you.

"Egypt is a beautiful country, but women are expected to stay at home and take care of the family."

In your opinion, what is the biggest problem women of your age face today?

They feel that it is too late for a change. They have concerns not only for themselves but also for their children. Family is often their priority, and they no longer think about their dreams, even though fulfilling what they want could make them happy. They are also afraid to return to the work environment, especially after maternity leave, in which they were not for several years. They also often suffer from the stigma that women should mainly take care of the family and they suppress their individuality and desires.

What message would you like to convey to other women?

Don't be afraid. Life is too short to hold ourselves back. Searching for reasons not to initiate a change leads to nowhere. If you encounter obstacles, don't give up. By pursuing our dreams, we are an inspiration to our children and people around us.



NATO GUBELADZE

"Journalism is an interesting job, you won't experience boredom," says a Georgian journalist.

BY MARIAM LOMIDZE

The desire to be a journalist is often associated with a sense of truth and justice. This was also the main reason why Georgian Nato Gubeladze entered the journalism profession. She sees journalism as a way to see places and experience things that an ordinary person wouldn't, but also as a means to hold politicians accountable and expose wrongdoings. "I love writing and always strive to make my articles interesting," she says. And she succeeds in doing so. The newspaper she founded in Kutaisi after graduating from university has received awards for the best regional journalism. "If you are proactive and good at what you do, you have many chances to experience various things and meet many famous people," she adds.

How did you become a journalist and what was your biggest motivation to choose this profession?

When I was in the first grade, one of my school teachers blamed me for stealing a book. But the thing was, it was my book so I didn't steal it. When I was reading this book during school classes, my teacher told me that I had taken this book from her library. I was very nervous about this accident, when my mom heard about it she was also worried. The teacher took my book away from me at the end and I didn't manage to prove the truth. I felt a huge sense of injustice back then. When I graduated from the school I even wrote an article about this accident with the title "The thief of his own book" and it was even published in one newspaper. I eventually managed to prove my truth, so this is a story which influenced me in becoming a journalist.

After graduating, I wanted to study journalism but unfortunately I didn't have all the necessary

documents for the entrance exams. They wanted three articles from the candidates and I had only one, so I decided to study law instead.

When I got the results of the admission, I was taken by surprise because they deducted one mark from my results. I was a very good student, I even got an award for my achievements and I knew they did on purpose. I, again, felt this huge sense of injustice and tried to solve this problem. I contacted all the responsible people for the results, I even met with the rector of the university, who, after seeing my work, was very angry and wanted to help me. There was a free place at the Faculty of Journalism and I got there like that, with other students, who were also rejected at first with me. So I became a journalist in this way.

What is the most interesting thing about journalism? Which aspect of this job is your favourite?

Journalism is a very interesting career. The most interesting aspect of this profession is that it gives you the chance to meet many interesting people and be in places where other people cannot . It's not a boring job, it has various aspects. It's true that journalism is a low-paid job but money is not the most important thing here. If you are proactive and good at what you do, you have many chances to experience various things and meet many famous people.

"We all see good and positive things, too, but we can't write only about them."

Can you tell us more about your job? What type of journalism do you focus on?

I am mainly a newspaper journalist. I love writing and I always strive to make my articles interesting. After I graduated in 1995, I returned to Kutaisi, where I am originally from, and I founded the first independent newspaper there, together with my friends. It was called Poskriptum and we tried to inform people back then about everything that was happening. Now I work in three media and we also publish a local newspaper called Borjominews.ge.

Was it hard for you to find a stable job in this field?

Actually, it was not hard for me to find a good job, I have been working since my student days. You know when they say that sometimes good people appear in our life out of the blue. So something similar happened to me. I came across the director of Kutaisi Line Radio. He read my articles, he liked my potential and he helped me to find a job in this field. When I graduated university and came back to Kutaisi, I already had a job. At first I was working in radio but then I decided to continue my work in other forms of media and I founded my own newspaper.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a journalist?

The most challenging aspect of my job is probably the amount of confrontation you face every day. When you are an independent journalist, your role is to write about politicians and people in power and confront the government with their actions. People often demand from us to write only about good things; they don't want to hear about bad things. But we cannot close our eyes in front of the wrongdoings. We all see good and positive things, too, but we can't write only about them. We need to write about new and shocking things people need to know. That's why some people don't like our profession. If you want to be a journalist, you have to be ready for constant tension with many people.

What is the most significant achievement in your career as a journalist?

We won the award for the best regional newspapers soon after we established our independent newspaper in Kutaisi. We got a golden pen as a symbolic present. One of my colleagues and I traveled to the United States too, we saw New York, Florida and Washington and we even saw famous newspapers including The New York Times". It was a great experience for me which taught me so much.

Have you had other foreign experiences like this one? What did you learn there and how did it help your journalism career?

