

2018

Understanding Orphanhood in Russia: Education as a Bridge to (No) Where?

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Understanding Orphanhood in Russia: Education as a Bridge to (No) Where?

By

Marina Kudasova

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative and International Education

Lehigh University

April 2018

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April 2018

Certificate of Approval

This dissertation of Marina Kudasova is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education, College of Education, Lehigh University.

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To the power of love to heal and transform people's hearts.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest and sincerest gratitude to my inspiring academic advisor Dr. Iveta Silova. Throughout this journey, she patiently guided me every step in my research and studies, encouraged to pursue my passion, and offered her infinite help and support. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she changed my life. Not only did she teach me how to be a researcher but, most importantly, she showed me an example of an outstanding scholar, compassionate professional, and a dedicated leader. For all her teaching, kindness, and encouragement I am infinitely thankful.

I would like to extend my genuine gratitude to my wonderful dissertation committee members: Dr. Alexander Wiseman, Dr. Peggy Kong, Dr. Heather Beth Johnson and Dr. Mary Nicholas. I was fortunate not only to learn from such incredible scholars, but also to receive invaluable feedback, thoughtful questions and outstanding support throughout the research. I could not have asked for a better group of professionals to guide me in my research.

In addition, I would like to thank all the professors I had a privilege to learn from during my graduate studies. Especially, I would like to thank Dr. Sothy Eng for the opportunity to be part of the Caring for Cambodia research team, as well as for his constant encouragement to pursue doctoral studies. I thank Dr. Laurence Upton, Dr. Grace Caskie, and Dr. Bridget Dever for being amazing people and professors of statistics. Also, I would like to sincerely thank Sharon Wardon who was always there to help and answer my questions with a warm smile.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Bill Hunter for his tremendous efforts in welcoming and supporting Fulbright scholars. Thanks to him, I felt as a part of a family from the day I arrived to Lehigh University. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Graduate Student Office, Global Union and International Student Office who made my learning experience very

smooth and pleasant. I especially thank Dr. Kathleen Hutnik, Amy Wieboldt McCrae, Clara Buie, Bonnie Beidleman, Jeanne Ma and Olga Scarpero for their genuine commitment to students.

Surely, my journey would not be possible without my amazing friends. Especially, I would like to thank my dearest Ph.D. colleagues who shared the ups and downs of a graduate life from the very beginning: Dr. Fatih Aktas, Dr. Anu Sachdev, and Dr.-soon-to-be Hang Duong. I cannot even begin to describe the amount of support and encouragement I received from them. Also, I am infinitely grateful to my Lehigh friends, whom I truly can call a family, namely Cecilia Lesomar, Leary Pakiding, Fauzia Nouristani, Hnin Su Mon and Anastasiya Perevezentseva. They all were the constant source of inspiration and support for me. Besides, I would like to thank Dr. Alla Korzh for giving me invaluable advice regarding my research and studies. I would like to thank Gretchen Tillitt, Viktoriia Brezheniuk, Olga Mun, Fayaz Amiri, Parastoo Fotoohi and Dr. Hossein Ghodsi, Dr. Golnaz Shahidi and Dr. Mohsen Moarefdoost, Petrina Davidson, Ngoc Minh Pham, Irina Levytska and Alex Shnaydruk, Radja Bendimerad, Jarfa Ranjbar, Marcela B. Gamallo, Whitney Szmodis, Xiaoran Yu, Xia Zhao, Audree Chase-Mayoral, Angel Oi Yee Cheng, Carolina Hernandez, Michael Russell, Kate Lapham, all the Fulbright friends, all the members of Lehigh University UNICEF Club, CIE students, Teach for Russia colleagues and everyone whom I had an honor to know.

Importantly, I would like to sincerely thank the Fulbright Scholar Program and the American Association of University Women for providing crucial financial support for my studies. Without it, I would not be able to even begin my journey. They helped me to change my life, and now I am determined to change the lives of others thanks to all the knowledge, skills and experiences I received at Lehigh.

Furthermore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my outstanding husband, Dr. Aman Karamlou, for his infinite patience, unlimited support and unconditional love. He surely made the whole experience for me as smooth and as comfortable as possible. I am truly blessed to have him in my life. Also, I would like to thank our cat Buji for endless purring, joyful playing and loving attitude. I thank my husband's family and my family for endless support and encouragement. Especially, I thank my caring mother, Galina Riabova, who instilled in me love for education and love for people. She is the greatest inspiration and a role mode for me. In addition, I wanted to thank Victoria Orazova for being an amazing sister and all her continuous support.

Lastly, I wanted to thank all the participants for sharing their incredible stories with me, for all their courage, strength, and resilience. I greatly applaud and salute their thirst for life, despite all the challenges and barriers.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter I. History of Orphanhood in Russia (1706-2016)	11
Prerevolutionary Russia: Genesis of the First Shelter	11
Revolutionary Russia: The Establishment of the First System of Orphan Care.....	13
Soviet Russia: Orphans - Children of the State?.....	17
Post-Soviet Russia: Emergence of Social Orphans	18
Chapter II. Orphanhood and Education Globally: Literature Review and Theory	27
Theoretical Considerations	34
Chapter III. Methodology	41
History and Development	44
Sample	48
Data Collection and Analysis	52
Trustworthiness Criteria	61
Ethical Considerations	62
Limitations	63
Chapter IV. The Stories of Orphans	64
Rising From the Ashes of Human Negligence and Ignorance.....	64
Fantasies of Life.....	115
A Woman of Steel: Nothing Can Break Me Down	133
The Sorrows of Wasted Time and Joyfulness of Hope	176
A Story of Burnt Flour, Human Pain, and Public Activism	194
When Orphanhood Takes an Unexpected Turn.....	248

Chapter V. The Researcher’s Interpretation: Discussion, Analysis, and Implications	286
Experiences Prior to Orphanages.....	287
Life and Educational Experiences at the Orphanages.....	294
<i>Society at large</i>	295
<i>Orphanage</i>	299
<i>Children’s world</i>	314
<i>School</i>	318
<i>Alternative agendas and subversive agents</i>	331
<i>Resistance</i>	337
Pedagogy of Violence.....	345
Transition to Adulthood.....	349
Adulthood	355
Chapter VI. Conclusions	365
References	380

List of Tables

<i>Table 1.</i> Template: the way to reconstruct a story through the simultaneous exploration of temporality, sociality, and place.	59
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List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Family forms of placement of orphans in Russia.	20
<i>Figure 2.</i> An example of multi-layered reality, which orphans navigated during their lives at orphanages.	294
<i>Figure 3.</i> The self-perpetuating cycle of low-motivation and unchallenging curriculum.....	325

Abstract

Orphans in Russia have been widely discussed as one of the most marginalized groups. However, the mass media as well as academic literature have presented largely generalized accounts of orphans' lives and there has been no clear understanding about how these children experienced transition from their childhood to adulthood. The statistics on orphanage graduates show that the majority of them become alcohol or drug addicts, end up in jail, or commit suicide. Not only there is no clear answer as to why it is happening, but also the role of education in shaping orphans' life trajectories has never been previously examined. To address this gap, the study utilized narrative inquiry research method to highlight stories of six orphanage graduates from Moscow, Moscow region, Saint Petersburg, Tomsk, and Krasnoyarsk, who left their respective orphanages 2 to 17 years ago. A close involvement of participants throughout the study provided a unique opportunity for the readers to immerse into the midst of orphans' life stories, as well as to better understand, sense, and reflect on orphans' experiences of their transition from childhood to adulthood. The study broke through the secrecy of the closed nature of orphanages and examined various processes and factors that shaped orphans' lives and educational experiences, including a rigid and controlled environment, hidden curriculum penetrated with physical and psychological violence, as well as subject vs. object model of relationships between children and adults. Importantly, two theoretical concepts - *an imagined family capital* and *pedagogy of violence* - were introduced to explain some of the central parts of orphans' experiences. Overall, the narratives revealed that across the contexts, children developed and learned to navigate their own children's cultures, broadly described as *dedovshina* (hazing, bullying of younger children). Academically, the participants were subjected to various educational experiences ranging from no education at all to correctional programs with

simplified tasks and curriculum and general public school curriculum. Each of these educational programs had important implications for the children's lives and their adult futures. Furthermore, the study revealed the struggles of subversive caregivers and teachers who attempted to challenge the status quo within the system of orphan care by adopting more humane and kind approaches to working with children. Compared to a common depiction of orphans as passive victims of the system, the study described the many ways in which children demonstrated their active resilience and agency. Finally, the research examined orphans' transition period from childhood to adulthood and discussed various strategies used by orphans to develop and shape their adult life trajectories.

Keywords: orphanhood, orphan, orphanage, Russia, education, life experiences, educational experiences, lived experiences, history.

Understanding Orphanhood in Russia: Education as a Bridge to (No)Where?

Introduction

The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life.

Plato

I was born in the era of mass education. I entered this world in a time when education as never before has gained an immense power to shape, transform, and determine one's life. I grew up in a society that questioned neither the importance of schooling nor the power of university diplomas and certificates. Over time, institutions of education have become even more influential and sophisticated. Technologies have shifted the physical boundaries of a school and offered new forms of education such as distance and online learning. Increasingly, educational agendas have become seemingly a top priority for governments worldwide. Millennium Development Goals and current Sustainable Development Goals continue to target quality education for all, while also treating mass schooling as a mechanism to eradicate hunger and poverty. These goals are bold. We live in times when the right to education is as important as having something to eat. Local, national, and international initiatives like Education for All aim to make education available in any corner of the world to include every child from distant, rural, and marginalized communities. Why is education so imperative?

Reflecting on my own childhood in Turkmenistan and Russia, I remember my mother and teachers' constant reminders of the importance of education in becoming a successful adult. It was somehow carefully embedded in my mind that success is linked to education. Years later, when I climbed up the education ladder at Master and Ph.D. levels, the theories of social mobility and stratification, human capital, as well as cultural and social capitals provided new conceptual and empirical foundation for my mother and teachers' arguments about education.

Coming from a low-income, single-parent household, I personally experienced the power of education to transform and change one's life. In my own story, education played a role of a fairy that helped me achieve professional and social heights. Yet, this dissertation is neither about my life nor about the role of education in it. It is about the lives and the educational experiences of young adults who are being categorized as a "different" group of citizens in Russia – orphans.

In official terms, orphans (*deti-siroty*) are defined as children under the age of eighteen, who have lost one or both parents (Russian Federal Law from 21.12.1996 N 159-FZ, translated by the author). However, these children are the minorities within the system of orphan care. The largest percentage of children residing in government institutions are generally known as social orphans or, according to the official law, as children left without parental support (*deti, ostavshiesya bez popecheniya roditeley*). They are defined as:

Individuals, under the age of eighteen, who were left without care by one or both parents due to the actual absence of parents or deprivation of parental rights, the restriction of parental rights, the recognition of parents as missing, handicapped (limited capability), being under treatment in hospitals; due to the actual death, imprisonment, being in custody for suspects, or due to the parental refusal to raise children or to protect their rights and interests, the refusal of parents to take their children back from of educational, health institutions, institutions of social protection and care, and other similar institutions; and in any other cases in accordance with the law. (Federal Law from 21.12.1996 N 159-FZ)

While statistics on Russia's orphans are blurred, the available numbers reveal that four out of five children were classified as social orphans in 2011 (Markova, 2011). Such a high

number of institutionalized children who do have parents largely mirrors the broader social, economic, and political context in the country.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the citizens found themselves in a new social reality where the previous ideologies of communism were replaced by neoliberal agendas with wide-ranging processes of decentralization and privatization (Silova & Eklof, 2012). Within this reality, the income and private property became new stratifying factors that rapidly divided the society (Volkov, 2008). In particular, about sixty percent of the population ended up at or below the poverty level, with only five percent constituting the elite (Gorshkov, 2007). In response to high level of poverty and unemployment, coupled with weak social policies that proved to be ineffective in identifying and working with families in need, the number of orphans drastically increased reaching the level of World War II with 700,000 orphans. Since then, about 60,000-70,000 children each year have been identified as 'orphans,' suggesting that the rate of orphanhood was fairly stable during the last decade (State Data Bank, 2016).

So, why did I decide to write specifically about orphans? After almost ten years of work and research in this area, I recognized that (1) it was still largely unclear what orphans experienced before, during, and after the orphanage; (2) what quality of education they received and, overall, what role education played in their lives; (3) the statistics on orphanage graduates suggested an alarming and unhealthy dynamic, thus, making this subject worth investigating. In particular, anyone interested in the topic of orphanhood in Russia has most probably seen a widely-cited yet never officially confirmed statistics that show that about forty to fifty percent of orphan graduates become alcohol or drug addicts, thirty percent end up being in jail, ten percent commit suicide, and only about ten percent manage to live more or less normal lives.¹ Although

¹ Various sources report the statistics, to mention a few http://www.spravedlivo.ru/5_36565_1_5.html;
http://www.spravedlivo.ru/5_36565_1_5.html

I was not able to officially confirm this data, one public activist believed that these numbers were being beautified and the reality is even more desperate (personal communication, 2015). This study is partly an attempt to understand this frightening trend and an important step to gain a better understanding of educational and life experiences of orphans in Russia.

These 60,000-70, 000 of orphaned children are not mere numbers; these are real people with their own stories and histories. Yet, their stories were rarely heard or known to the general public. At best, their stories were fragmentally captured by mass media, academics or international agencies. In their views, Russian contemporary orphans were depicted as one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The numerous studies documented that children placed within the system of orphan care often go through the numerous challenges such as physical and psychological violence, and lack of individual attention and support (Creuziger, 1997; Fujimura, Stoecker & Sudakova, 2005; Glazkova, 2006; Astoiants, 2007). These children also suffered under the plight of negative stereotypes as a few studies showed that Russian society tended to hold negative stereotypes about orphans and viewed them as poor, unhealthy, unintelligent, delinquent, and dirty (Kuznetsova, 2003). Such depictions were primarily sustained through political and mass media discourses (Astoiants, 2006; Kudasova, 2013).

By and large, such descriptions may account for a very brief overview of what it meant to be an orphan in Russia from academic and mass media perspectives. However, these overtly generalized descriptions did not reflect the depth of lived experiences by the children. The real stories, told in orphans' voices, were not commonly present in the realm of academia and mass media. Furthermore, the discussion on the role of education in orphans' lives was completely missing. Therefore, this study addressed the existing gap in literature and presented orphans'

lived experiences of institutionalization and transition from institutional care, exploring the ways in which orphans made sense of the role of their educational experiences in shaping their life trajectories from childhood to adulthood. Guided by narrative-inquiry approach, the theories of social mobility and stratification as well as theories of cultural and social capitals, this research answered the following questions:

- What are orphans' lives and educational experiences during the transition from childhood to adulthood in post-Soviet Russia? How have these life and educational experiences been shaped within the broader political, economic, social, and cultural contexts?
- How do orphans make sense of their educational experiences in the context of their complex life trajectories? How do they view the role of education in their lives?

To answer these research questions, the narrative inquiry method was used. The narrative inquiry is a widely used qualitative method in the fields of sociology, psychology, as well as education to specifically document and make meaning of one's life experiences. A number of interviews with orphanage graduates were conducted and their personal profiles on social media, photos, and other artifacts of their past and present lives were examined to gain a better understanding of their experiences. The purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit six study participants. The researcher identified three study participants through the social media platforms such as Facebook and Vkontakte. The other three orphanage graduates were introduced through the pool of friends and acquaintances. The study participants resided in different geographic locations: Moscow, Moscow region, Saint Petersburg, Tomsk, and Krasnoyarsk. All of the participants graduated from the orphanages after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Two of them were raised in a regular orphanage while others were raised in orphanages for children with special needs. I met with participants several times for in-depth

face-to-face interviews and via Skype from November, 2016 – November, 2017. However, I knew some of the participants for as long as four years.

This dissertation, therefore, takes a reader into a journey of exploring the nature of orphanhood in Russia. It provides a unique opportunity to feel, sense, and understand orphans' experiences of life and education. The voices represent powerful stories that fascinate and appall, give hope and leave you hopeless, make you smile and make you cry. It invites readers to become independent co-researchers, to think with the stories and engage in cross-disciplinary discussion and analysis together with the participants and the researcher.

In Chapter I, I present a background and context for the study. I offer a detailed historical overview of orphanhood in Russia beginning from 1706 till present day to provide a more holistic view on the research topic. In Chapter II, I summarize literature review on orphanhood globally and in Russia, followed by a theoretical framework developed for this dissertation. In particular, I present a short synopsis of the literature that focuses on the issues of orphanhood and orphans' education globally and discuss some of the key theories, methodologies, and findings. In Chapter III, I deliberate in detail the proposed methodology and describe the sample, data collection, analysis, and present limitations. In Chapter IV, the stories of six orphanage graduates are presented. These stories are central to the research study - they represent independent findings, valuable on their own, inviting readers not only to understand the narratives, but also to develop personal reactions to them. Chapter V outlines the researchers' interpretation, analysis, and discussion of the life and educational experiences of orphans. This chapter represents, complimentary, yet enriching discussion of the narratives. It elaborates on four major universal milestones that orphans' go through from their childhood to adulthood: (1) children's experiences prior to the orphanage; (2) life and educational experiences at the

orphanage; (3) transition into adult life; and (4) adult life. Some common themes and key findings are analyzed and presented within each of the section. The concluding Chapter VI summarizes all the major findings and conclusions, and discusses implications and future research.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the nature of orphanhood in Russia in three major ways. First, it provides distinctly unique and elaborate accounts of orphans' life and educational experiences during their transition from childhood to adulthood in post-Soviet Russia. The close involvement of the participants throughout the process of data collection and interpretation permitted to significantly reduce the researcher's biases, and straightforwardly engage with the orphans' stories firsthand, opening up space for multiple readings and interpretations. Given that orphanages largely represented closed systems, the narratives broke through the secrecy of institutions and brought more clarity on orphans' experiences of their lives and education.

Second, the scope of the research allowed to recreate a more holistic picture on the nature of orphanhood in Russia as orphans' experiences are presented from their childhood to adulthood. Such an approach placed a phenomenon of orphanhood into a dynamic perspective, tracing various developments over time and space, observing the interconnectedness of experiences, of life and education, in particular. Structural factors, life and educational strategies, motives, internal processes, as well as external influences were discussed and analyzed, providing one of the most detailed and up-to-date analysis of orphanhood in Russia. In addition, it uniquely highlights two themes that have been largely missing from previous studies and mass media accounts, namely (1) the existence of alternative agendas and subversive agents within the

system of orphan care; (2) wide-ranging and encompassing orphans' resistance and resilience to the system.

Lastly, the study makes an important contribution to the field of Comparative and International Education as it addresses a huge gap in the literature related to educational experiences of orphans in Russia and the role of education. In fact, this study is one of the first attempts to understand and examine the topic of orphans' education. The research, therefore, describes in detail orphans' educational experiences, and, importantly, it makes significant theoretical contributions by proposing the ideas of imagined family capital, pedagogy of violence, and education *dlya galochki* (for the sake of appearance). Overall, this research was conducted with an intention to engage a group of researchers, practitioners, government officials, NGOs and international organizations to mobilize and change the system of orphanhood in Russia once and for all.

Chapter I.

History of Orphanhood in Russia (1706-2016)

To gain a richer understanding of lived experiences of contemporary orphans, I believed it was important to provide a historical overview of orphan care in Russia as well as to discuss the changing role of education within particular historical period. It should be noted that this historical overview was an adopted version of my Master thesis (Kudasova, 2013).

I divided the history of orphanhood into four main periods: prerevolutionary Russia (1706-1900); revolutionary Russia (1914-1930); Soviet Russia (1941-1956); and post-Soviet Russia (1991-2012). The latter three periods were often named as three waves of orphanhood in Russia, as each of the periods indicated a major political shift or historical event, such as World War I, the Civil War, World War II, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. All these events resulted in a large number of orphaned children. To note, some of the researchers drew a line between the period of 1914-1917, and 1920-1930 and named them as two separate waves of orphanhood. Yet, in my understanding, the gap between the two periods was insignificant; thus, I preferred to combine the period of the World War I and Civil War into one. The indicated years were used to draw symbolic distinctions between the periods rather than to signify the established historical boundaries. The historical background on orphanhood in Russia was presented based on the scholarship of Ball (1992), Fujimura et al. (2005), Green (2006), Minchella (2008), Pantiukhina (2009), Creuziger (1997), Ezhova and Porezkina (2004), Markova (2011), Nazarova (2001) and others.

Prerevolutionary Russia: Genesis of the First Shelter

The first shelter for "babies born of shame" (children who were born outside of marriage) was founded in 1706 in the Kholmovo-Uспенkii Monastery near Novgorod (Pantiukhina, 2009).

Such necessity arose out of the ghastly trend of mothers abandoning and even killing their "illegitimate" children, children born outside the wedlock. Society placed a strong stigma on individuals who had "illegal" intimate relations that resulted in pregnancy. In response to this problem, Tsar Peter I (1672-1725) established hospitals to care for the foundlings (Fujimura et al., 2005).

In 1763, Betskii, under the rule of Catherine II (1762-1796), proposed an establishment of an educational type of institution - *vospitatel'niy dom* (a childcare home or a home for children's upbringing). Such homes were open for children who were born outside the marriage, and those abandoned by their parents (Pantiukhina, 2009). The institutions were privately run and not controlled by the government. Their main functions were food and shelter provisions, as well as trade education. Education was one of the primary goals since these measures were aimed to integrate marginalized and abandoned children into society. Despite good intentions, such homes were often lacking material and financial support and had poor hygiene, resulting in a high rate of mortality. Historian David Ransel noted that in 1764 about eighty-one percent of children who lived in those childcare homes died, and in 1767 percent increased up to ninety-nine percent (as cited in Minchella, 2008).

Minchella (2008), however, stated that there was a tendency to adopt orphans in prerevolutionary Russia. In most cases, relatives or extended family members adopted an orphaned child when the biological parents were unable to take care of them anymore. The main reasons for adoption were to secure a male heir in the families that had no children or only daughters, or as a mean of acquiring an additional worker in the family. Thus, the preferences in adoption were given to males of older age, while the younger children were considered as a burden to a family, since they could not contribute much to households. The adoption was more encouraged within peasant and merchant families compared to clergy. Interestingly enough,

adoption was also a means of making an illegitimate child stay with biological parents. Already at that time the act of adoption was kept confidential and families did not want to disclose it.

With regard to orphans' education at that period little was made known. From the studied sources it might be implied that education was not part of the discussion at the time. The institutions were mainly tailored towards orphans' upbringing as peasants and workers and not as intelligent elites.

Revolutionary Russia: The Establishment of the First System of Orphan Care

The period of 1914-1930 was marked as a time of sorrow and chaos, since the nation continuously faced such dramatic events as World War I, the October Revolution, and several waves of famine. World War I destabilized the country, forcing a huge male population to leave their homes to defend the motherland. As a result, female-headed households were struggling to get any sort of provision for their children. In addition, the government was organizing a massive evacuation of people from the war-zones to safe places. The process of evacuation was chaotic and spontaneous, with a poor system of tracking who had been evacuated and where they had relocated. The war took a countless number of lives in combat zones, others died from hunger and various diseases. Millions of children were left without any support, devastated by the loss of their parents, the war, violence, and the hunger.

Huge masses were moving to regions in the Russian Far East (near Ural or Volga river) to secure food and safety. The government's response to this critical situation was insufficient and ineffective, but quite understandable considering the hardship that the country faced. The officials tried to organize shelters for refugees, including children. Yet, such shelters lacked financial support from the state, and overcrowding was a common problem in such

boardinghouses. Children were often rejected, thus having no other choice, but to resort to a street life.

The Civil War and October Revolution of 1917 added further burden to the country that had not yet time to recover from its previous wounds. The bloodshed and hardship continued, along with an increase in the number of orphaned children. As Ball (1992) expressed, "No spectacle in Soviet cities more troubled Russian and foreign observers during the 1920s than the millions of orphaned and abandoned children known as *besprizornye*" (p. 247). According to the state archives, by the beginning of 1920, there were approximately 28,000 homeless children in the Kuban' region alone and another 30,000 in Siberia (as cited in Ball, 1992). Economic and social instability forced thousands of *besprizorniki* to join the ranks of thieves and prostitutes, and to commit various petty crimes in order to make a living.

In 1921, the situation had worsened since the horrific famine covered the regions along the Volga river from the Chuvash Autonomous Region and the Tatar Republic through Simbirsk, Samara, Saratov and Tsaritsyn provinces to Astrakhan' and further to Viatka province, Cheliabinsk and the Bashkir and Kirghiz Republics, including Orenburg, Ufa and Perm' provinces, and some parts of Ukraine (Ball, 1992). The famine affected children and families in various ways. First, the famine took away millions of lives and many people died from hunger. Furthermore, government food supply programs favored youth over the adults, thus allowing children to observe their parents slowly fading away from malnutrition. In addition, poverty, lack of financial aid and food supplies forced families to abandon their children in order to survive. Families hoped that the government would help their abandoned children. Overall, the revolution, civil war, and famine resulted in leaving between 4 to 7.5 million children orphaned (Ball as cited in Minchella, 2008, p. 19). Given the high rate of reported criminal activities

among orphans during this time, the Soviet state began to directly associate orphans with delinquency and criminal behavior.

The rising number of orphans along with the increasing rate of juvenile delinquency forced the state to strengthen the policies around orphan care. As such, the government established a Ministry of Social Assistance, which developed the first system for the protection of orphans on a state level (Zezina, 2001). The ministry was responsible for helping and supporting homeless, abandoned, and orphaned children. The approach that the officials undertook in addressing the issues of orphanhood was mainly based on Marxist traditions. For example, the Soviet government was willing to demolish family as a unit, and shift the role of child upbringing from families to the state. Public policies were in favor of placing children within foster and boarding institutions, while, abolishing adoption. The state wanted to raise a generation within socialist traditions and strongly promoted such ideology within the institutions of orphan care.

During 1920-1926, different public figures, educationalists, and writers (such A.V. Lunacharskii, N.K. Krupskaja, A.S. Makarenko, and M.N. Pokrovskii) began to discuss various forms of proper upbringing and education of children, focusing on the collective, labor, or the individual. However, the Soviet government soon realized that the goal of the state replacing the need for families in the process of child's upbringing was too ambitious. In 1926, the government passed a law that encouraged and allowed adoption. However, according to Minchella (2008), this law did little to secure the lives of orphans. Most of the families were struggling to get enough provision, food, and supplies for themselves, thus, they were generally not able to take additional responsibility for taking care of an orphan child. As a result, orphaned children stayed in orphanages or shelters, returned to the streets, or tried their luck in the labor

market. Each of their options was full of challenges. The shelters continued to possess a poor level of hygiene, had limited provision available, and were overcrowded. To find a job was also not an easy task. As Ball (1992) explained,

First, the unemployment rate among teenagers remained high after the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. NEP itself bore some of the responsibility for this because it required state enterprises to operate profitably. Stirred by the new discipline, these establishments often cut expenses by dismissing staff-with women and adolescents representing a disproportionate number of the layoffs. In many types of production, labor laws stipulated that juveniles work fewer hours per day than adults, with lower output norms but at the same wage scale as their older coworkers. Moreover, the preceding years' turmoil deprived youths of adequate schooling and labor training and thus of qualifications needed to compete for jobs. (p. 266)

In this way children were being abandoned by almost everyone – the family, the state, employers – and had practically no other option, but to join street gangs and make living by stealing or doing other illegal activities. Given the fact that the number of children roaming the streets was high, the government and the public started to apply a new term to the street and orphaned children - *beznadzorniki* (left without control or abandoned). Consequently, the list of terms used to describe children who were left without parental support due to their death or abandonment expanded to include such terms as *besprizorniki*, *besnadzorniki*, *homeless*, *street children*, and *orphans*.

In the later decade, the situation more or less stabilized and the trend of *besprizorniki* declined. The official government continued to set ambitious goals, aiming to end *besprizornost* (street, abandoned children) by 1931. Meanwhile, a report from the Children's Commission

showed that about 7,000 to 8,000 *besprizornikov* were registered in the train stations and other public places during 1928-1929 (Ball, 1992). In addition, many researchers believed that the number of abandoned and street children declined because many of them died not being able to make a proper living or obtain food, shelter, or healthcare.

While, one can see that during this period discussion about orphans' education started to emerge, the history of orphanhood did not end here. Unfortunately, World War II caused a second wave of neglected and abandoned children in Russia, thus, calling the society to address some old and new challenges.

Soviet Russia: Orphans - Children of the State?

World War II brought countless deaths and family break ups, resulting in another dramatic increase of orphans in Russia. While the exact number of orphans was uncertain, some statistics suggested that there were about 700,000 children placed in orphanages and 400,000 with families under foster care or adoption by 1947 (Green, 2006). The government responded to the situation by issuing two decrees in 1942-1943 "On the Placement of Children Who Have Been Bereft of Parents" and "On Strengthening Measures to Combat Children's Homelessness, Lack of Supervision, and Hooliganism." These decrees aimed to eliminate homelessness among children by placing them in families or in orphanages, as well as to establish special governmental bodies to address the issue (Zezina, 2001). Based on these documents, special committees were created, which were directly responsible for placing orphans within families (preferably), finding jobs, or assigning them to the orphanages. Furthermore, various ministries were monitoring and controlling the situation, such as ministries of education (the children's homes), healthcare (orphanages and children's homes of the hospital type for the handicapped), labor reserves (trade schools and factory training schools), and internal affairs (children's rooms,

colonies) (Zezina, 2001). The government established special centers that worked towards finding families for children who were separated during the wartime relocations. In addition, internal affairs established children's rooms in railway stations, river ports, and other public places in order to track homeless children and place them into orphanages.

During this period, government funding of orphanages was negligent, thus, the childcare institutions were responsible for self-sustainment through cultivation of gardens and livestock. Meanwhile, various public organizations were encouraged to help orphanages and almost every orphanage was sponsored by *Komsomol* (youth communist party), professional and labor unions, or *kolhozy* (villages). Some orphanages received real help, while others had a sponsor only on the paper. The success in finding provision was largely dependent on the motivation and professional skills of their directors, who had to use their creativity and entrepreneurial skills to get adequate provision for children. Since the country was already economically and socially devastated, mobilizing the necessary resources and funding was a tough mission to accomplish. As reported by many investigators, orphanages were in very poor conditions, with no food, heat, clothes, and supplies. The staff was paid poorly and their salaries were insufficient to sustain their own families. As a result, the food that was aimed for orphans was often stolen by administration – a fact that was repeatedly reported by various investigation commissions all over the country.

Post-Soviet Russia: Emergence of Social Orphans

This section represents summary of a literature review on orphans in post-Soviet Russia. It should be noted that the stories collected as a part of this dissertation research have partly confirmed the findings from existing literature, yet some facts became debatable. Thus, as will

be illustrated later in the dissertation, the life stories of Russian orphans have greatly enriched our understanding about what it means to live in an orphanage in post-Soviet Russia.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the number of orphans had reached the number of World War II, which was about 700,000 orphans. With such a high number of abandoned children, the Russian government continued to develop programs and policies concerned with orphanhood. The post-Soviet period was marked by a wide range of changes in forms of care and adoption policies. Currently, there are two main mechanisms that could place a child into an orphanage. The first mechanism activates when parents decide to abandon their children (in most of the cases this happens right after the birth of a child); and, second, when parental rights are terminated by a special Guardianship Committee, which consists of several inspectors who monitor families at risk and investigate the living conditions of children. The Guardianship Committee has the right to appeal to the court in order to terminate parental rights. If the trial is initiated, a child is placed into a provisional shelter, where he or she can stay until the decision will be made: the court might make a decision to return the child to his or her biological parents, which in 2005 constituted 70.6 percent of the cases (Schmidt, 2009). In an opposite sequence of events, the child would be relocated to an orphanage.

The main responsible governmental bodies that supervise the system of orphanhood in contemporary Russia include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Science and Education. The Ministry of Health monitors infants' homes (orphanages for abandoned babies under the age of three, and care institutions for children with multiple disorders); and the Ministry of Education oversees orphanages for children aged four to eighteen years old. Thus, the main emphasis of work with orphans under the age of three is healthcare; while the education and upbringing is the priority in work with orphans above the age of three.

Other developments in the area of orphan care resulted from international cooperation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the borders were opened up and numerous international scholars, officials, and just ordinary people were able to visit Russia. For the first time in history, already in the early 1990s the Russian government allowed foreign parents to adopt Russian children. In addition to foreign adoptions, international cooperation resulted in the development of an alternative to a traditional system of institutionalized care, including a growing emphasis on family placements or foster care (see Figure 1 below).

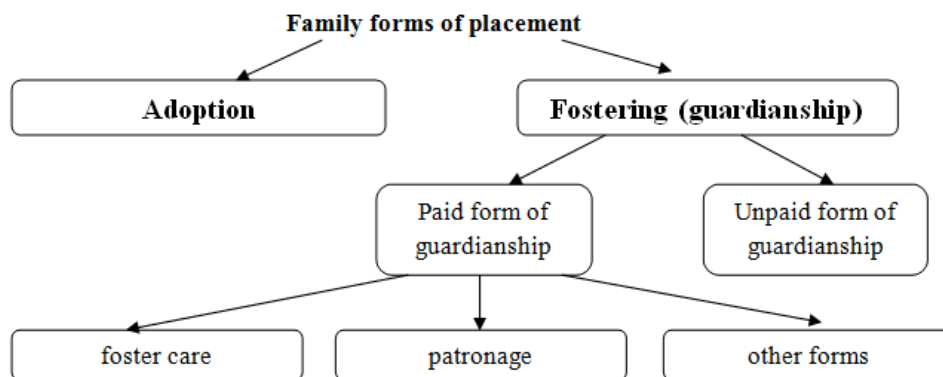


Figure 1. Family forms of placement of orphans in Russia. The illustration shows different forms of family placement of orphans in Russia. State Data Bank on Orphans in Russia (2016), translation by author.

In 2016, the main form of family placement was found to be unpaid guardianship (constituting 51 percent of all cases), paid guardianship (36.6 percent of the cases), adoption by Russian families (10 percent), and foreign adoption (1,6 percent) (State Data Bank on Orphans in Russia, 2016). It is important to mention that children of a younger age, under the age of three, had a greater chance of being adopted by a family; while older children and children with disabilities had the least chances to secure a family.

Each of the form of placement had its own benefits and drawbacks. For instance, in the case of family placement, there were many incidents when an adopted child was returned back to

the orphanage. Even though there was no official statistics found on the exact number of such cases, this fact was broadly discussed on TV, newspapers, and in academia. One of the main reasons for parents to return children was believed to be the absence of proper training for adoptive families. Families often felt unprepared for adoption and unaware of the possible challenges associated with it.

The paid forms of family placement were also criticized by the general public for two reasons. The first reason revolved around the suspicion for the motives to adopt/foster a child. The public questioned whether the main motive for foster care was a child's wellbeing or the financial benefit. As Markova explained (2011), "Unfortunately, monetary payments as an incentive can play a negative role. In a number of depressed regions, upbringing for orphaned children has become an industry that constitutes the only source of income possible" (p. 91). Another criticism alluded to "discrimination" against low-income families with biological children over the families who were willing to adopt an orphan. To clarify the point, people found it unfair that the government was ready to finance families who were ready to foster an orphan, while at the same time not providing equal support to low-income families with biological children.

Despite developments in family forms of placements, the traditional form of an orphan care, namely orphanage (state-funded educational institution, where children live until their age of majority) remained. Such traditional institutions were being widely criticized for their neglect of children, non-stimulating environment, and a closed nature of the institution. For example, Astoians (2007) compared the Russian system of orphanages with Erving Goffman's concept of total institutions, referring to isolated social institutions in which the lives of its participants were

controlled and monitored.² Similarly, Nazarova (2001) compared Russian orphanages with the concept of a "disciplinary society" developed by Michel Foucault:

The system of orphanages in Russia reflects Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary society. Children are isolated and supervised on several levels: in the orphanage itself, and in hospitals, including the mental health hospitals. The latter is often used as a mean to punish orphans for inappropriate behavior. (Translation by author, p. 71)

To be more specific, the daily routine in an orphanage was subject to a strict discipline and regime. Astoians (2007) described how orphans lived under a strictly prescribed regime, in an environment where nothing belonged to them individually, but everything was rather collective. As a consequence, orphans did not value the property, and expressed carefree attitude towards the collective belongings. The stories confirmed these previous findings, yet they added a great number of details illustrating the scope, intensity, and diversity of processes taking place within the system of orphan care.

Along these lines, the orphanage system was often held responsible for promoting passivity and dependency among its inhabitants (Shakhmanova, 2010). Distinctively, the literature described children in orphanages as passive recipients who were not allowed to perform the daily duties, integral to a family routine, such as cooking, cleaning, buying groceries, and paying for utilities. As this dissertation will illustrate, orphans' life stories partly refute this claim as many interviewed children were forced to clean the orphanage territory, wash their clothes, and help in the kitchen. Also, many did not face any difficulties performing these duties in their adult lives (however, the experiences varied).

² For the sake of comparison, Erving Goffman was mainly applying the concept of total institutions to prisons, mental health institutions, and monasteries.

Furthermore, the academic literature devoted special attention to the problem of diagnosing orphans as mentally retarded (Cherkasov, 2004; Glazkova, 2006; Cox, 1997; Rusinova, 2006; Fujimura et al., 2005; Parfitt, 2003). First, in a very compelling study, Glazkova (2006) accused orphanages of misdiagnosing children to get additional funding from the government by serving "mentally ill" children. She also blamed the staff – comparing them to criminal groups – who forced orphans to sign papers before the graduation stating that they (orphans) expressed their wish to live in the mental health institution after they graduate from the orphanage. The staff motives were seemingly to take away the apartment, which was the property of an orphan by allocating them into the mental health institution. Allegedly, the personnel was trying to convince orphans that life in the mental health institution was very favorable since the institution provided all the services, and children will not have to worry about anything. After all, children were not aware that in the institution they would be assigned one pair of shoes and one pair of clothes for a couple of years; they would share the room with others for the rest of their lives; and they would not have almost any opportunity to get married and have their own families (since it is strongly discouraged and almost banned in such institutions). Children were also misinformed about the fact that the prospective employer would not be willing to employ someone whose residential address is a mental health institution.