Besides the USA, I was in Sweden. I met various interesting people from different countries, we learned about problems in their countries and we discussed them together. We also had workshops about democratic journalism. That was a great experience for me.

Is it hard to be a journalist as a woman? What problems have you faced in this field for being

a woman and how did you solve them?

Yes, it's hard for all women to be journalists. You often face situations when people are opposed to you because of your job. People threatened me for my articles or interviews but fortunately they didn't carry on with their actions, probably because I am a woman. Sometimes being a woman is helpful when you are a journalist, many male colleagues can get beaten. If you want to be a journalist you will face situations like this but you don't have to be afraid of them. Just do your job and don't pay attention to these people.

"Journalism is an interesting job, you won't experience boredom."

Besides journalism, I've heard that you are actively involved in many other projects. How do you manage your time, when you have so many tasks and responsibilities to do?

When you are involved in various projects and you have many responsibilities to do, you need to have good time management. You need to redistribute your time correctly, set up your schedule and follow it. Once you get used to it, doing it everyday won't be difficult anymore. In addition, besides time management, it is good to have co-workers with whom you can share your work and tasks. Now I have them and with their help we all can share our work and do our responsibilities more easily than if we would be alone.

What would be your advice to youngsters who want to become journalists?

I would advise everyone who is attracted to this profession to think carefully, if this profession is really their calling and if yes, then they should follow their dreams and fight for their goals. I wish good luck to every young person who wants to become a journalist.



TAKO TUMANISHVILI

"I want to support the young people in my generation so that they can develop according to what they enjoy," says a Georgian youth worker.

BY MARI MALVENOVI

Tako Tumanishvili organizes summer camps, interesting workshops, and other activities for young people in the town of Akhaltsikhe in southwestern Georgia. This youth worker aims to provide local teenagers with what she herself had available during high school - the opportunity to freely explore what they enjoy and improve in it. "By understanding young people's interests, we can identify their strengths and focus on developing the skills they need to feel fulfilled and accomplished," she says.

What does your current activity as a youth worker include?

In general, the role of a youth worker is multifaceted, with its primary objective being the development of various competencies in young individuals. There are various directions in youth work. Some youth workers engage in voluntary youth activities, while others work with specific age groups or focus on particular areas aimed at instilling values and competencies in young people. In my case, I work with individuals aged 14-29, and my main goal is to assist them in discovering and nurturing their own skills and knowledge. Through collaborative efforts, we aim to develop multifaceted competencies, enabling young people to realize their potential, particularly within Georgia and our region.

The main goal is to recognize and nurture the interests of every young person. By understanding their interests, we can identify their strengths and focus on developing the skills they need to feel fulfilled and accomplished.

What made you choose this profession?

I chose my profession because I believe that being a youth worker is one of the most crucial professions in Georgia today. There are limited opportunities in our city for young people to develop diverse skills and acquire knowledge based on their interests. Informal education spaces are scarce in the country. My main goal is to provide the same support and opportunities to young people that I received during my school years. As someone who still belongs to the young age category, this remains important to me. I aim to empower the young individuals in our population who show promising potential to have ample opportunities to discover and create a better future for our country from a holistic perspective.

Could you please share with us a typical day in your professional life?

Currently, I work at the Akhaltsikhe office of the Center for Democratic Engagement. A typical day involves starting various activities around 10 o'clock. These activities encompass ongoing processes and club meetings with young people, which are integral to the role of a youth worker. In addition to my role as a youth worker, my daily activities also involve combining various other responsibilities, including entrepreneurial business training. While my working hours are usually from 10 to 7, youth work doesn't adhere to specific time limits because we are youth workers at all times, and we must be available to and supportive of young people whenever they need us.

What challenges do youth workers face?

One of the important challenges in relation to youth workers in Georgia is that there is still no recognition of youth workers as a profession in Georgia, which means that there is no awareness of this profession in society, nor in the governmental or non-governmental sector as a whole. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges is this in my profession, which is constant

Are there any specific skills that you feel are necessary to succeed as a youth worker?

I would emphasize responsibility. Working with young people is a significant responsibility, particularly because it involves minors, making it a potentially risky profession. Failing to take responsibility for your work can potentially harm others.

Can you tell us about important projects or achievements in your career that you are proud of?

The happiest feeling for me personally throughout my life is seeing the success and happiness of young people whom I have worked with in the past or am currently working with. It brings me immense joy to witness them pursuing what they love and finding happiness. Therefore, I consider my biggest achievement in life to be when, for instance, one of my colleagues became a member of one of my

clubs. These are not isolated instances; there are many similar cases. In summary, seeing the young people I work with achieve happiness is the greatest measure of success for me.

Do you have any advice for young people who are planning to work as youth workers?