Second, orphans were being tested at an early age on their intellectual abilities while not being exposed to any sort of educational programs in the infants' homes. The results from the tests were used to place a child into an "appropriate" institution, corresponding to orphan's needs and development. As a result of such a fraud system of placement, many children were misdiagnosed and placed into institutions with minimal educational opportunities. The academic literature described four different types of institutions that served orphans with "visual

impairment; audio impairment; movement deprivation; speech development defect; the defect of cognitive sphere; the complex defect of mental development” (Schmidt, 2009). The last two categories were considered the most serious, as they often placed orphans within the category of "uneducable," thus, providing no education at all. The graduates of such institutions were described as a highly marginalized group who had no hope of obtaining education or finding a job. Such children were believed to be dependent on the mental health or other social institutions for the rest of their lives. In this research study, a story of Evgeny well illustrated the realities of being raised in such an institution with no education. However, despite previous findings, Evgeny’s story showed that graduates of such institutions did have a few opportunities to study and work.

Next, the existing studies of the lives of orphanage graduates showed that, in general, their ability to socialize and communicate with the society was greatly suppressed due to the isolated nature of the orphanage (Prisyazhnaya, 2007). Also, Glazkova (2006) described cases when the orphanage graduates became victims of “black realtors” or other criminal groups that forcibly took away orphans' apartments or convinced them to participate in illegal activities, including prostitution and theft. In such situations, orphans were usually unable to obtain any help and did not know how to act in such extreme situations. My study partly confirmed these findings, however it also demonstrated the cases of orphans’ active resilience and activism as opposed to passive victimhood.

Lastly, Nazarova (2006) conducted a research on the post-graduate life of the orphans. She conducted a number of interviews with the orphanage graduates in which she asked children to depict examples of a successful life. Interestingly, most of the respondents mentioned a job, an apartment, a car, and a family as symbols of a favorable life. From her study, Nazarova (2006)

concluded that not many orphans were lucky to have such a life, indeed, only a few: orphans mentioned that many of their peers were imprisoned or had started to abuse alcohol or use drugs, and many of the graduates expressed a wish to return back to the orphanage to be under the institutionalized care again.

Although the academic literature identified a number of drawbacks in the system of orphan care in post-Soviet Russia, there were positive sides as well. One of them was a significant financial support from the government to sustain the system of orphan care. Certainly, it was for the first time in the history of orphanhood in Russia that orphanages started to receive sufficient funding. The positive change can be attributed to the stabilization of a Russian economy that was seriously challenged during the past century. In 2016, GDP in Russia was estimated to be \$3.577 trillion US dollars, placing Russian economy number seven in the global arena (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). Even though there was no official data found on how much the Russian government spends per orphan, the number, which was announced by government officials in the mass media, was impressive. For example, Pavel Astahov, Children's Rights Commissioner for the President of the Russian Federation, in the interview on radio *EHO Moskvy* mentioned that some of regions, such as Krasnoyarskiy kray spends nearly two million rubles per year per orphan (which is approximately \$30,000 US dollars a year). In comparison, the average monthly salary in Russia constitutes 27,340 rubles, which is equal to about \$400 US dollars (ROSSTAT, 2013). The announced amount of money allocated to orphans created a space for intense public discussions and debates. For instance, in one of the message forums on the website of *EHO Moskvij* people were very surprised and even shocked by this declaration:

Those children should live in luxury. Can you imagine...TWO MILLION a year per an orphan. Those funds could have gone to the families, and should be paid to foster parents in the amount of 170 thousand rubles per month. People would fight to take children from the orphanages. (Forum *EHO Moskvy*, translation by author)

Others were very skeptical about two million allocated per orphan, expressing a concern that money did not reach the recipients and was being pocketed at different administrative levels. Some individuals witnessed that orphans did not have everything they needed, such as appropriate clothes for various activities, such as sports and hiking. Current research identified some cases of theft by orphanage staff, but it also confirmed gradual improvement of funding and conditions of the institutions.

In addition to funding, social services for orphans expanded. For instance, orphans are now eligible for receiving monthly subsidies, have the right of obtaining a higher education (even though only very small percent are using this privilege), have the right to get an apartment after reaching eighteen years old, and have access to a range of other services such as discounted rate for utilities, medical treatment, and so on. In other words, Russia has a very good foundation for effectively addressing the issues of orphanhood. It has appropriate financial resources and legal mechanisms of orphan protection and care, so what is setting the system back?

Chapter II.

Orphanhood and Education Globally:

Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

To place the research topic within international context, I reviewed and discussed orphans' lived experiences and their education from global and theoretical perspectives. My attempts to identify studies that specifically addressed education/educational experiences of orphans in Russia showed a scarcity of information. Only one study discussed agricultural education as a way to provide social security to Russian orphans (Pichugina, 1996). The author acknowledged that many orphans faced unemployment after they left their orphanages and as the solution she suggested to train orphans in agriculture. In her words, "Agricultural occupations can be the most attractive because the profession of the farmer has become prestigious" (Pichugina, 1996, p. 189). This statement shows certain biases as agriculture is not a prestigious profession in post-Soviet Russia, and it seems unfair to tie all orphans' fate with agriculture. Apart from this study, however, the question of orphans' education has been only partly discussed in the scholarship, more as a background and not as a research topic.

Compared to Russian context, the international scholarship on orphanhood entails a relatively large pool of literature centered around the issues of educational access and quality of education of orphans. I identified and reviewed twenty-eight articles published between 2003-2015 that specifically addressed the topics related to orphans and their education. I looked at Google Scholar and ProQuest databases using the key words: orphans' education, orphanhood, lived experiences.

It is important to highlight that most research has focused on Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Niger,

Swaziland, Uganda, and South Africa (n=25), and only two publications were about Cambodia and one on Ukraine. It should be noted that the review was not exhausting as the purpose was to get a general synopsis on the topic.

The high number of publications on Sub-Saharan Africa may be partly explained by the popular global rhetoric of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that places extra responsibility on developing countries to provide basic provisions to their citizens, including access to quality education. It is not surprising that vulnerable groups of children, in this case orphans, become at the forefront of policy discussions and research agendas. In fact, Sub-Saharan Africa is home to about third of the world orphan population (about 53 million according to UNICEF, 2016). The causes of orphanhood vary from armed conflicts to HIV/AIDs epidemics that took lives of millions of people. The complexity of the existing situation has raised a genuine interest among researchers to study the impact of orphanhood on children's educational opportunities and outcomes from various theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Among the literature reviewed, fourteen sources used quantitative methods (e.g. linear regression analysis, logistic regression, univariate and multivariate analysis, etc.), nine used qualitative methods (e.g. interviews, observations, ethnography, narrative research, etc.), two used mixed methods, two represented policy and literature review papers, and one was not clear on its methodology. With regard to theoretical discussions, human capital was one of the popular theoretical frameworks. Several studies referred to it both explicitly and implicitly as they approached the question of access and quality of education of orphans in relation to labor outcomes and country's economic development (Bhargava & Bigombe, 2003; Bicego, Rutstein, & Johnson, 2003; Evans & Miguel, 2007; Shetty & Powell, 2003). Two studies referred to the

theories of orphan care that demonstrated how the extended family may or may not provide needed support for orphans (Abebe & Aase, 2007; Harms, Jack, Ssebunnya, & Kizza, 2010). Korzh (2013) framed her research in Bourdieu's theories of cultural, social, and economic and capital. Study of Case et al., (2004), attempted to explain educational outcomes of orphans using Hamilton's rule that predicted that closer ties between the orphans and their foster parents would lead to better outcomes. Most of the studies either did not explicitly framed their research or refused to use any theory.

Among the most popular research topics and themes were orphans' school enrolment, academic achievement, and dropout rates (Bennell, 2005; Case et al., 2004; Evans & Miguel, 2007; Mishra, Arnold, Otieno, Cross, & Hong, 2007; Operario, Cluver, Rees, MacPhail, & Pettifor, 2008). The common findings illustrate the following:

- Compared to non-orphans, the enrolment rates of orphans are lower and the dropout rates are higher (Bennell, 2005; Bicego et al., 2003; Case et al., 2004; Mishra et al., 2007; Operario et al., 2008). Only one study found no statistical difference in education, health, and labor related outcomes between orphans and non-orphans (Parikh et al., 2007).
- The death of a mother had a stronger negative impact on educational attainment compared to the death of a father (Bicego et al., 2003; Evans & Miguel, 2007; C. A. Nyamukapa, Foster, & Gregson, 2003; C. Nyamukapa & Gregson, 2005).
- Girl-orphans were more likely to complete schools compared to boy-orphans (C. A. Nyamukapa et al., 2003; C. Nyamukapa & Gregson, 2005).
- Among some of the factors that influenced school enrolment and dropout rates were (1) low family SES as orphans often took a responsibility of securing provision for him/herself and siblings; (2) lack of support from home or foster families; (3) bullying

and stigma of being an orphan, especially coupled with HIV/AIDS status; and (4) emotional trauma (Bhargava & Bigombe, 2003; Case et al., 2004; Emond, 2009; Harms et al., 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2012; Poulsen, 2006; Robson & Sylvester, 2007; Shetty & Powell, 2003; Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, Wright, & Hoffmann, 2010).

These findings reflect quite an alarming state of orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, most of the conclusions mentioned above are drawn from quantitative data, thus, the individual stories and educational experiences may vary. Therefore, I discuss further qualitative studies that specifically attempted to document and understand orphans' life and educational experiences. For example, Masondo (2006) examined the experiences of orphans living in child-headed households. The researcher intentionally refused to frame the study within a particular theoretical framework and undertook a phenomenological approach. The sample consisted of eight children who were heads of the households in Bronkhorstspuit, a city in South Africa. The researcher interviewed and observed children in their households. Then, interviews and observations data were categorized into themes. The findings revealed that these children faced numerous challenges such as poverty, psychological and emotional problems, lack of access to social services and information. Furthermore, these children often gave up on their education as they decided to take on an adult-role of a family provider. While this research took a more nuanced approach and allowed readers to understand orphans' experiences in a greater detail, the picture was not holistic but rather fragmented. The findings were presented as themes with a number of quotes illustrating the actual living experiences, making it challenging to see a holistic individual and his/her experience behind the quotes.

In another study by Harms et al. (2010), the scholars documented the experiences of young people in Uganda who lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS. The purposeful sample

consisted of thirteen participants with eight females and three males. Six of them were HIV-positive and the other six were HIV-negative. The status of one person remained unknown. The researchers conducted 90-120 minutes interviews with each of the participants and wrote field notes at the end of the interviews. When the data was gathered, the qualitative content analysis was performed to draw the conclusions. The findings were similarly presented as commonly identified themes. For example, the participants talked about their orphanhood experiences as the end of their childhood and disclosed the challenges they faced. The children noted the conflicts with their extended families and communities after losing parents due to HIV/AIDS. The orphans also shared experiences of stigmatization.

An interesting approach was taken by Ogine and Neiuwenhuis (2010), who explored the lived experiences of orphans as learners at schools. The study examined how teachers managed the educational needs of orphans. It focused on primarily describing the methodology rather than presenting the findings from the study. The researchers appealed to the draw-and-write narrative method. Their sample consisted of twelve children between 10-17 years old who lived in Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. The researchers asked children to draw pictures of their lives and schooling experiences and asked to explain them through stories. The researchers argued that their method provided insights into the lived experiences and made it more comfortable for children to share their stories. While I agree with their views, I believe this approach might not be suitable for everyone as not everyone is comfortable with drawing.

In a study by Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al. (2010), the researchers documented the mental health challenges and issues that adolescents faced after losing their parents to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Their sample consisted of fifteen adolescents between the ages 14 to 18. The participants were asked to write weekly diary entries for seven months. At the end only eight

participants shared their diaries while others did not. The researchers identified the following emotional issues through the diaries: discrimination and stigmatization, anger, anxiety, denial, hope, and guilt. Children described their experiences at school as well as their foster families. These findings were similarly grouped and discussed within particular themes. The scholars argued, “Exhaustive descriptions lent themselves to the discovery of the lived experiences of orphaned to HIV and AIDS” (Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al., 2010, p. 011). However, the exhaustive descriptions were largely missing for the reader and only short summaries of the findings were offered instead. In part, it is understandable given the word limitations that the journal places on publications. Hence, only the researchers had a privilege to access detailed transcripts about the lived experiences of orphans.

Another study by Loubser & Muller (2011) described the experiences of seven male adolescents who lost their parents to HIV and AIDS. The scholars used post-foundational practical theology and narrative therapy method to explore participants’ view and relationship with God and how these views affected orphans’ past and future narratives (Loubser & Muller, 2011). What was interesting about this study is that all seven participants were invited to be co-researchers who were constantly involved in data production, collection, and interpretation. I believe such an approach increased the validity and reliability of the study as the participants were in control of meaning-making of their experiences themselves.

Korzh’s (2013) findings about inequalities that were confronting Ukrainian orphanage graduates with regard to their education and career opportunities seemed highly relevant to the current study, especially given that Ukraine and Russia share certain characteristics, including the legacy of the Soviet past. Korzh (2013) conducted an extensive multisite case study in two orphanages in Ukraine – urban and rural. In each of the orphanages, she sampled orphanage

youth in tenth and eleventh grades and through the series of in-and-out of the classroom observations as well as interviews, she investigated the quality of educational opportunities of orphans and their future educational aspirations. One of the interesting findings demonstrated that the great majority of orphans did not like to study at school, yet they were all very aspired to get post-secondary education and higher education. They viewed educational diplomas and certificates as vital in acquiring jobs and securing their future. Korzh (2013) also documented that the youth at the orphanages were offered low quality of education that largely limited their future educational opportunities. Majority of orphanage graduates were pushed into the vocational schools that offered substandard education, thus, failing to prepare youth for the labor market opportunities. The graduates of vocational schools were offered a low-paid physical work that could not provide high quality of living.

Despite the fact that majority of youth in tenth and eleventh grades were motivated to get higher education, only a few managed to graduate from the university. These youth shared that they believed obtaining higher education would be sufficient for the future life and career, yet after completing the university they faced a serious constraint, namely they realized that social connections mattered more than a university diploma. They occasionally had to readapt and pursue job opportunities in non-related professional fields. In other words, possessing social capital (friends and acquaintances) was more important in securing job in Ukraine than accumulating cultural capital (diplomas and certificates).

All of the reviewed literature attempted to document and understand orphans' lived experiences. While all of the studies provided valuable and vital insights into what it meant to be an orphan in various contexts, the examined scholarships did not provide a reader with an opportunity to genuinely discover and understand orphans' experiences independently from the

researchers. For the most part, the stories of orphans were retold and thematically categorized for the reader. The quotes were the only glimpses of orphans' lives. Therefore, I attempted to document orphans' stories in a more holistic and elaborative way so that the readers may dive into the midst of the stories, feel and experience them, think along them and draw independent conclusions.

Theoretical Considerations

The major aim of the study was to document how orphans gave meaning to their educational experiences within the context of their complex life trajectories. Given that this topic was understudied, I preferred not to frame the study in any particular theory and begin the study with an open-mind. However, as argued by Sharan (2009), the theoretical framework was inevitably present in every qualitative study as it represented the lens, the body of literature that the researcher used to formulate research questions, to identify the gap in the literature and formulate the problem. Thus, to reduce the influence of the theories and my personal biases during the data collection and analysis stages, I utilized bracketing, a phenomenological technique that allowed to (1) openly disclose my personal views and assumptions prior to the study; (2) to put aside personal beliefs, allowing to experience the phenomenon under the study in potentially unpredictable ways (Sharan, 2009; Fischer, 2009).

In particular, my approach to the study was shaped by theories on social mobility and stratification as well as the theories of cultural and social capitals. In my view, these theories highlighted the underlying idea that education and educational experiences were not neutral in shaping human lives. Rather, education played an active role in predicting and even determining one's life trajectory. Further, I provide an overview of these theories.

Education, social mobility, and stratification. Various academic traditions view education as a stratifying mechanism. In classical terms, the stratifying power of education is viewed through the prism of functional and conflict theories.

Originated in the works of Emily Durkheim, the functional theory viewed the society as a living organism that maintains and organizes itself naturally according to its own needs. Within functionalists' realm, education served the purposes of preparing a labor force with the skills and knowledge that were in demand in the society. Durkheim (1956) debunked Kant's view of education as a way to develop individual to his or her highest potential by stating that, "We cannot and we must not all be devoted to the same kind of life; we have, according to our aptitudes, different functions to fulfill, and we must adapt ourselves to what we must do. We are not all made for reflection; there is need for men of feeling and of action" (p. 62). Thus, he underlined the idea that the society doesn't need everyone to be intellectuals but also needs workers, builders, and other professions. Accordingly, stratification within this view was functional and was deemed necessary for the society to maintain itself.

On the contrary, the conflict theory problematized this approach as it stated that stratification mechanisms were the result of the elite groups' agenda to maintain inequality so that they maintain their power (Weber, 1968). Education in this view became a mechanism for sorting people based more on a cultural code rather than technical function. The school became a space for passing certain cultural codes that may or may not be in line with the elite groups. As stated by Collins (1971), "The main activity of school is to teach particular status cultures, both in and outside the classroom. In this light, any failure of schools to impart technical knowledge is not important; schools primarily teach vocabulary and inflection, styles of dress, aesthetic tastes, values and manners" (p. 1010). Similarly to the cultural codes, Bowles (1976) introduced the

concept of reproduction of consciousness - “beliefs, values, self-concept, types of solidarity and fragmentation, as well as modes of personal behavior and development” that are being nurtured both in family and school, and which in the end lead to the reproduction of the larger class structure (p. 127). The scholar explicitly indicated that school institutions, “replicate the relationships of dominance and subordinancy in the economic sphere,” where “*the experience of schooling*, and not merely the content of formal learning is central” (emphasis added, p. 125).

These two approaches may, in short, characterize education as a just (functional) or unjust (conflict) system that has control over the individuals. While, my personal stance was more aligned with the conflict approach, it was of an interest to examine how the participants made sense of their educational experiences.

Cultural and social capitals. The study also referred to the theories of cultural and social capitals as they had the potential to explain life outcomes – occupation and social status. In particular, Bourdieu's (1973, 1986, 2000) theoretical work on cultural capital may bring an enhanced understanding of the socio-economic inequalities embedded in the Russian educational system and potentially explain unequal educational outcomes between children that were socialized in families, and those who spent their childhood within the walls of institutions, namely orphanages. Bourdieu (1986) broadly defined cultural capital as inherited and/or acquired array of attitudes, tastes, styles, preferences, ways of thinking, knowledge, goods and credentials. The cultural capital manifested itself in three distinct forms, namely the *embodied* state - in a "form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body;" the *objectified* state - in the form of cultural goods such as books, pictures, musical instruments, etc.; the *institutionalized* state - in the form of academic credentials (Bourdieu, 1986).

Due to the fact that cultural capital could not be transferred to an individual instantaneously and required time to be accumulated, Bourdieu emphasized the importance of early socialization in formation of the cultural capital or *habitus*, the system of dispositions learned through family socialization (Lamont & Lareau, 2010). *Habitus* derived from the unconscious internalization of external structures and codes (Swartz, 2012). Given that many children were initially socialized in the families struck by poverty or drug or alcohol addiction and then transferred into the system of orphan care, it was suggested that their socialization was drastically different from children who grow up in the families. It was one of the objectives of the study to conceptualize orphans' *habitus* seeking for ultimate understanding on how orphans saw and interacted with the educational system and the society at large - or using Bourdieu's term with the *fields*.

In short, field was defined as a structured system in which *habitus* operated (Grenfell & James, 1998). Field was a structured space for struggles between dominant and subordinate positions characterized by the type and amount of capital (Swartz, 2012). It was of a great interest to explore how orphans navigated throughout the schooling system - a field that strongly relied on parental involvement and carried expectations of children's family socialization. It was also worth investigating which strategies orphans choose to navigate through the field. Bourdieu (1986) suggested three strategies, namely conservation, succession, and subversion. Conservation strategies were commonly pursued by dominant groups; succession strategies were employed by those who wished to gain the entry ticket to the dominant positions; and subversion was the most radical strategy that could challenge the legitimacy of the dominant groups in their pursuit to define the field (Swartz, 2012).

One of Bourdieu's (1973) major arguments was that cultural capital transmitted in the family is further reproduced in schools, and it is mainly cultural capital that could explain the unequal educational outcomes. Given that orphans were likely to possess low amount of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1973) suggested that schools would anticipate their failure,

It follows from this that negative predispositions towards the school which result in self-elimination of most children from the most culturally unfavoured classes and sections of a class - such as self-depreciation, devaluation of the school and its sanctions, or a resigned attitude to failure and exclusion - must be understood as an anticipation, based upon the unconscious estimation of the objective probability of success possessed by the whole category, of the sanctions objectively reserved by the school for those classes or sections of a class deprived of cultural capital. (p. 83)

Such anticipation of failure translated into Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence - imposition of rules and power to disfavor one and privilege another. In this context, cultural capital was a powerful mechanism of exclusion. Bourdieu and Passeron distinguished four major types of exclusion: self-elimination, overselection, relegation and direct exclusion (Lamont & Lareau, 2010). Self-elimination often occurred when individuals feel uncomfortable in the settings they are culturally unfamiliar with. Overselection anticipated individuals with less cultural capital to compete on equal basis with those who were culturally privileged. In the case of relegation, individuals with lower cultural capital ended up having less prestigious positions mainly due to ill-informed, early or forced decisions (Lamont & Lareau, 2010). Direct exclusion was often employed on the basis of differences in taste. These exclusion mechanisms seemed to be highly relative to the study as they could potentially formulate and explain orphans' behavior and life choices in a given situation.

Apart from the cultural capital, I was interested in investigating the role of schools in expanding orphans' social capital. Despite various traditions of conceptualizing social capital (Bourdieu, Loury, Coleman), there was a general agreement in the literature to refer to social capital as, "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (Portes, 1998, p. 6). Given that orphans' interactions were often limited between the orphanage and school, school seemed to be the major (if not the only) place for orphans to expand their social networks. The importance of social capital was also acknowledged in the academic literature as it was found that social capital was a predictor of academic performance, employment and occupational attainment, delinquency and so forth (Portes, 1998). Therefore, social capital could be viewed as a powerful conceptual framework to enrich the understanding of both educational experiences of orphans and their chosen life trajectories.

Especially important for the study, I considered two premises of social capital. First premise was that interaction was the key to accumulate cultural capital (Coleman, 1988). In other words, social capital did not build on its own but rather depended on individuals' efforts to engage and develop relationship with others. Second, membership in a particular group (for example, street gangs) may have a negative impact on their members as they are abounded by certain norms and behaviors. The key questions to be considered, therefore, were the following: Did school offer the opportunities to expand social capital for orphans? Did orphans utilize or withdraw from these opportunities? Did membership in orphanages prevent orphans to expand their social network?

To conclude, I believed that theoretical premises of cultural and social capitals could greatly enrich our understanding of orphans' educational experiences, the social reproduction

embedded in the Russian educational system and provide deeper insights into current negative trends of orphanage graduates becoming alcohol, drug addicts or criminals.

Chapter III.

Methodology

To document orphans' life and educational experiences, I referred to qualitative research as it was found to be the most appropriate to explore individual experiences and alter their meanings. Using Sharan's (2009) words, "The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (emphasis added, p. 14). Among various approaches that qualitative research has, such as ethnography, phenomenology, qualitative case study, grounded theory, critical qualitative studies to name a few, I chose narrative research methodology to answer the following research questions:

- What are orphan's life and educational experiences during the transition from childhood to adulthood in post-Soviet Russia? How have these life and educational experiences been shaped within the broader political, economic, social, and cultural contexts?
- How do orphans make sense of their educational experiences in the context of their complex life trajectories? How do they view the role of education in their lives?

I chose the narrative research method because numerous scholars draw our attention that narratives are the primary channels to understand the experiences. For example, Clandinin (2006) once wrote, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2006, p. 51). Similarly, Conle (2000) stated that, "Human beings tell and listen to stories. We use narrative to communicate and understand people and events. We think and dream in narratives" (p. 50). Thus, the narrative research was based on the assumption that stories were channels to lived experiences.

Being particularly attracted to the power of narrative inquiry research to understand and capture the experiences, this study adopted Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) definition of narrative inquiry as "a way of understanding experience,"

It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

This research adopted their definition in three major ways. First, it viewed narrative inquiry as a way to understand and capture human experiences. Second, it recognized the importance of collaboration between the researcher and the participant. Third, it acknowledged the openness of the narrative research – entering the field in the middle of stories and leaving in the middle of them.

It should be noted, however, that Clandinin and Connelly (1990), the creators of "narrative inquiry" within the field of education, were highly influenced by John Dewey's philosophy. Specifically, they built upon Dewey's concepts of *interaction* and *continuity* that placed an individual within social context and where the experience grew out of other experiences, thus, representing the continuum of "the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Next, this study acknowledges that the research questions are drawn from the intersection of various fields – education, psychology, and social psychology. It is educational research as it attempts to contribute to the broader understanding of the role of education in humans' lives. It is also relates to human psychology as stories depict a person's identity, politics of belonging, as

well as the inner thinking of a person and ways humans interpret and give meaning to their lives. While I truly focus in the study to understand the phenomenon from the field of education, I decided to step an inch outside the educational field and look at some research within the field of psychology.

For example, Kraus (2006) discussed narrative foundations of identity and belonging. The scholar viewed narrative as one of the prominent ways individuals manage their social identities. In fact, “It [identity] must be understood as processed, socially embedded, and readable through the self-stories in which it discursively manifests itself. In order to understand this construction, we need to analyze the process (the telling) as well as the relationships (between teller and listener) and the form and content of such stories. As an individual, the author of a self-story must be seen as a person with many selves, constantly trying to reorganize him or herself into a provisional unity” (Kraus, 2006, p. 106). From the statement, it can be inferred that the scholar viewed the story not as a mere reflection of true “I”, yet as a way to construct one of multilayered identities. Similarly,

...narrative psychology aims to understand human experience as a form of text construction, relying on the assumption that humans create their lives through an autobiographical process akin to producing a story. It is not just the material “facts” of a life that are of concern here, but the meaningful shape emerging from selected inner and outer experiences. “Facts,” in the naive historical sense, are understood as created rather than reproduced. This approach has allowed psychology to view and analyze people’s lives as lived, people whose life experience had been lost in the search for central tendencies, for statistically significant group differences on oversimplified measures or in contrived experimental conditions. (Josselson, 2006, p. 4)

The quote above is important because it highlights the understanding of a narrative as a tool to analyze experiences as lived. In other words, as sensed, felt, reflected upon and delivered through the story itself. I believe this statement also recognizes that objective reality might have been different yet the person telling the story constructed a narrative as a way to understand and give meaning to his or her own experiences. Thus, the narrative *created* rather than *reproduced* the social reality. Further, I describe the history of narrative research and its development, outline various approaches, and at the end offer my personal position within the realms of narrative research.

History and Development

For the past three decades, a “narrative turn” has reached the fields of psychology, history, sociology, education, gender studies, education, and anthropology (Spector-Mersel, 2010; Conle, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Richardson, 2000). The narrative research became so prevalent that Phelan (2005) referred to it as a potential narrative imperialism. Despite its popularity, the controversy regarding the origins, theoretical foundations, as well as methodology prospers within the realms of academia. As noted by Hyvärinen (2006), the narrative turn does not represent a homogeneous social science movement but rather consists of different academic fabrics and approaches.

Narrative research appeared in diverse fields and started to develop in various directions (Hyvärinen, 2006). According to Spector-Mersel (2010), the history of narrative can be traced back to 19th century. At that time, history as well as anthropology began to actively use stories, narratives, and biographical methods to document human experiences and events. Similarly, “sociology, the only social sciences’ discipline born positivist, employed narrative methods”

(Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 207). Yet, narrative was not given a chance to flourish as the positivist paradigm became dominant, thus, pushing narrative methods to the outcast of the social research.

The interest to the narrative returned “as a result of disappointment with inability of quantitative methods to appreciate human experience” (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 207). Alternatives to positivist’s ways started to develop bringing the narrative at the center of the discourse once again. Particularly, a series of research studies were published that brought about *narrative turn*: Bruner (1986), Polkinghorne (1988), Ricoeur (1988), Sarbin (1986), McAdams (1985), Gergen and Gergen (1988) and others (see Hyvärinen (2006) for detailed overview of the narrative turn).

It might be stated that narrative turn brought not only renewed interest in narrative but also provided legitimacy for narrative methods to be used in social sciences once again. The return, however, shaped new ways of understanding the narrative. While, at the beginning of the 20th century, the narrative approaches were closely linked to positivist paradigm, current approaches are more in line with nonpositivist paradigms of qualitative research. Conle (2000) characterized a new approach as open-ended, experiential, with quest-like qualities. Spector-Mersel (2010) summarized this as, “While the traditional approaches depicted narrative as a way to getting to a pre-existing entity, according to current perceptions narratives do not *mirror* that seeming entity but *construct* it. Instead of a real, essential and objective reality reflected in narratives, it proposes a subjective and relativist reality, largely invented by narratives.” (p. 208). Thus, the new approach challenged the use of stories and narratives as a channel to the objective truth, on the contrary highlighting its fluid nature (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 207).

Diverging from the positivist paradigm that claimed the existence of objective and uniform reality, the narrative fell into the interpretive paradigm that believed in multilayered

nature of the social reality (Spector-Mersel, 2010). The interpretive paradigm diminished categorization of a human being within certain categories and aimed to demonstrate the various levels of complexity of human's life and experiences. Using Josselson's (2006) words, "Narrative research, rooted in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, strives to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history and time" (2006, p. 3). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), thus, placed narrative along the traditions of postpositivism, Marxism, and poststructuralism. Yet, Kohler Riessman and Speedy (2006) identified that the narrative field has realist, modernist, postmodern and constructionist strands. The diversity of views on narrative clearly indicates that there is no a single understanding of narrative that overpowers all others in academia as, in fact, the researchers still use narratives within both positivists and nonpositivist paradigms. Therefore, I felt it was important to offer my personal insights on the narrative and outline my stance with regard to the scholarly debates.

First, it was imperative to note that I did not share the dichotomy of positivist vs. non-positivist paradigms of narrative research. I believed that both approaches offer valuable insights on society and human life, and each approach had its own strength and weaknesses. While positivist approaches, specifically quantitative studies aimed to understand patterns and trends, the non-positivist methods drew attention to the nuances, complexity, and sophistication. While, this research utilized the latter, I believed the findings would build a foundation for future studies, including quantitative research that would draw on a larger sample or total population.

Second, within the typology of philosophical traditions of qualitative research summarized by Sharan (2009): positivist, interpretive, critical, poststructural and postmodern, I aligned current study more with the interpretive mode of thinking. Interpretative research

assumed that the reality was socially constructed, it was multilayered and complex. The researcher was not finding the objective truth but rather constructing knowledge about the reality. I believed this philosophy greatly echoed with the argument mentioned earlier that narratives created rather than reproduced social reality.

While such an approach did not necessarily fit within the classical research paradigm, I believe it had its own unique strengths. First, it showed the complexities of humans' lives and demonstrated the interconnectedness of experiences. The educational experiences were so intertwined with life experiences that it was almost impossible to understand one without the other. Also, the stories reflected the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future, alluding to the fluid nature of life and the continuous process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of meaning and knowledge. Indeed, this symphony of experiences bound by time created a canvas in which any attempt to single out just one piece of life or experience tore apart the whole fabric.

Second, the study invited the readers to be co-researchers, providing an opportunity to generate their own understandings and arrive at independent conclusions. Besides, it opened up a unique opportunity for a cross-disciplinary discussion and analysis, where the researchers from interdisciplinary fields - education, sociology, psychology – are invited to offer fresh insights and unique perspectives about the nature of orphanhood in Russia. I believe that such multiplicity of opinions and voices would eventually only strengthen and enrich the overall scope of the research.

At the same time, with strengths come weaknesses. As such, the unconventional approach placed me into an uncomfortable terrain as a researcher. Given that I appealed to the narrative inquiry method for the first time, I began questioning my role in the process. Was it

enough for me as a researcher to identify the participants, built trustworthy relationships, listen to their stories, develop the story narratives together with them, translate the narratives into English, and present them in the dissertation? In fact, I realized that I was pressured by the general expectation that a “good researcher” had to use vigorous methodology and be able to arrive to objective and meaningful conclusions. On the contrary, I had to almost give up my power to solely control the study findings. I opened up the study for possibilities of multiple readings and interpretations knowing that my own discussion and understanding would be one of many. Therefore, this research may serve as an invitation to discuss and reexamine the nature of research as well as the researcher’s role in it. Contrary to a classical academic approach where the researcher was expected to find and present the objective truth, the researcher in a narrative inquiry field appeared as a mediator between the participants and the reader. In other words, researcher became a bridge, a window into the world of orphanhood, inviting the academic community to step in and look at the phenomenon from a multidimensional perspective.

Despite these doubts, which urged me to reexamine my own role in the research, I firmly believed that the narratives were the ultimate way to understand the experiences and orphans’ views on education and no other methodology could have provided a more efficient framework. Even though the narrative methodology made me vulnerable in the face of criticism, I still stand by its premises and research potentials.

Sample

The study participants included orphanage graduates who left the orphanage after the collapse of the Soviet Union. My purpose was to find a diverse pool of participants based on gender, geographical location (center–periphery), sexual orientation, abilities (disabilities), age, as well as time spent in an orphanage. The final sample represented graduates between 21-35

years old, who graduated from their respective orphanages 2 to 17 years ago. The various ages were chosen for a couple of reasons. First, it was important to examine the dynamic of orphanhood in Russia from 1982, the year when the oldest participant was born until the present moment, capturing orphans' experiences during the various stages of post-socialist transformation. Second, it gave an opportunity to track the dynamic of orphans' lives as they moved further and further away to adulthood after their graduation from the orphanage.

In particular, academic literature and personal communication with public activists suggested that many orphans faced a breaking point in their lives between 25-28 years of age. Many believed that orphans continued to be dependent on institutional support for another six to eight years after the graduation and only at the age of 25-26 the graduates began to face their new reality – living on their own and making independent decisions (Gezalov, 2015). For many, this transition marked new heights of stress and anxiety. Thus, it was important to examine this claim and capture the overall evolution of orphanage graduates over time.

While the purpose was to find a diverse pool of orphanage graduates, the criteria was set to allow for cross-stories comparisons and discussion: namely, I was looking for participants who graduated from the orphanages in post-Soviet Russia, meaning that on a macro-scale they lived in a more or less similar economic, social, and political context; and they were subject to similar national educational reforms. Thus, the diversity of participants was supposed to bring richness and complexity of experiences through stories, while the common macro context allowed for cross-case discussions and comparisons.

Given that it was challenging to acquire any of the contacts of orphans, as the government does not keep any publicly available records after these young people leave the system, the purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit study participants. I have

identified three study participants myself. These participants were located in different geographical locations in Russia – Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk, and Moscow. All of them were identified through social media. Later, my friends and acquaintances introduced me to other three orphanage graduates from the Moscow region and Saint Petersburg. While I communicated with them via Internet for lengthy periods of time, the official in-person interviews took place between November, 2016 - November, 2017. It is also worth mentioning that initially I anticipated having a total sample of eight participants. Yet, two of the participants dropped out from the study for various reasons. One of them was a young woman who resided in Tomsk. She was introduced to me through a caregiver who worked in one of the orphanages in Tomsk and she kept in touch with this young woman after graduation. I called her and arranged to meet with her for an interview. However, on the day of the interview she did not show up and stopped answering her phone. Perhaps, she got scared and decided to withdraw at the last minute. Another participant was a male from the Moscow region. I identified him through the social media as well. I contacted him via Facebook and he agreed to participate in the research. Yet, before meeting him in person I was closely following his social media thread on Facebook. From the first moments it was clear that he was full of anger and frustration as he shared posts and wrote poems about his mom's betrayal of him, about all the injustices and violence he faced. It was clear that he was a soccer fan and from time to time he engaged in fights against other soccer team fans. However, what stopped me from meeting him in person were the most recent posts that alluded to him killing homeless people and people with drug addiction – as they were reminders of his mother. He also shared that he dreamt to die soon in a battle. He was desperate and on the verge of committing suicide or engaging in other criminal activities to express his

anger and disappointment. Therefore, I was a little concerned for my own safety and decided not to meet with him.

Thus, a total of six graduates agreed to talk to me about their experiences. The first male participant, Evgeny, resides in Krasnoyarsk. It is one of the largest cities in Siberia located on the Yenisey River. About a million people live there. I encountered Evgeny in 2012 while I was working on my master's thesis "Social Construction of Orphanhood in Russia." He created a group in the social platform with the purpose to dissolve myths about orphans. I contacted him and since then we have been exchanging emails from time to time. Evgeny grew up in an orphanage for children with disabilities, and, thus, he revealed the experiences that were unique for children with special needs. Also, his story uniquely captures the collapse of the Soviet Union and country's transition to a present day Russia.

The second participant, Maria, is a female and she resides in Tomsk, which is one of the oldest cities in Siberia with a population of about half a million people. I got to know her in 2014 through the project "Successful Orphans." The purpose of the project was to share stories of successful orphans in Russia to inspire and motivate other children to do well in life. I came across her story and then contacted her through social media. We have been in contact since then. Her story is a story of human strength, spirit, and bravery.

The third study participant, Dima is a male who lives in Moscow. He was born in a prison where his mother was sentenced for murder. Later he was transferred into the correctional orphanage. I got to know him through social media as well. Dima has openly declared his homosexuality, which was quite rare given that within the Russian reality such a disclosure is often met with public aggression and hatred. Nevertheless, his story shed light on what others

may have experienced but never talked about openly. Also, his story showed how challenges in life might lead orphans to commit suicide.

My friends and acquaintances introduced the other three participants to me. The fourth orphanage graduate is Kostia. Dima (a previous study participant) introduced me to Kostia. I knew very little about him at first. Kostia grew up in one of the correctional orphanages in the Moscow region. He did not receive any housing, thus, he was on the verge of becoming homeless. His story depicted the reality of being highly resistant towards orphanage and schooling culture and being placed in psychiatric hospitals.

My colleague introduced the fifth participant, Olga, to me. Olga grew up in a correctional orphanage in Moscow. Olga's story was an example on how challenging it was for some graduates to talk about their experiences, as their past was penetrated by pain, shame, and embarrassment. Lastly, I contacted Anna from Saint Petersburg. She was the youngest participant in the study. Her story is an extraordinary story of success and achievement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Below I outline and describe three stages of research design, including pre-data collection stage, data collection and analysis stage, and post-data collection analysis stage.