I would advise these young people that being a youth worker in Georgia is not an easy path. The key is to love your work, cherish young people, and have faith in them. Young individuals have the potential to be incredibly successful; the crucial aspect is for us to believe in them, and for them to believe in themselves.

Have you personally faced any major challenges in your career and if so, how did you overcome them?

At this stage, I can't recall any specific major challenges, although undoubtedly there are numerous difficulties in this role. Dealing with multiple young people simultaneously can present its challenges, especially when unexpected events occur, such as a young person becoming injured or falling ill during a camp. Moments like these can be particularly challenging because you are responsible for their health, safety, and well-being. When unexpected incidents happen, it can be emotionally difficult as you may feel a sense of personal responsibility and self-blame. Perhaps, managing such situations is the most significant difficulty in this role.

Can you share with us any memorable or interesting story from your work experience?

I fondly recall all the camps and happy days I spent with the young people. One particularly pleasant memory that comes to mind is when, about 10 days or 2 weeks after my birthday, I was unable to see these young people for quite some time. Following my birthday, they surprised me by presenting a sign that read "Congratulations and

we love you very much." These moments hold a special place in my heart, and I have displayed the sign in my workspace. Looking at it always energizes me.

Did you have any role models who influenced your career choices?

The first time I had such extensive contact with informal education was when I was 16 years old. I went through an interview process as part of a competition and became a member of the Akhaltsikhe Committee of the Georgian Youth Idea. The program's leader, an employee of the European Foundation, served as a role model for me because she was exactly the kind of strong, educated, smart, and resilient woman I admired. From our first meeting, I expressed my aspiration to grow up to be like her, even saying, "When I grow up, I want to be called Mariam." Perhaps she was indeed that role model because she worked tirelessly for the development of young people and fought hard. In our country, this field is constantly struggling to develop and find its own place, and she embodied the determination required to navigate these challenges.

"I want to support the young people in my generation so that they can develop according to what they enjoy,"

How do you deal with career failures?

Emotionally, it's a bit challenging for me to accept failures, but ultimately, it's a sign that I need to put in more effort, try again, and surpass what I have done in the past to finally achieve my goals.

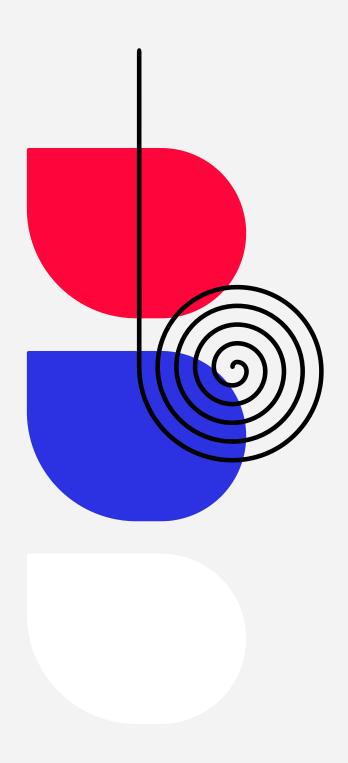
What motivates you to continue in what you do?

Young people, young people, and once again

young people—because the more young individuals have the opportunity to engage with a youth worker and be part of a youth club, the greater the motivation is for me. Every person who is currently in the process of self-discovery, who perhaps has not yet had any contact with nonformal education or with youth workers, serves as a source of motivation for me.

In your opinion, what specific problems or challenges does Georgia face in this field?

There are quite a lot of challenges for young people and the youth field in general. Unfortunately, one challenge is the scarcity of youth workers in Georgia today. Another challenge is that youth workers are not employed in all organizations where their presence is crucial. Additionally, not all individuals who interact with young people in similar capacities are trained as youth workers. This lack of training may lead to unintentional harm to the young individuals they work with. Another challenge is the lack of recognition of youth work as a profession by the state. In many European countries, youth work is taught as a profession in universities, but in Georgia, we have not yet reached this stage. Currently, my organization, where I am one of the trainers, offers professional certification programs for youth workers. However, these programs are not equivalent to master's or bachelor's degrees in this field.



ANNA ZUZANA KETEVAN MIRA IVANA TAKO MANANA LUCIE MANANA JANANANA IVANA MARIAM KETEVAN MARIAM DANIELA NATO MARKÉTA ANNA MANANA IVANA MARIAM KETEVAN MARIAM DANIELA NATO MARKÉTA ANNA ANNA ZUZANA KETEVAN MIRA IVANA TAKO MANANA LUCIE MANANA JANANANA IVANA MARIAM KETEVAN MARIAM DANIELA NATO MARKÉTA ANNA ZUZANA KETEVAN MIRA IVANA TAKO MANANA LUCIE MANANA JANANA ZUZANA KETEVAN MIRA IVANA TAKO MANANA LUCIE MANANA JANANANA ZUZANA MARIAM KETEVAN MARIAM DANIELA NATO MARKÉTA