I. Pre-data collection stage. I met all the participants in person between November, 2016-November, 2017. At first, I spent a great amount of time to establish trustworthy and open relationships with the study participants. I found out that it was much easier for me to establish close relationships with the participants I have identified myself and communicated with them for some time through social media before meeting them in person. In general, they were all ready for an in-depth interview right away. The orphanage graduates who were introduced to me usually required more time to get comfortable with me. I met with them for casual talks and

conversations before conducting interviews. I shared my life stories to develop a level of trust and connection. I thoroughly explained the purpose of the study to each of the study participants, allowing them to ask any questions. The participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntarily and their personal information would remain strictly confidential (they would be given pseudonyms and other identifiable information would be either omitted or modified in the written report). However, some of the participants asked me to use their actual names as they told me that they have nothing to hide and they were not afraid of the consequences. Even though the participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point of the study, none of them opted for such an option. The participants were also given two copies of the written consent form to participate in the study. One copy remained with them, and another with me. The written consent described the purpose of the study, their rights, risks and benefits as well as contact information, in case they had any further questions.

II. Data collection and analysis stage. Data was collected through various methods. The major method of data collection was person-to-person interviews with the participants. According to Sharan (2009), “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). This was precisely the case in my research, as I was curious in participants’ past experiences. Thus, the major source of data were stories and narratives told by study participants.

Vilma (2004) differentiated between three modes of narrative, namely the *told*, *inner*, and *lived* narrative. The told narrative represented a symbolic verbal account of the events. The told narratives, thus, became the data in narrative research. In comparison, the inner narrative was a more complicated concept compared to a relatively straightforward told narrative. The inner

narrative reflected the inner thinking of a person. Vilma (2004) described this concept as a “hypothetical, non-empirical construct” existence of which cannot be proven; it was “a story we tell to ourselves” (p. 70). She noted that inner narrative was not fully verbal as, “a great part of the mental processing of events occurs on the level of meanings rather than verbal signs, and rather as images than explicitly unfolding narratives” (Vilma, 2004, p. 75). The inner narratives were related to told narratives, but they differed in a significant way. While told narrative could be a channel to inner narrative, it cannot holistically represent the latter. Vilma (2004) drew the distinctions using Vygotsky’s discussions on external and internal speech, explaining that “the function of external speech is communication, while the function of inner speech is mastering one’s own psychological processes” (p. 78). Thus, the inner narratives might be understood as the organizational engine behind the told narrative that could not be fully expressed in words (Vilma, 2004).

While the told narrative was largely verbal and the inner narrative was cognitive, the lived narrative was more concerned with the actual lived expression. The inner narratives certainly shaped lived narrative yet not in its entirety as people often faced unforeseen or unexpected circumstances that deviated from their inner narrative. Thus, lived narrative may have unfolded in unplanned directions. I believe the distinctions between these three modes of narrative were important as they pointed to the complexities of life and human experiences. While told narrative represented data in the study and was actually documented in the dissertation in the form of stories, it is important that the reader is aware of the inner and lived narratives, which may not be fully expressed or documented by the told narratives. Similarly, the told narratives – the findings of the study – should be seen as only glimpses to inner and lived narratives.

In addition to the differences in narratives, Spector-Mersel (2010) made a distinction between *collected* and *produced* stories. Collected stories were stories told in a natural environment during the observations, while produced stories were those specifically generated during the interviews. In technical language, collected and produced stories corresponded to unstructured and structured/semi-structured interview types. While unstructured interviews did not place the participant within certain boundaries as they allowed to have free-flow conversations, the structured/semi-structured interviews required participants to focus their attention on particular questions that the researcher asked. Within the framework of the research, both unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants and both produced and collected stories were gathered. Produced stories were gathered in a more official setting, the place was chosen by the participants themselves: at home, café, park, and/or via Skype. Collected stories were captured in more unofficial settings during the time I spent with the participants as we went to cinema together, talked in cafes, took lengthy walks in the city, or just had conversations over a cup of tea in their homes.

During the interviews, I followed the general conduct of interviewing as suggested by Sharan (2009). First, I continually made sure that the participants were comfortable with the setting and comfortable sharing the stories. Second, I assumed neutrality to the content of participants' stories. In other words, I did not argue or debate participants' views, beliefs or experiences. On the contrary, I took a position of an interested and sympathetic listener. Third, I trained myself in asking proper questions, questions that typically yield descriptive data, following Patton's (2002) typology:

1. Questions about behavior and experience. For example, "Tell me about your usual school day, what did you do in and outside the school?"

2. Questions about opinions and values. For example, “What do you think about the school, in general?”
3. Questions about feelings. For example, “How did you feel at school?”
4. Questions about knowledge. For example, “What do you know about new educational law?”
5. Questions about senses. For example, “What did you see/hear/touch in this situation?”
6. Questions about background of the participants. This includes questions regarding age, gender, SES, etc.

The type of questions was determined by a particular situation or need to clarify certain events. Besides, I tended to avoid multiple, leading, and yes-no questions (Sharan, 2009). All the interviews were audiotaped with the permission of the participants and later transcribed. The initial question for the interview was, “Can you please tell me about your life?” Further, I asked participants to specifically describe their schooling and other education related experiences from childhood to adulthood and asked follow-up questions to reconstruct the grand-narratives of their lives. Sensitive questions that could potentially harm the participants, especially with regard to orphans' family background, were not asked directly but rather driven by the participant's desire to share.

To spark the conversations and diversify the sources of data, I asked participants to share their photos, videos, as well as personal diaries with me. However, none of the participants had kept a diary. One of the participants shared that he had a diary in the past but no longer possessed it. Participants' social media profiles provided another great source of information. I asked participants to comment and/or elaborate on certain pictures and posts they made available

through social media. The social media, thus, greatly helped to revive the conversation about participants and reconstruct their life narratives.

Given that qualitative research typically produced large and overwhelming amount of data, the analysis of data was partially performed simultaneously with data collection. In particular, I followed the steps suggested by Sharan (2009):

1. The first interview was transcribed. I included the date, time, and name of the participant, as well as the location of the interview in the transcript. The line numbering on the left side was applied to make the transcripts easier to analyze.
2. I continually refreshed the study objectives and reread the transcript several times to familiarize myself intimately with the data. Then I wrote comments and memos indicating my initial reflections, field observations, emerging themes and ideas. I also assessed the quality of data received based on the factors that may have influenced the interview such as mood of the participant, unexpected circumstances, weather conditions and so forth.
3. I made a list of questions/points that I wanted to ask or clarify during the next interview.
4. When the second round of interview was completed, I repeated the procedure and at the end compared the results with the first interview.

I repeated these procedures until the point of saturation of data, when the information started to repeat itself and little to no new information was emerging. Working in the field, it typically took me two to four cycles of interviews to capture the narratives of participants' lives (about four to six hours of official interviews). However, the fine-tuning details and questions

were further elaborated mainly through informal conversations and social media for longer periods of time. When data was collected, I initiated the post-data collection analysis.

III. Post-data collection analysis. At this stage, I began the restoring data analysis process (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), using a three-dimensional approach developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) defined the restoring process as “the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence” (p. 332). Thus, I looked at the stories and arranged them in a chronological order. Then, I wrote the outline of the grand story using Connelly and Clandinin’s (2002) three-dimensional approach that included the simultaneous exploration of temporality, sociality, and place.

First, Connelly and Clandinin (2002) noted that narrative inquiry deals with past, present, and future, thus, bringing temporal qualities to the narrative research. It was imperative to constantly be aware of the timeness of the events, on the one hand, and, on the other, it was vital to avoid the risk of falling into determinism by making false assumptions of one event leading to another. Second, the scholars emphasized that narrative inquiry has always been an interaction between the personal and the social as the personal experiences and the social surroundings are interconnected. In other words, it was vital to constantly keep in mind not only the personal experiences but also social influences. Third, place or situation may have had an effect not only on told, inner, or lived narratives but also on the participant–researcher interactions. Certain place may have had an influence on participants’ decisions and actions. For example, in public spaces where the participants could have been uncomfortable it was likely that the story was not fully told. Consequently, it was crucial for me as a researcher to be constantly aware of all three dimensions of the narrative inquiry to gain a more detailed and unbiased picture of the

experiences. To achieve the simultaneous exploration of all three dimensions, I utilized the format offered by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). The scholars developed a template that helped to fill in known information as well as to identify blind spots (see below).

Table 1

Template: the way to reconstruct a story through the simultaneous exploration of temporality, sociality, and place.

Interaction		Continuity			Place
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/place

The blind spots required reaching out to the participants once again for clarification and/or elaboration of the event. When all the major events were written down in accordance with the three-dimensional approach, I wrote a draft of the stories in Russian language. While writing the drafts, I preserved participants’ actual story-telling style and used direct quotes as much as possible. I also attempted to avoid adding any descriptions or adjectives from myself (so that I did not exaggerate or undermine certain events). When the drafts were completed, I shared them with the participants to seek their feedback. The participants read the stories and informed me about some inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Based on their feedback, I rewrote parts of the stories until participants felt their narratives were presented accurately.

Only after reaching mutual agreement, I translated the participants’ stories into English. It should be noted that while translating stories from Russian into English, I felt that some uniqueness of participant’s story-telling style was lost due to differences in grammar and word-choice in both languages. The stories were fully included in the dissertation for the reader to

generate personal understanding of orphans' life and educational experiences. Indeed, the active involvement of the participants throughout the process of narrative inquiry allowed for the possibility to answer the research questions minimizing researcher's interference and subjectivity. The reader was invited to be a co-researcher in the study and to find answers within the stories independently. Such an approach was described by Bleakley (2005) as *thinking with the story*.

In fact, Bleakley (2005) discussed two approaches to narrative analysis: thinking *about* the story and thinking *with* the story. Thinking about narrative required researchers to look at the narrative through the analytical lenses, specifically to derive categories from the data and connect them back to narrative for explanation. Second approach looked at the narrative more holistically. Using Bleakley's (2005) words, these methods "seek a more holistic and integrative understanding of narratives, either empathically entering a given narrative, or creating a story as research product as a way of capturing elements otherwise lost to a structural analysis" (p. 535). While the first approach treated the participants as an object of examination, the latter seemingly opened up doors to understanding of participants' experiences first-hand.

While Bleakley (2005) discussed these two approaches as contradictory, I believed there was a way to bring the two approaches together in meaningful ways. I thought it was imperative to present the participants' stories which were valuable in their own right and which illustrated the richness and complexity of life, thus, taking the readers into the journey of understanding orphans' life and educational experiences. Similarly, I believed the researcher had the right to offer a discussion/interpretation of the stories all together - comparatively - and highlight some common themes witnessed as the stories unfolded and were experienced by both the researcher and participants together - bounded by place, time, and common circumstances. In that light, I

believed researchers' insights might have been useful yet complimentary to the stories. The researcher's discussion, should not be viewed as the objective and deterministic truth offered at the end of the story, but rather as *one* way to look and understand stories and life experiences. Therefore, when the stories were written down, I looked back at them and initiated a next phase of the analysis.

I reread stories over and over again and divided discussion into four major parts, corresponding to the major milestones in orphans' lives, namely (1) orphans' experiences prior to the orphanage; (2) educational and life experiences at the orphanage(s); (3) transition period; and (4) adulthood live. In each of the category, I analyzed common themes and addressed key issues in relation to orphans' life and educational experiences and connected them to broader academic literature and discussion.

Trustworthiness Criteria

Given that this research was largely located within the interpretive paradigm that did not claim to identify the objective truth, this study could not operate along the classical criteria of internal and external validity as well as reliability. Instead, it has been quite common in qualitative research to refer to the alternative criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Sharan, 2009). These terms were developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility. According to Krefting (1991) the credibility criterion, "establishes how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants, and context" (p. 215). To ensure credibility several measures were taken. First, I spent prolonged time with the participants (minimum of six months of person-to-person as well as Internet communications). Second, I used various methods to collect data through interviews,

field notes, photos, videos as well as personal social media profiles to triangulate the data. Lastly, I continually involved participants in data-analysis and interpretation to ensure accuracy.

Transferability. Transferability was the degree to which the findings of the study might be applied to other similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba argued that transferability was largely a responsibility of the person who wished to transfer the findings elsewhere (Krefting, 1991). The responsibility of the researcher was to provide thick and descriptive data. These criteria were met as the stories were presented in full so that the reader might gain a deeper understanding of the findings.

Dependability. This criterion invites to consider “whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). To ensure dependability, I described in detail the research methods, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the findings, the context, and other relevant research information.

Confirmability. This criterion is referred to “the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results (Sandelowski as cited in Krefting, 1991, p. 216). To reduce personal biases I continuously involved participants in the story writing and described personal theoretical assumptions prior to the study.

Ethical Considerations

The Lehigh IRB committee reviewed the research design. All the participants in the study were protected and confidentiality was guaranteed. The names of orphans were changed to ensure anonymity. Four of the participants expressed their wish to remain non-anonymous. Participation in the study was entirely voluntarily. All the written or recorded notes were kept confidential and all the records were destroyed as soon as the study was over. Sensitive questions that could potentially harm the participants, especially with regard to orphans' family background

were not asked directly but rather driven by the participants' desire to share. When preliminary stories were ready, I shared and discussed them with participants to ensure that narratives represented their meanings.

Limitations

The study has a number of limitations. First, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the whole population and additional studies are needed to draw generalized statements. Second, the participants' stories may or may not represent the objective reality. As was argued earlier, it is acknowledged that stories largely created rather than reproduced the social reality. The stories reflected the meaning making of the orphans themselves – they reflected their experiences as lived, sensed, touched, and felt. It is acknowledged that as the time goes by and orphans gain new experiences their narratives may change. Third, all cause and effect factors should be taken very carefully as life is much more complex and narratives may not necessarily capture all of the complexities, thus, drawing an illusory cause and effect.

Chapter IV.

The Stories of Orphans

The stories in this chapter are organized in chronological order, starting from the oldest participant to the youngest. Participants' age and geographical location are indicated at the beginning of each story to quickly situate the reader within a certain time and space.

Rising From the Ashes of Human Negligence and Ignorance

The real nightmare for me is to return to the past...

To be afraid of something that did not happen yet is foolish.

Evgeny, 35 years, Krasnoyarsk

From Tomsk I travelled to Krasnoyarsk on a train from the past. As soon as I entered the train, I got into an atmosphere saturated with Soviet past: the train was very old, dirty and stuffy. It had no air conditioning and the only way to cool the crowded train compartment was to open a window that reclined onto my bed, my pillow, to be exact. I thought that such trains had gone extinct long ago, but apparently they continued their existence far from the capital of Russia. Thoughts about the train led me to think about Krasnoyarsk itself. What would the city be like? Would I also submerge into the Soviet past? What kind of people would I meet?

As a matter of fact, I had never travelled this far from Moscow and I was very curious to see the different corners of the country. When I got off the train, I was pleasantly surprised. I was immediately surrounded by fresh and warm air. All around was very clean and beautiful. In the distance, I could see gorgeous green hills, covered with trees. I felt excited to spend two weeks here.

Krasnoyarsk left very positive impressions on me. It did not look like any of the cities I had visited before. There was some kind of a hidden gem in it. The city was filled with a calm

and friendly atmosphere: its unique energy attracted and fascinated. The people I met in Krasnoyarsk were rather kind and open. In the city center, the streets ran parallel to each other. You could see many cafes, restaurants and shops. Some corners of the city were decorated with street graffiti that added a youthful vibe and atmosphere. The city had fountains and what amazed me the most - palm trees. I did not expect to find palm trees in Siberia. They were planted, however, in special large wooden boxes on wheels. Most likely they were transferred somewhere warm during the winter months.

I was also surprised to see a large number of coffee shops. Just five years ago, coffee shops were quite rare, but now it was as if a coffee revolution were taking place. In one of the streets there was a kiosk with Cuban coffee and music. Not far from there stood a vehicle in the style of an old London minibus, which similarly offered coffee for take-out.

While globalization and capitalism had certainly left their marks on Krasnoyarsk, the Soviet heritage was also still present. By tradition, in the center of the city stood a monument to Lenin. Yet, Lenin rather looked as an unexpected guest from the past, not claiming to be involved in the world around him. A little further were blocks of old Soviet buildings as well as old-style amusement parks.

The day after my arrival, Evgeny³ agreed to meet with me. I got to know him in 2012 through social networks. When I was working on my Master's thesis on the social construction of orphanhood in Russia through mass media, I accidentally stumbled upon a group in the Russian social network Vkontakte. The purpose of this group was to dispel negative stereotypes about graduates of orphanages. Evgeny was the administrator of the group. I sent him a message and

³ Evgeny expressed his wish to keep his name in the story. However, his last name has been omitted and all other names changed to keep confidentiality of the participants involved.

we began to chat from time to time and talk via Skype. At that moment, I did not even imagine that one day I would see him personally in Krasnoyarsk. Yet, it happened.

We agreed to meet at my hostel around 4-5 pm. At four o'clock nothing happened. I did not get any news or messages from Evgeny. Then it was five o'clock, once again - silence. I tried to call him on a mobile phone, but he did not answer. I began to worry: what if he changed his mind? What am I going to do here for two weeks? Fortunately, after some time he called back and said that he was on his way.

When he arrived I went outside my hostel to meet him. There were many cars in the parking lot, so I could not find him at first. A couple of minutes later, I saw him. He stood among the cars in a bright orange Hawaiian shirt, well trimmed and freshly shaven. He was rather short; he stood on his knees as a result of a disability. Fashionable beige shoes were tied to them. He had brown hair and brown eyes, neat and pleasant facial features. A device was attached to his ear, allowing him to talk on the phone through Bluetooth. I greeted him with a smile and went to hug him. After a short welcome, we started to think where to go. Evgeny was hungry and we decided to go to a pub, which was a couple of steps away from us.

We went through the summer verandah. The waiters stared at him and me. We were given a menu, I ordered a coffee and Evgeny asked for French fries and a glass of Cola. We began to talk. He told me about his day. In the morning, he went to a cafe to arrange a birthday celebration for his friend, who was very modest and too shy to do it himself. The owner of the cafe was late, so it took him longer than expected. After the meeting, he immediately went to a friend and told him everything about the birthday arrangements. When his duties were completed, he remembered about me.

In return, I told him about my life and research. Smoothly, our conversation turned to politics and history. Evgeny told me how he sees historical developments in two countries - Russia and the United States. A little later the conversation returned to Russian realities.

“I’ve just noticed,” Evgeny said, “that Russian people are not very eager to sympathize with disabled people. I had situations when Armenians, Tajiks and people of other nationalities would approach me on the street and ask about me. Sometimes they gave me money. Of course, I rejected it, but Russians never ever approached me in this way.”

“There was a case, when I was getting off the bus, but the driver began to drive and I was thrown out of the bus into the pavement. I fell down very badly. I opened my eyes and all over me were Armenians and Tajiks. They asked me, “Are you fine, brother?” At that moment I did not even feel the pain. I kept wondering why Russians did not help me again. That day I got somehow home, but the next morning I could not get up.”

“There was another case. In my childhood I was bitten by a dog and since then they do not like me. They attack me. So once, when I was studying at a university, I had to go through the yards where there were a lot of dogs. One day a group of dogs attacked me. Everyone passed by me: people, students and none of them tried to interfere. Only one Armenian stood up for me. He fought with dogs and chased them away. Again, Russians did not help. It hurt, of course.”

At this moment Evgeny became sad and focused. He began to remember his childhood little by little. He shared that he had the nickname Grandfather in the orphanage, for his slowness and love for reading. This nickname followed him for a long time, until one day, when he was twenty-four, he played the role of a king in a play based on the work of Leonid Filatov, “About Fedot the Archer.” Everyone considered his acting to be very successful and since then they started calling him King.

We finished our meals and it was time to pay the check.

“Evgeny, can I pay, please? I invited you, after all.”

“No!” he shouted at me quite rudely. His look became furious, penetrating and burning. There was anger and irritation. “Will your character change because of that, will you be better off if you pay?” he exclaimed.

I did not expect such a reaction, so I tried to soften the edges and turn the situation into a joke. After the café, we decided to head to the park, which was relatively nearby. With Evgeny we walked very slowly – it was very hard for him to walk on his knees. On the way, we continued to talk about our lives and immersed in conversations, we finally came to the park. It began to grow dark as sunset approached. The park was lovely and vibrant: music was playing, people walking and children playing. We sat on a bench. Evgeny asked me to start recording the interview. Despite the fact that there were people around us, we could freely talk, as everyone was busy with their own business and did not pay any attention to us. I explained to Evgeny once again all his rights and he gave me his consent. That’s how his story began:

“I was born in 1982. I was born with a disability. My parents did not want such a child, so they abandoned me in the hospital. Mom, as a matter of fact, did not write an official refusal; she simply left the hospital. Then I got into an infants’ home, in the town of Cheryomushki. I was there until the age of five. It was a wonderful place - the kindest one. I liked the caregivers and nurses. I could not even imagine that life in any other orphanages could be different. In fact, orphanages and infants’ homes *ARE* very different. In the infants’ home everything was fine, but when I was taken away from that place, I felt right away that something was wrong.

One morning, the caregivers came to my room and told me they would like to take me to a hospital for examination. I believed them, yet they brought me to an orphanage and gave me to

women dressed in white robes who took me to a room and locked me up. I immediately realized that I was deceived. I started to panic and cry. I begged to go back to my mother Katia. She was a wonderful woman whom children called granny Katia and I called her mother Katia. She was really wonderful and so kind to me. I missed her for a very long time, a very long time. I cried all the time at nights and called for her. But no one came. Since then, I did not call anyone else

Mom: she was the only one for me.

In the new orphanage boys and girls lived together. There were more children with disabilities than normal children. When I arrived, I was initially feeling bad: because of my age I did not understand many things. I did not understand all the cruelty. I learned very soon what violence was. One day a girl called me and told me to wipe a puddle in the toilet. When I refused, she grabbed a glass bottle from a window and hit me hard on the head with all her power. I felt pain for the first time in my life and I learned that people could hurt and beat me. In the infants' home that never happened: no matter how poorly I behaved, no one had ever raised a hand to me. But here, after a very short time I had been already beaten...

At this orphanage there was another strange tradition: before dinner we were always stripped naked by the nurses and closed in the playroom. Why did they do that? I still do not understand, but it was happening every day. In summers, it was not an issue, we would just run and play, boys and girls together. We were very young, so nobody felt embarrassed. Yet, in winters it was a challenge. Our orphanage barracks were not heated and it was very cold. Despite the cold, we were undressed anyway and forced to sit in the playroom and get cold. After some time, the caregivers would take us to eat dinner. This practice went on for a long time until I was transferred into another building.

In fact, some caregivers loved us, but others hated and despised us. If the attitude of caregivers towards children up until 1990 was neutral - they simply did their work, then at the end of 1991 the situation completely changed. The caregivers became openly rude and hateful. Why? Everyone was unhappy. They were not paid any money; therefore, caregivers believed that they did not have to do anything. Yet, despite their constant complaints that they were not paid, they always had money to buy vodka. Often they would come to work drunk. They did not care about children at all. I think the orphanage principal closed his eyes to them and he was happy that at least they showed up for work.

We had one caregiver who always said to us that she was not able to feed her own children, but the government was feeding us “bastards” every day. She said it openly. Once, she got so angry that she grabbed a barrel of food filled with soup and the main dish, and publicly poured it outside the window in front of everyone's eyes.

“My children do not eat, and you will not eat!” she shouted.

Her heroic act inspired other nurses and they began to do the same to the point that it became a tradition. We were very hungry and to survive, we sneaked into a warehouse and stole canned food and sausages. There were plenty of cans there. We would steal cans, bring them into the orphanage, open and eat them and then feed the younger ones. I still can remember the taste of these sausages, but I cannot find them anywhere.

In general, the caregivers poured out our lunches and dinners until we began to go to the dining room ourselves. Our orphanage was not like the ones nowadays where everything is located in one building: bedrooms and cafeteria. We had barracks - the first barrack, the second, the third, etc. The cafeteria was located in a separate barrack and to get there it was necessary to go out into the street. Not all of the children could walk, so the caregivers would go to the

cafeteria and bring back barrels of soup, main dish and compote. They would bring the food, but would not necessarily give it to us.

Sometimes we had ridiculous situations. Once the caregiver brought the food and said, “Today is pea soup for lunch, but you will not eat!”

“Why?” we asked.

“You will get diarrhea!” she told us.

We believed her, we thought that it was true and we would get sick. That explanation sounded reasonable to us. The children kept quiet and I kept quiet. Now I remember this case with a smile.

At the same time, in 1990, there was a very high mortality rate in our orphanage. We really saw corpses more often than cartoons on TV. Children were dying from diseases, accidents and negligent caregivers. One girl was burnt to death in the shower just because no one was near her. There was another case when a piece of food stuck in a child’s throat and he began to gasp for air. The caregiver ran around, but she did not know what to do. In 1990 no one taught them anything. Almost everyone could get this job, even high school students. In panic she ran to get a medical nurse, but she did not make it on time. The boy died. We attempted to help him ourselves. I pressed him on his belly - I saw somewhere on TV before...No one investigated this case.

Another child, Semen, had ulcers on his legs. He should have been taken to the hospital and checked, but no one did it. He was lying all night crying and slowly dying, and eventually he died. Negligence...There was Veronika, an excellent girl. She died for no reason at all. We, frankly, did not ask any questions, as it became normal for us. One day there was a child. The next day there was not. Fate.

Children were just raw material. The state somehow maintained orphanages, but the children were just the “stuff.” So many children died ... Now I see in the news that if even three children were poisoned at the orphanage, then all the mass media would trumpet about it, but back then no one cared.

We were somehow not afraid of death. We were used to it from childhood. Every time we would go out on the street and walk through the verandah, we would see children's corpses laying there, covered with white sheets. We all knew that dead children were under them. As a child I often tried to understand why children died and occasionally I felt frightened.

For a very long time there was a real mess in our orphanage, until a doctor came, a wonderful person, I believe. His name was Ivan Fedorovich. He restored order, more or less. He tried to fight to improve conditions for the children, but no one else cared. Everyone got used to what was happening in the 1990s and nobody wanted to change. Doctor fired many people back then, but the “core of darkness” remained within the orphanage. This darkness caused Doctor stress, and it seemed to me that his nerves could not take it – he broke down.

When he learned that food had been poured out of the windows, for example, he became very angry. He was very emotional. At such moments, he could grab caregivers by the hand and hit them. Because of his impulsive behavior many people hated him.

One evening he called me into his room. When I entered, I saw him nervously walking around the room and talking to himself. I realized that he was drunk.

“All bastards! Traitors! Nobody understands anything!” Doctor cried angrily. Then he noticed me.

“You do not understand anything either, do you?” he turned to me.

“Doctor, what's wrong with you?” I asked.

He looked at me and in his eyes I saw hatred and despair. He took out his revolver and pointed it at me.

“Are you scared?” he said looking straight into my eyes.

I was looking into the barrel of the revolver and wondering whether the bullet would fire or not. I was very scared, but I did not say anything. Doctor's hand was trembling.

“Are you scared? I'm asking you!” he repeated his question again.

Still I stood silent as a fool.

In an instant, consciousness returned to him and he removed the revolver and kicked me out of the room. I left his office and pretended that nothing happened. But the next day I found out that earlier that evening he had pointed the revolver at one of the nurses and the administration learned about the incident. He was given a choice – either to voluntarily quit the job or deal with the police. He resigned. He was forced to do it. In total, he worked in the orphanage for about six to seven years, from 1993 to 2000.

I must say that we never called him by his full name. At that time, we watched a very popular soup opera called *The Rich Cry Too*. One of the actors was Dr. Gomez, thus, we began to call our doctor affectionately either Doctor or Doctor Gomez. He was a very interesting and unusual man, at times even weird and cruel. He loved to hit us in the liver. He would often approach us unexpectedly and hit.

"Oh, you were not ready for that!" he would say, "You should always know that someone can hit you any time!"

Despite his strange habits, he was a very approachable and friendly man. Many of us knew that if we were in trouble or had problems we could always approach him, and he always helped. How many times have we been naughty and caught by the police, we immediately turned

to him. We were very afraid of the principal, but we knew that Doctor would understand and help us. When he left, of course injustices continued.

I remember once, before Doctor came to the orphanage, when I was about six or seven years old, I laid on the mattress and played in the playroom. A drunken nurse approached me, picked me up and began to carry me somewhere. She took me outside the orphanage and continued to carry me.

“Where is she carrying me? What does she want from me?” I was thinking.

I was so scared that I was afraid even to ask. I just hung on her hands and looked at the ground as the road was going on and on. Then, I began to count the houses-one, two, three, in a case I would need to find my way back myself.

Finally, she brought me to some kind of a garage and put me on the hood of the car. At that time it was already getting dark outside. In the garage, there were a couple of men who were drinking alcohol and talking. She joined their company.

I thought, “What does she want from me? Why did she bring me here?” I began to slip off the hood of the car and fall to the ground, but she did not even look into my direction. Finally, I fell.

“Olga, I want to go home to the orphanage,” I almost cried.

She did not say anything and continued drinking. Over time, I started to feel very cold. I decided to climb under the car, because it was warm there. As I understand now, the engine was on. All night long the engine warmed me. I realized later that if the driver had driven away that evening, the car would have easily smashed me. But I was lucky, everybody stayed at the garage that evening.

In the morning I woke up from the noise. The nurse was shouting,

“Bykov, bitch! If you ran away, I will kill you!” she screamed.

“Why didn’t you pay attention to him?” she screamed to her fellow friends. “I am responsible for him!”

“Why did you even bring him here?” one man angrily replied.

“Oh, I just wanted to show how you idiots live,” she snapped back.

At that point, I decided to crawl out from under the car. She saw me, walked towards me and hit me in the face just because she had to look for me. She grabbed and dragged me back to the orphanage. When we reached the orphanage, she left me in the playroom. She did not even feed me although I hadn’t eaten anything since the previous night. I was so hungry that I was waiting for dinner as manna from heaven.

There were many similar situations. I can say that I’ve lost my legs because of a drunken nurse too. I was about eight years old. I do not remember exactly. It was another regular day. I was hanging around with children in the playroom and accidentally turned over the table with blankets. When we got up in the morning, we always made beds, and folded blankets separately on tables in the playroom. That day I accidentally flipped the table. The nurse, Svetlana Lvovna, immediately noticed it. She grabbed me and started to kick me with all her strength. She beat me so hard that she broke my leg. As usual, I remained silent and went for a few days with a broken leg. It got swollen beyond imagination, but no one saw it, since I dressed myself.

My broken leg was discovered only when I went bathing. The nurse immediately saw my leg and asked what happened. I said that I fell down.

“Why did you not tell anyone?” the nurse asked me.

I did not say anything to her. I pretended to be a fool.

“Why did you not tell the truth?” I interrupted Evgeny’s story.

“We used not to say anything. Ever. That was our law. That was the way I was raised. Since I was six, older children taught us to never complain about anyone or anything. It did not matter whether you were a good person or a bad one, if you snitched – the end. Snitches got stitches. It did not matter why or how just was your complaint, even if you snitched about your worst enemy, you could simply not do that. [At this moment, Evgeny's voice immediately became very low and serious, almost threatening]. They would not respect you. Therefore, I had no right to snitch. Otherwise I would really no longer respect myself. Also, there was fear that later it would be even worse. Thus, I just said that I fell down.

Anyway, when my secret was revealed, they put a plaster on my leg and placed me in a room with other sick children. I felt that Svetlana Lvovna regretted her actions because a few days later she brought me some gifts. She brought me sweets, gingerbread, and candies. She said that they were from her daughter, but I had never seen her daughter: I did not know her, and she did not know me. Anyways, I accepted.

I stayed in bed for a very long time. In fact, it was the most horrifying period of my life. I was shackled to the bed, I could not move... On top of that, I knew that no one needed me, and no one would come to visit me. Since then, the real nightmare for me is to return to this past, to be shackled to bed again... I believe that to be afraid of something that did not happen yet is foolish. Sometimes, in my dreams I see flashbacks of that time. I would wake up sweating and my heart would beat wildly.

Overall, I spent about one and a half years in bed. I could not turn either left or right. There were other children in the room who were moaning, crying and shouting. But no one came to answer our calls. We felt that nobody cared about us. We were left alone... Children began to

quietly, little by little go insane. Some would start swinging their heads back and forth; others would continuously scrape the wall or their beds.

I remember that we were allowed to go to the toilet only one time in the morning and one time in the evening. If someone did pee in bed, God forbid, during the lunchtime, then they were severely beaten. Nurses would become furious, because they had to change our clothes and they did not want to do it. All the children in the room, who were capable of understanding what was going on, were afraid to death. It was scary as we were beaten with slippers, shoes, everything that the nurses had in their hands. I remember how I tried to avoid going to the toilet until evening. It was such a torture; I could not always resist, and was, indeed, beaten.

Fortunately, we also had good shifts of nurses, where they would happily change our clothes three and even four times. Such days were holidays for us. But there were shifts that were the pure embodiment of hell. We had, overall, three bad shifts and two good ones. During bad shifts, the nurses would feed us breakfast and then they would not show up until dinner. Behind the wall, we would hear them laughing, drinking tea, and watching TV and we would just lay and lay...staring endlessly at the ceiling.

After a while, I was taken to the hospital, the doctors did a surgery on my leg, applied a new cast and returned me to the orphanage where I continued to lie in bed. Over time, the cast began to rot. The leg under it became so itchy that I remember trying to shove anything I could inside, just to scratch a little bit. After itchiness, a terrible pain developed. My leg became swollen and infectious. When the doctors removed the plaster, everyone gasped, but it was too late.

After a year and a half of being bed-ridden, my bones atrophied. I tried once to get up on my feet, but immediately I fell down and felt sharp pain in my leg. It turned out that I broke my

leg once again, just because I attempted to stand on it. Therefore, I began to crawl. During this difficult period of my life a wonderful woman came to work with us. Her name was Julia. She became interested in my life.

“Why are you crawling like that? Are you going to crawl all of your life?” she asked me once, “Maybe you should start to walk on your knees? I can show you how.”

She began to teach me how to walk on my knees. First she tied ordinary home slippers to my knees and I learned to walk on them. I tore the knees to meat and bones, to the blood ... The infection started again and again I stayed in bed for a long time. But the idea of being attached to the bed frightened me more and I said to myself that no matter what it would take, I would continue to learn how to walk.

As soon as I felt better, I continued to practice walking on my knees. I remember everyone was looking at me like I was a fool. Everyone was wondering how a man could walk on his knees. I remember that all the children were allowed to walk outside, but they would forbid me to go.

“Why don’t you let me out?” I asked them.

“You crawl. How will you go?”

“I’ll go on my knees.”

“Have you seen your knees? There’re only bones left!”

“I want to go anyway!”

“No, you will not go!”

Then I started to run away and learn how to walk on the street. After some time, the nurses were tired of looking after and catching me, thus, they started to let me go outside just like everyone else. The roads at that time were terrible, not like now. I would leave the building and

train my knees. I would hurt my knees again and again, I would lose a lot of blood, but I would continue to train my knees to walk. Finally, I MADE my knees WALK. I trained myself to live with pain, to accept it. Frankly, I still have knee pains. The pain is terrible, but it became a part of my life that I do not notice that much anymore.

After some time, I faced another problem. When winter came, my feet began to horribly freeze. I would make a step on the snow and freeze. Yet, I did not give up, I began to force myself to go out into the cold without any shirt, with bare chest in minus 20 degrees Celsius (-4 Fahrenheit). I would get frozen to death, but I would continue teaching my knees to get used to the frost so that I could walk at least for a few kilometers without falling and freezing. Thank God, I succeeded and now cold is no longer a problem for me.

While I was in the orphanage, I loved to go to the construction sites and other dangerous places. Once we ran away with another boy and walked in nearby woods for the whole night. We just went for a walk but got lost, and in the orphanage it was taken as an attempt to escape. The next day we were caught and punished. We were closed in an isolator box – it was a room without windows and doors, like a dark room in a fairy tale, just like a Black Square of Malevich. There was only one mattress on the floor. We were often punished this way. We were locked in this room and we stayed there alone. Once I was locked up for a month. For the whole month you cannot see the light, can you imagine? There was only a small window at the bottom of the door to push food through.

There was another punishment in the orphanage too. We were injected with psychotropic drugs such as Haloperidol and Chlorpromazine. Everyone knew that if they behaved badly, they would be injected. These were famous popular drugs, fools even knew about them. From Haloperidol children turned into vegetables - they became indifferent, like amoebas. They

suffered from drooling, they could neither say a word, nor do anything. They stayed in a kind of a coma. Muscles would become very tight and seizures would appear so that children would scream in pain. I saw with my own eyes how one boy suffered like that, his fingers twisted awfully and he cried. It was creepy.

Personally, I experienced only Chlorpromazine. Once I said to a nurse to go to hell. I just could not stand the situation. I was about fourteen years old, I do not remember what kind of conflict happened, but I was very rude and she ordered two boys to hold me. Then she gave me a shot. Chlorpromazine by itself is a fairly harmless drug: you would just sleep a lot. But when regularly injected, it caused addiction.

Why did I say addiction? Because I almost got hooked on them. We had a girl Galina, may her soul rest in peace, she did not survive the age of eighteen. She was called a “running girl” as she used to escape through the windows. For that, she was prescribed Chlorpromazine in the form of tablets. When I found out about it, I felt sorry for her and approached her and said, “Just pretend that you swallow them, but in fact give them to me.”

We had serious control in the orphanage. We did not have toilet bowls, only buckets of garbage, so it was impossible to hide the tablets. I began swallowing them instead. No one even paid attention to the fact that I was so sleepy, as if I was drunk. I began to sleep and see good dreams, very good ones. I do not remember everything now, but I remember that I saw my mother. It seemed to me that she came and took me. I dreamed that I was healthy, I saw that I was in paradise. Every day I was looking forward to swallow the tablets and waited for dreams.

That continued until others finally figured out what was wrong. They began to inject Galina with Chlorpromazine. Over time, her whole body became atrophied, because she was

constantly lying in bed. Although the girl could walk and was healthy before, she turned into a vegetable, and then died.

I have been recovering from Chlorpromazine for a long time. I remember that I followed the nurse and asked her to give me tablets again. I wanted to fall asleep and see these beautiful dreams again. I did not like the world I lived in, but in dreams I was happy. I begged again and again, but no one gave them to me.

The truth is, as soon as I recovered from drugs, the time of persecution came. Once, I finally crossed the line and snitched. An inspection came to the orphanage and I just said that they did not give us bread. After that, I became an outcast both among children and adults. The children did not understand how I could snitch. Nobody talked to me for a long time. I could not tell my own opinion, the children just stepped aside from me and that's it. There was no me for them. It was hard. They played with each other, but I sat in the corner and was neither here nor there. Once I was beaten for snitching. I had to win their respect again - one chance helped me.

That day we went for a walk on the street. Not far from us was another orphanage. The boys came from there and started to humiliate us, calling us invalids and freaks. Our guys answered, everything escalated and we began to fight side by side. Despite the fact that I did not participate in the debates I fought for our guys. They started to respect me again. That time I broke my finger, I was beaten very badly, but I did not feel the pain, I felt so good, because I returned the respect of my friends. We returned to the orphanage with black eyes, bruises, my nose was bleeding. Nowadays if a nurse sees such a scene, I think she would run up right away, but at that time she just looked at us, snorted and continued to watch her TV. I thought whether to ask her for a cotton pad or a bandage, but then I thought it was probably better just to let her

watch “Santa Barbara.” I went to the room, washed my face and organized myself: I was alive and thank God.

When we were already teenagers, we became in charge at the orphanage ourselves. Those who were older than us either left, or were taken to a psychiatric hospital, or died before reaching the age of eighteen. Among us there was Irina - she got ill with asthma when she was about eighteen years old. She died in the orphanage. She was Doctor's favorite. He was very worried because of her death. I still remember. But she was so cruel; she was not a good person. When she died, we took all her belongings and toys and celebrated that she was dead. Yes, we were cruel and not good either, now I understand that, but she was very cruel. She had a mother who came to visit her. Irina hated her parents, treated them very boorishly. They gave her toys, brought gifts, but Irina would curse at them or complain that food was not sufficiently warm. I was always shocked. I dreamt of someone coming to visit me. I was ready to kiss their feet. In my childhood I wanted it very much. I wanted to get gifts so that I could share with others, but, alas ...

Irina was a leader for a long time. She told us that earlier in the Soviet era, caregivers were not engaged in upbringing, their task was only to feed and dress children. The elder children took responsibility for upbringing. Irina chased and beat me, and said that I was nobody there. She constantly imposed that idea on me. But strangely enough, when she was given gifts, she never left anything for herself - she first shared with the elders, and then all that was left gave to young kids. She came to us and said that we could take a candy and eat it. Therefore, despite her cruelty, she taught us all these relationships and laws, which we further supported: always to share, not to leave each other under any circumstances, always be for each other. She repeated these rules over and over again, often with abuse and obscenities.

Also Irina had a pyramid toy, which she filled with stones. She used it as her weapon. Even when she was laying in bed, in spite of her poor health state, she managed to throw this pyramid and hurt children. Once I decided to play a hero and went near her. She hit my head with her toy, I literally felt as if my head cracked - the skull cracked, I thought. I felt a warm stream going down my head. As it turned out, it was blood. I began to stagger and everything became blurred in my eyes. At that moment, I did not feel any pain, on the contrary, I felt such a comforting light feeling. It turned out that I lost consciousness and later they told me that I was about to die. But I remember this feeling very well: how warm blood began to flow over my head and how it became so comforting, so good.

When Irina died, a new leader appeared, Danil. He was German. We called him Fascist. He sometimes corresponded to this nickname. His methods of upbringing often went beyond the limits. He had such a whim that the children had to sit in a line on a bench and getting off was considered a crime. Everybody was afraid of Danil, except for a few people, including me. We grew up with him and accepted him as a leader. At some point, I began to consider myself guilty, because I *woke up* late and realized that he was completely out of control with kids. I was the only one who stood up against him. We started to have conflicts and fights with him. Our group divided into two camps - those who supported me and those who stood for him. For a long time we clashed. Most of the younger kids supported me.

Once we had a serious fight where everyone participated. Even though we were seemingly disabled and we did not have anything to divide (I understand this now), but at that time the fight got tied up. We did not have psychologists who could solve the situation. The kids stood up for me and, of course, Danil lost. At that time we had a rule, if you lost - that's it. For some time I became a leader.

Yet, when we became in charge, it was not easy. Nurses and caregivers considered children as nothing at all. They drank, closed themselves in their rooms and spent the whole day there. They did not care what was going on. On the other hand, I can understand them, they received salary in a form of video recorders. But they also had their own children whom they had to feed. They could not be angry with their children, so they would come to work, do nothing or get angry with us. Thus, we, the “elders in charge,” started to take small buckets with food and feed the kids. Later all responsibilities fell on us as the caregivers realized that we were able to do everything ourselves. They made us an offer: we take all responsibility to care for children in exchange for partial freedom, namely the nurses would not bother us much. We agreed, we started to come and report to them on what we had done.

During the period when I was a leader, I understood that I have to let go of many things. I did not know how to be a leader. I dismissed many traditions; the kids really became insolent and did not obey us, because I could not manage them well. All the guys around me understood that, so over the time, Danil felt that his time had come once again. Well, I voluntarily agreed myself that he would become a leader again.

We started to divide the responsibilities among us and make schedules of duty, I personally wrote them. The duty officer was responsible for everything, he had to get up at about five in the morning, wake the children up, feed them, watch them wash their faces, put on their clothes. Then he had to take them to the playing room and spend time with them until 6 pm. At 6 pm there was dinner, then toilet, bath rituals and sleep.

It was rather difficult to be on duty. You had to get up very early, go to the children, and they were completely different, many had serious diagnoses, many could not understand anything. Many of them peed and pooped in their beds, so we had to change sheets under them,

as there were no diapers. Even now I remember this time with horror: you untie and dress, untie and dress. There were children from five to fourteen years old, but there were seventeen year olds too, who were not adequate at all. They were almost like adult men, yet we had to change their clothes too.

Most of the time we spent in the playroom. We gathered all the children there, about twenty to thirty people, closed the door, sat down in the center of the room and monitored children till evening. But I tried not just to sit there, I started to invent games and classes for them.

Later I introduced another innovation - "a quiet hour." I've grown up without the quiet hour. But once we participated in a kind of festival in the town of Lukinsk. We were taken there with the program we had won in one of the competitions before. They met us well and took us for a tour. It happened that it was a quiet hour. We were led along the corridor and they said, "Be quiet, the children are asleep. It is a quiet hour now." Can you imagine? I thought, wow, "a quiet hour" it might be time when I can get some rest! Because I was getting very tired while on duty as children played, ran around, and were naughty. From 6 am to 6 pm I had to be with them. Whenever I finished my duty shift, I went to my room and just immediately fell asleep. I was so surprised why other guys who were on duty did not get tired. As it turned out they just sat and did nothing, made comments to children and that's it. But I really worried about them. I was worried that they were not developing. The children felt my caring attitude, and they were happy when I was on duty, because I really cared for them and invented all sorts of games. Those kids who were able to more or less understand [mentally developed], I was raising them up the way I was raised up. Sometimes I used harsh methods, but I always insisted that children help those who were not able to understand anything.

So one day I began to introduce quiet hour. First, I asked the caregivers why we did not have a quiet hour. They looked at me like I was a fool and told me not to bother myself with nonsense. They told me that never ever in their lives would they make the beds again during the day. I listened to them, but did my own way. I began to organize a quiet hour in the playroom myself. I came up with a game. I walked in a line with children, then I told them that we would play a game called “quiet hour.” Those who would fall asleep would get a candy and those who don’t would not get anything.

Not everyone understood me, of course, some children’s diagnoses were difficult. But I explained to the “difficult” children by example. I laid down on the floor and those who understood repeated after me and pretended to be asleep. At first they pretended to sleep as they thought the game would continue for half an hour, but when they saw that I did not get up for an hour or two, many felt asleep. Some children were not getting the game, they would get up and move. I had to explain to them again and again. Later, I realized that those children who could not understand - they lived by instincts: they did not understand many things, but they had instincts or habits.

I made an unexpected discovery once. I had a child, Roman, he did not understand words at all. I tried to make him fall asleep in different ways, but he could not understand. He saw that I was angry and he tried to lay down for some time, but then he would get up again. I could not stand it. Once I became very angry and threw a blanket onto him. It happened by chance that the blanket covered him. An hour passed, he did not get up, two hours have passed - he was still lying down and then it hit me! I started to cover all children with blankets and they all began to sleep.

Over time, not only other children started to arrange a quiet hour, but also in other barracks caregivers started quiet hours too. Once as I was walking along the corridor, I heard how the nurse shouted, “Everyone, quiet hour!” Can you imagine my pride? That was what I did, my work. I’m wondering if they write a story about the orphanage, will they write that I introduced a quiet hour or not? This is certainly not for praise, just for interest.

That’s how I began to work with children - first I played with them, and then I began to teach them how to read and write. By the way, my first love forced me to learn how to read and write. I was about thirteen years old and one wonderful woman worked at the orphanage at that time. Her daughter often visited her and when I saw her, I immediately fell in love. When I saw her, I thought that an angel had come down from heaven. We began to communicate a little and play together. One day she asked me,

“Do you know how to read, at least?”

“No,” I answered.

“How about writing?”

“No.”

“Well, why do I need you then?” she said irritably, turned around and left.

It *really* hurt me. It offended me, although until that moment I, like other guys, did not even think that it was necessary to read and write. We simply did not think about it at all. Yet, after talking with her, I decided to learn by all means. In our orphanage, there was only one boy, Dmitry, who could read and write. We called him a “family crystal boy.”

He was a family boy, because he lived in a family up to ten years and finished four grades of public school. He was “crystal,” because his bones were very weak and he constantly broke something. Dmitry was younger than me, and I was older, so he was afraid of me. Besides

we followed rules like in a military - the subordination had to be preserved. It was impossible for me to simply approach and ask him for help. That was against the rules. I had to solve this problem. First, I went to my friends and said, "I want to learn how to read. Therefore, I inform you all that I will now go to Dmitry and he will teach me how to read. In return I will give him favors."

"Are you out of your mind? Why do you want to read? Are you going to humiliate yourself in front of this tiny kid?" they told me.

"Whether you like it or not, I am determined to read, so it's better if you accept it as it is."

They were still a bit ruffled, but then they said, "Well, it's good that you told us directly, you did not plot behind our backs."

After securing my friends' approval, I arranged to meet with Dmitry.

"Dmitry, I'm ashamed to admit it, but I cannot read."

"Yes, I'm not surprised, none of you can read or write," he said with a smile.

"Can you teach me to read and write?" I asked.

"I'll teach you to read, but not to write."

"Why not?"

"Well, then you'll have to make me one of your ranks, but it's not right, right?"

"Yes, it's wrong ... well, then teach me to read."

Dmitry taught me only the alphabet. He did not teach me how to read. As soon as I learned the alphabet I somehow guessed that the letters could be combined into syllable and syllables into words. When I learned how to read, I no longer needed that girl who offended me. It's not because I started to have a fair concept of myself, I was just so carried away by books. I

forgot about everything in the world. I searched and asked for books everywhere, even in dumps. It was not important for me what kind of books to read, novels or thrillers. I was brought a whole collection of Alexander Dumas. I re-read them all and I got so fascinated by them. Books were sort of discovery for me. Lord, I could not even imagine that I could learn so many stories and so many interesting things from knowing these letters [alphabet]!

Soon my friends started to call me a grandfather, because I stopped hanging out with them and kept reading a lot. Later, of course, I got tired of reading. But the truth was that from our group I was the first who learned to read and write. After some time, others also developed a desire to read. For instance, Danil, who was the leader, saw that I was immersed in these books, that I was learning something new, and that I started to show my cleverness. He would talk to me and I would reply, "But Aristotle said"

"Who is Aristotle?" Danil asked me.

"He is a philosopher and there also was a French writer called Alexander Dumas!"

"French? Then why does he have a Russian name?"

"Well, that's how they called him in France."

"And what is France?" he asked again.

"Danil, if you want to learn everything, learn to read. But I will not teach you - you're an overgrown person, I would better start teaching kids."

Eventually, I did start to teach kids. I bought first copybooks for them when I sold a Bible. Once missionaries visited our orphanage and they gave me the Bible, I re-read it a couple of times. Then a new caregiver was hired, she had never seen the Bible in her life.

Once she said to me, "I've always dreamed of owning the Bible, but I never had a chance."

“Do you want me to sell it to you?” I asked.

“For how much?”

“For a million rubles.”

I did not even expect that she would agree, I jokingly named the price, but she agreed and brought me money. Then people blamed me that I committed a terrible sin, but that was the true story. Because we were not allowed to go outside, I asked one good nurse to buy me something delicious for that money.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“I do not know.”

But then I thought and remembered that once I was given a Choco-Pie, “Yes, buy a Choco-Pie, please.”

“OK,” she answered and headed towards the exit.

Suddenly I stopped her, “Wait, buy a pair of Choco Pies, and for the rest buy pens and notebooks.”

“What for?”

“I just want.”

She brought me three Choco-Pies, and a pile of notebooks, pens and markers. First, they were just lying there useless, but once my friend Kostia crawled to me, he could not walk on his feet either. He asked me to read to him. I started to read, it sounded interesting for him. I asked him if he would like to learn how to read, he said he would. I began to teach him, and eventually I wanted everyone to learn how to read. I opened my own classroom. All the nurses looked at me like I was an idiot, except for Doctor, he praised me.

In the morning, I used to go out into the corridor and shout with such a commanding tone, “To class!”

Out of all the rooms, children ran with notebooks and pens and headed into the playroom where we sat on the floor. I taught them the alphabet and screamed horribly if any of the children forgot it. When they learned the alphabet and learned to read more or less, I began to teach them topics on history and literature. I would choose a topic and we studied it. We learned Pushkin's poems by heart. I also especially liked the theme of volcanic eruption. Much of what I read, I did not understand myself. Many words were unfamiliar to me. It was not easy for children to understand either, some went into hysterics, they cried, but still they liked it. I saw with what joy they ran to my classes.

Then I decided to make my friend Igor a teacher too, and we began to teach in shifts. At first, he was not completely recognized and respected by children, but then everything went well. Over time, even Danil learned to read and write. But it was very difficult to teach children as they still had different diagnoses, and I was just not able to train them all. This idea came to me at the age of sixteen and I taught until I was eighteen years old. For this period of time, about ten to fifteen people have learned how to read.

When the principal found out that I had learned to read, he did not believe his ears. He went around and asked who taught me, but everyone said no. Then he called me and praised me. He told me that he felt that I had a good future and he signed me up for school. One teacher began to visit me, Liudmila Petrovna. She was with me for a long time, I was poorly educated and I was not interested in learning. At that moment I wanted to hang-out and play with my friends, and she was coming and trying to force knowledge into me. I was not interested at the time, but now I am deeply thankful to her because she did not give up on me and gave me four

grades of education. She kept telling me that nothing good will come out of me, but she continued to teach me.

When we became older the attitude of caregivers began to change for the better. We suddenly became good people in their eyes and caregivers talked frankly with us. Perhaps they were afraid we would complain and they would be investigated or something. One day a nurse told me that if I my cast was changed in time, I would normally walk on my own feet. They made a surgery on my leg especially so that I could walk... Thus, I should have walked on my own feet, but, alas ... It did not happen.

When I was seventeen, I started to look for my mother. I do not know why, but I got a feeling that I had to find her. Doctor helped me very much. He sent numerous requests here and there, but there was no answer. Then I somehow saw an advertisement on TV – a kind of a directory. They said, “For any question we can give you an answer and a phone number.” I knew the name of my mother and my father, so I decided to try calling and asking for a number.

“Hello, this is Directory Assistance, how may I help you?” I heard on the other end of the line.

“Hello, could you give me Anatoly Ivanovich Bykov's phone number?”

“Yes, of course, just a minute.”

I could not believe, was it just so easy?

“You know, there is such a citizen residing in Turukhansk and in Krasnoyarsk. Which one do you need?”

“From Turukhansk,” I said at random.

“OK, write down the phone number ...”

I wrote down the phone number and decided to call right away.

“Hello, is it Anatoly Ivanovich?”

“Yes, speaking.”

“I'm looking for Bykova Svetlana Fedorovna.”

“We've already divorced, we do not live together, but who are you?” he asked me.

“I'm her classmate, we are planning a reunion.” I answered him, not daring to tell the truth.

“OK, you can call her eldest daughter, she knows for sure. Here is her phone number ...”

Then I called her daughter, Vika.

"Hello, Vika!"

“Hello.”

“I'm looking for Bykova Svetlana Fedorovna.”

“She's in the hospital. My stepfather had an accident and she is with him there, but what do you want?”

At that moment my heart started beating wildly, my hands became wet, emotions overwhelmed me. I did not know what to say ...

“So what do you want? Who are you?” Vika continued to shout into the phone.

“Tell her that her son is looking for her...” I burst out emotionally.

Communication broke off abruptly, Vika hang up the phone.

A couple of hours later my mother called me back. I picked up the phone and heard her sobbing voice, “Evgeny, is that you?”

“Yes, it's me.”

“Give me your address, I'll come to you.”

An hour later she really came, she sobbed and asked for forgiveness. She told me a trivial story, like everyone else that doctors told her I had died in the hospital. She began to visit me and then decided to take me from the orphanage. A year and a half later, she kept her promise.

I moved to their apartment. She was renting a one-bedroom apartment together with a stepfather. Their children lived in the grandfather's apartment. We began to live all together. At first everything was more or less fine. Of course, it was obvious that we were different. For example, at the orphanage the caregivers were always mixing soup and the main dish together. For a long time, I did not even know that they were supposed to be served as two different meals. Nevertheless, I got used to it. Thus, when I started to live with my mother I continued to mix soup and the main dish together. My mom and stepfather looked at me with surprise.

Later some situations began to break my heart. My stepfather would go on drinking sprees from time to time and beat my mother. For my mom it was normal, she believed that everything was all right – if he beats, then he loves her. But for me it was outrageous and I often argued with him. The younger daughter always interfered and took his side.

In addition, there was a problem: I could not apply for anything. I could neither study nor work as I was considered “mentally retarded” and “incompetent.” In 1997, when inspections of orphanages began, all children who were fourteen years old were promised housing from the government. But of course the government did not have money for everyone: there were many orphans, yet not enough money. But the law was the law, and to follow the law a solution was found - to recognize children as mentally retarded and incompetent.

In Russia, there are special institutions - psycho-neurological boarding institutions (PNBI) and hospitals for adults where everyone could be placed. The government started to send everyone there. I personally do not remember that in 1997 I passed some sort of commission, or

there was a court, or my opinion was even asked. I do not remember that at all. Yet, when I began to investigate, I read the court decision from 1997 and it was written clearly that there was a court hearing and I was present at the trial, that there were my guardians and representatives of guardianship authorities. It was written that I was dressed sloppily, that I tore up my shirt in the courtroom, and that I answered questions inadequately!

My God! I lived in an orphanage like all ordinary children: hung out, dated girls, played. Then, I suddenly was recognized as mentally retarded and incompetent. I remember that orphanage principal told us that we were considered incompetent, but we did not understand the meaning. Incompetent, what is it? What do we have to do with it? Nobody explained anything to us. It is only when I left the orphanage it turned out that it was a total disaster. I was allowed neither to study nor to work. The state did not really give up on me, but at the same time it did not owe me anything anymore. Do you want an apartment? Well, you're incompetent! Education? You're incompetent! Work? But you are incompetent!

In general, I could not do anything, I stayed at home and witnessed the difficult relationship between my mother and stepfather. The situation heated up to the point that a year later they decided that I should return to the government institution. They accused me of interfering in their personal lives. They told me that they lived well without me. I was so offended and hurt that I did not care where I would continue to live.

I relocated to “Krasnoyarsk’s Boarding House for the Elderly and Disabled People.” At first I felt offended as I was again in a government institution. I got depressed. It was very difficult for me because I felt betrayed once again. It was foolish of me to hope that I had acquired a family, a family, which I dreamed of as a child, but in a real life it turned out that I never had any. Only thanks to my lifelong friends, comrades, acquaintances I had the strength to

go further, to fight and rise. Their actions and presence, even if they do not realize that, gave me the strength and the stimulus to live.

Now I'm telling all children not to search for their parents and relatives, there is no need. If it happened that you grew up in an orphanage, then it's better to remain that way, because when you find your parents then it will be even more painful. Now it hurts me because I know where my mother lives, I can call her anytime. I'm worried about her health. I'm very concerned about the attitude of the sisters towards me and I know that it's bad and it is even more painful. But when you do not know, as I did not know before, everything was fine. What the hell drew me to look for them?

I guess I thought that everything would happen as it was with Nikolai Krylov. We had a boy and his mother found him purely by accident. The story was also confusing. His mother had a high government position and she came to the orphanage with an inspection. I remember this scene. She entered the room and the principal was telling her, "So, children eat here."

Suddenly her eyes fall on Nikolai and she grew all pale.

"And who is it?" she asked the principal, pointing at Nikolai.

"This is Nikolai Krylov," the principle replied and as soon as he pronounced the last name Krylov he immediately realized that she also had the same last name.

He turned to look at her, but she was already in tears and rushed to Nikolai, she began to tell him the same story that my mother said that she thought he was dead. But unlike my story, it all ended well. She took him abroad, he had a surgery there, he grew up healthy. I also hoped that I would have the same situation. I hoped, but it did not work out.

After some time, I decided to fight. I wanted to live and learn. Thus, I appealed to the court to remove the status of mentally retarded and incompetent. The court ordered to put me

into psycho-neurological hospital to check my adequacy for thirty days. At the hospital, I was staying with prisoners: one was a murderer, two drug addicts, one was a rapist and me. One drug addict had huge experience with drug addiction: he had been taking drugs for thirty years. Therefore, his nickname was Experience. Creepy, of course, that was the company I had to be with. In addition, I was constantly checked. The guard could wake me up at 3-4 o'clock in the morning and ask what day and time it was. They treated me like a prisoner, when they led me out of the room, they pressed me against the wall. I was tortured and checked for a long time. Fortunately, the doctors turned out to be decent. On the last day, when the doctors were supposed to give their final verdict, they told me, "You're a normal guy, it's strange that others insisted so much on your incompetence."

From this conversation, I realized that the guardianship wanted very much and asked doctors to recognize me as incompetent. Oh, you should have seen the faces of people from the guardianship and of the prosecutor, when the results of the examination were announced in the court and the court decided to recognize my right to be as independent and capable adult.

I was really afraid that they would lock me up in a psychiatric hospital, because it was hard to break the system. They all stand up for each other. The judge would never admit the error of another judge. Although they decided in my favor, no one said that the previous judge made a mistake or made an illegal decision. In my final court verdict, it was written that I no longer needed to be incompetent; supposedly the term of my debility had expired, I got treatment and everything went away.

The most interesting thing I discovered was that by law, when it all started, I really had to be monitored by a psychiatrist. I looked for documents - there was nothing about me in any of the psychiatric hospitals. I was not even registered once with them, yet I was officially a

psychopath from 1997 to 2008. I just calmly existed as incompetent all these years and not even once did I turn to a psychiatrist, isn't that strange?

Anyway, I still got rid of this status. Right after the court, I decided to go to evening school.⁴ I do not know why, but I always understood that I needed to get an education. Probably I understood this since I learned how to read. I knew that I needed to go further and it was interesting for me. The only problem I had was math. In the evening school poor teachers had many problems with me, but I should say not in vain. When I passed the Unified State Exam (USE)⁵ in mathematics, I scored more points than in all other subjects. I studied at evening school since sixth grade.

For three years I studied remotely: I was given assignments, I read them myself, studied the material, performed tasks and brought papers back for checkup. In tenth and eleventh grades, I went to school every day myself, because they were preparing us for the USE. These five years flew by fast for me, and I met good people. They trained me well for the exam. I was terrified during the exam! My knees were shaking. Everything was so serious: our mobile phones were taken away and we were under video surveillance. Nevertheless, I passed the exams with enough points to enter the university.

At first I entered the Technological Institute for Social Work, I wanted to be a social worker. That was my conscious decision, because since childhood I dreamt to help people. Yet, when I was younger I wanted to be a policeman and help society in this way. Unfortunately, my

⁴ Evening school is a public school for adults, who for any reason could not complete secondary education while they were children.

⁵ The Unified State Exam is, in fact, a series of exams on different school subjects that students must pass to enter any university or college in Russia.

disability destroyed all my childhood dreams to become *Uncle Stepa*⁶ and I decided to become a social worker.

There was one budget spot and it happened that for that spot I had to compete with another candidate.⁷ Apparently, he had more connections, because after about a month, I was expelled. The official reason was that my Russian-language exam points were rather low. At first, I wanted to argue with them because they had seen my scores before and they accepted me with them, but after a month they suddenly changed their minds. But then I thought, may God be with them.

I stayed for a year at home and then I decided to apply to the Siberian Federal University. Again, I wanted to choose Social Work, but indeed, it turned out that the scores for the Russian language were rather low. I got upset, I was thinking what to do. I already wanted to leave when suddenly the dean caught up with me.

“Young man, you have good scores in mathematics, why don’t you go to Sociology? It only requires your results in mathematics.”

“Oh, no, I ran like the wind from math.”

“Think about it,” he said.

I thought and decided that rather than wasting another year it was better to accept the offer. Now I am studying in the university, on a budget, the government pays for my education. It is my corresponding fourth year. I thought that it would be difficult at first, but it turned out to be fine. I am doing well even in mathematics. We have statistics, probability theory and everything is fine, I’m not complaining.

⁶ Uncle Stepa, a famous fictional character from a poem by Sergei Mikhailkov, is a policeman, who has everyone’s respect.

⁷ Currently, in public universities there is a quota of “budget spots” which are fully funded by the government. The rest of the spots are allocated to “commercial spots,” requiring students to pay tuition by themselves.

At the same time when I applied to the university, I tried to find a job. I went to the government social service and a very good director turned out to work there. She listened to my story and empathized with me. At that time she could not officially employ me, but she managed to get me a position and only after a couple of years she offered me an official position as a social worker. I worked with the elderly and people with disabilities, bought them food, and accompanied them to hospitals. Since 2016, I have been promoted and now I work as a specialist, mainly working on a computer and dealing with documentation.

Once I made a heroic act with my colleagues. They invited me to go to Stolby Natural Sanctuary - this is a mountain reserve in Krasnoyarsk region. They told me that it would be a bus tour. I agreed and joined them. When we arrived there, it turned out that day buses were not touring. My colleagues suggested that I should go back home by car, but I was stubborn, I said no, if I came that far then I would go. I walked seven kilometers around the mountains that day. At one point, I stopped feeling my legs. I knew that they were drowning in blood. Luckily, I had dark boots and my colleagues did not see any blood. I walked and I hated myself. I kept thinking, "To whom am I trying to prove something? What am I doing? What for?"

When I got home I was afraid to take off my shoes, because I knew that there was just raw flesh. But the most painful thing was not even when I rubbed my knees, but when I put them into cold water. For me this was the only way, since childhood, to help my knees recover quickly. I pick up the basin with water myself, close my mouth with a gag, because it is always damn painful. I lower my knees into the water, and it hurts so badly because water penetrates into the wound, my bones and flesh. Then I wrap my knees neatly with a clean piece of cloth or a bandage and lay down until morning. In the morning, pain certainly remains, but at least I can get on my knees.

That day, I'd been thinking that I would prove something to my colleagues, but I did not, they did not even notice that something was wrong. I walked and smiled. Many people think that it's so easy for me and even cannot imagine how much it hurts. It always surprises me when healthy people who have hands and feet begin to complain about their lives. If only they knew what I have to go through every day just to walk on these knees...

In fact, I'm a very weak person, I just show people a mask. Maybe I broke down a long time ago but I just do not show that? I understand that I have to do something in my life, I have to work. I do not have a family or children behind me. For me, the worst thing that can happen is if I suddenly die and leave nothing behind. I want to prolong my family name. I'm the only man called Bykov in my family and if I do not do this, the clan will stop with me. The rest of the father's children were all girls, they got married and have changed surnames long ago. I'm afraid it will be too late soon, time does not spare us. Although sometimes I catch myself thinking that's perhaps it is better as is. I am fine by myself, there is no responsibility, no need to worry about anyone. I look around at families and see nightmares. They constantly quarrel, divide something.

My friend from the orphanage got married recently. Literally this year, a beautiful wedding was celebrated. So, they celebrated, and what? Just a few months have passed and they are already talking about divorce, cursing each other and fighting. What to divide? What does not suit them? A year did not even pass. Sometimes I see all this and I think that maybe it's good that I am alone.

When I was in the orphanage I had many relationships myself. I was even called Philanderer, it was my second nickname. Surprisingly, all of my relationships were with girls not from the orphanage. For two years I dated a girl whose mother worked as a nurse. This girl's name was Lida. I did not particularly like her. I do not know what she saw in me. Once, my

friend Danil and I walked in a park when we saw her with a friend. They were talking and giggling.

My friend Danil liked Lida. "Evgeny, invite her here, let's get acquainted," he asked me.

"If you need, go yourself!" I answered him.

"Oh, please."

"OK...."

So I approached the girls and said, "Dear girl, my friend really likes you, let me take you to him."

She laughed and looked at me from top to bottom. I knew that my appearance was not up to an ideal, I was not very handsome.

"Go your own way," she answered with a laugh.

"Fine," I answered and immediately turned around to leave.

Then Danil decided to approach her himself. He looked more handsome than me. We got to know them and invited Lida to our orphanage. We secretly brought her to the orphanage so that no one could see her. We invited her into our room and played cards all night. Nothing happened of that sort. When I was tired of playing, I went to bed. When I woke up, they were sleeping in the same spot they had played cards the day before. Then the door opened, the nurse came in and screamed, "Wake up!"

Then she saw Danil and Lida. Her eyes widened and she said, "What are you doing here?"

It turned out that Lida was her daughter.

Two days later another nurse came up to me and said,

"Well, you, Bykov, are completely shameless! How could you give the central telephone number to your girls?"

I did not understand what she was talking about, but I went to answer the phone.

“Hello, who is this?” I said.

“Do you not remember that we played cards all night long?”

“Ah ...”

Since then she started to follow me. For about a year I did not give up. I did not like her, I only wanted to be friends. But she was stubborn, she even climbed through windows. I was called to the principal’s office many times because of her. Then Doctor advised me to give her a chance, he was sure she would get tired of me and leave by herself. He was right. Literally two years later she left me. She did it unexpectedly, without warning, just one day she disappeared. I phoned her, wrote to her, looked for her like a fool. I was worried, I thought maybe something bad had happened, but then it turned out that she had already married while I was looking for her. What could I say? “My children, be happy,” I turned around and went away. I was not really deeply saddened by that.

There was another girl who also ran after me. Doctor was surprised, he told me a couple of times, “What do they find in you?” I really do not know. I seemed not to be so handsome, but this trend followed me until I was twenty-six, but then it was as if someone had cursed me. Now I’m not as before, after twenty-six I can no longer be called a womanizer.

Once, I even had an affair with a young nurse. It all ended with a scandal. Even in my personal file they wrote, “Had an intimate relation with an employee.” I was shocked, I did not expect they would write it in my portfolio.

Once there was a girl from the institute, she also liked me. She was young, foolish and naive. Romance happened between us. Everything was nice, but not for long. Her parents were against me. Later she married another man and I stayed alone.

Until today, I have not been particularly lucky in relationships, but I have big plans for the future, whether they will come true or not, I do not know. Dreams, dreams, dreams... There is nothing supernatural in my dreams. I want to have a family, have children. I want to leave something behind, probably that's all. Now I work and study. I live a normal life. Yet, I do not have my own apartment. That would be nice to have my own home. This is also my dream. I'm tired of living in state institutions. I pay my money for housing, seventy-five percent of the pension, which is about ten thousand rubles (about \$150). Is that what is called justice? At the orphanage, children did not pay anything, but now I live not in my own room, yet I pay for it. I live in a state room where at any moment I can be evicted or moved to another room, if the administration desires so. I have no other place to live. Of course, I can decide to leave this place, but where would I go? I understand that I have nowhere to go. Go home? Nobody waits for me there, and I do not like to inflict myself...

A Visit to the Past

One day we decided to visit his orphanage. We arrived in an area that was relatively far from the city center. Coming out of the bus, I saw beautiful new high-rise buildings and small shops. We walked from the bus stop to the orphanage on foot. He told me his life stories on the way.

“Yes, many things have changed here. But look at that shop, everything has changed, but it is still here,” Evgeny told me.

At this point, I stopped and took pictures.

“Do not take pictures so openly,” he told me.

“I'm a tourist, I can,” I laughed.

“Oh, sure. Let's go into the shop.”

We went into a small shop stuffed with food, looked around and went out into the street.

“Everything here is the same, only they added a slot machine. OK, let's go further ,”

Evgeny told me.

“If you follow this road, it leads to a lake. Previously there were three lakes. We used to run away and go there. There were almost no buildings, just a wasteland and a forest. There was only one five-storied building, and some private houses. Previously, all children knew me here, but now all children are unknown to me. I wish I would meet someone I know...OK, let's cross the road here. I hope it does not rain, although it will anyway, I just hope that it will start after we are done.”

“Look at that brick house, they started building it during my childhood. We called it *Piatachok*, because there was a shop named *Piatachok*.”

“How do you feel when you see the place of your childhood?” I asked.

“I do not understand anything special ... Nostalgia. Anyway, whatever one may say about my childhood, I still had more good memories than bad.”

Silence.

“I have not been here for two, three years. I came here before because of my work. I work in social services and sometimes I interact with orphanages as part of my job. I work with documentations or transport a child. I honestly tried to settle here for work [at the orphanage], but it did not work out. Probably it's not my destiny.”

“By the way, here is a five-story building, oh, I'm mistaken. There are more floors. The territory has changed very much, there used to be only one road and forest and forest ... Now it is all different.”

“Oh, here is our precious mental hospital, unfinished. Here we spent almost all of the time. They began to build the psychiatric hospital in the 1990s. I remember we were so frightened because caregivers were telling us, “We'll finish the building and all of you will live there! We'll finish the building and all of you will live in the psychiatric hospital!”

“But it did not come true... They stopped the construction after some time, I don't know why... Yet, all of my childhood memories are related to that place. We climbed the construction side, played a war game.”

“Oh, yes, here it is my sweet five-storied building. My first love, Julia, lived here once, but that was childish love, not something serious. I ran here to her. We went around the garages and got to this five-storied building. We ran around here and had fun. I gave her flowers. I tore them from the bushes and gave to her. Yeah...”

“This house was built after I left the orphanage. Garages have always been here as far as I can remember, they did not change. A good woman, Liuba, lived here. I remember babysitting her grandson. Her daughter was an alcoholic, she gave birth but did not look after her child. Liuba was old, it happened that she would call me and ask me to sit with the child, I would say yes, of course.”

“This parking lot was always here, only in the 90s it was smaller, but now it became bigger.”

I stopped to take another photo.

“What are you photographing?” suddenly from nowhere we heard a voice.

I began to look around and saw that at the top of the viewing platform of the parking we were closely watched by a man, aged forty to forty-five, apparently he was a guard of the parking lot.

“We are taking pictures of places of childhood memory,” I replied.

“I said that people might be interested, people are suspicious,” Evgeny said looking at me.

We passed another fifty meters.

“Here we are. Here it is: my orphanage.”

I saw a fence 100-150 meters long, only the gates were latticed, but the rest of the fence was solid, about three to four meters high. There was a closed solid door of blue color. All around us was deathly silence. I was curious whether inside the orphanage it was as calm as it was outside or some tornadoes were silently twisting and shaping children’s lives.

Behind the solid fence, the orphanage itself was not visible.

“Before, we had another fence and everything was visible, now it's changed,” Evgeny told me.

I took another series of photos.

“Don’t show off the phone too much, otherwise you'll attract even more attention,” Evgeny reminded me again.

“OK,” I answered.

“What do you feel when looking at the orphanage?”

“I have the normal emotions of a person who has already experienced everything, a person who is free and does not depend on the past. With age, everything passes. Sometimes I have feelings that I did not even live here. There is no such awe feeling anymore.”

“Do you know what happened to other graduates who left the orphanage with you?” I asked Evgeny.

“I do not know anything about girls. Almost all were taken to psychiatric hospitals. Danil was as lucky as me. Unlike me, he even got married. His wife also has disabilities, she cannot talk and does not hear well, but she is physically healthy. He has a disability too, he has cerebral palsy. He has not received any education, he does not want to. He thinks it's a shame to go to school so late. He has created a group for making handicrafts on the Internet called *Ochumelie ruchki* (Talented Hands) and children from orphanages make crafts. He is doing a nice job, he is trying to develop their abilities. The children follow him like dogs, and he trains them. They feel his protection and he is really ready to kill anyone for them. He changed now very much, he became a believer and began to go to church. He works with children in the House of Disabled People too. He loves that.”

“Generally speaking, from the old cohort only five of us are left, but there were twenty people at the beginning. Almost all died, both in the orphanage, and after. We just received messages –do not wait for this person any more. One was found dead on the railway. Another girl, who was only sixteen years old, was brutally raped and killed. Some became alcoholic... Everyone had their own fate.”

“How did you manage to avoid drugs and alcohol?”

“I will not say that I'm a saint. While I was in the orphanage I tried hashish, then I sniffed glue, I tried everything. We were ordinary street boys. Well, once I was offered to sniff glue, I said why not to try? I tried, but did not like it. I did not like the fantasies I saw. I vomited from hashish, so I did not get addicted to it either. I tried alcohol and went into drinking sprees; I experienced everything in my life. I have gone binge-drinking for a week.”

“But I always recovered. I could withdraw from any tragedy. There are people who just focus so much on drama, thinking that they are unlucky and they cannot move forward, they just

focus on their problems. But I will suffer, I can even cry, but then I put myself together. Any time I fall, I just get up and go further. Moreover, I never rely on anyone's help. It seems to me, if I ever accept any help in my life, I will stop being myself. Nobody helped me in my childhood. Even when my leg hurt, I climbed the bed myself. I screamed in pain, but continued to climb. I asked for help, but no one came. I realized that no one would ever help me. There are maybe some hypocritical people who would show their readiness to help, but real people who sincerely want to help, they do not exist now.”

“Even when I was in a psychiatric hospital, I thought I had many friends. Yet, there were only two people who came to visit me – two people, whom I did not expect at all. It was very strong support for me. I was waiting for good close people, but none of them came to visit me. It turned out that strangers came and brought me presents. I quickly understood, either I do everything myself or no one will do it for me.”

“There are certainly moments when people on the street might sincerely try to help, let's say, climb a bus, but I usually say no, I can do it myself. I'm afraid I might get used to help and won't be able to do anything on my own. For me that's the worst of all. I do not want to depend on anyone or anything. Even when I was in the psychiatric hospital, I did not allow them to help me to make my bed. Slowly, but I did everything myself.”

Silence.

“Evgeny, was there sexual violence in the orphanage?”

“If there were sexual violence in our orphanage, it would be a perversion. To rape children with physical disabilities is too much, you know? We all are from the USSR and nothing of the kind happened then. In my orphanage until 1991, everything was fine, it was considered the most prestigious orphanage. The food was good and so on, but when the Soviet

Union collapsed, then everything collapsed, including our orphanage. But the consciousness remained Soviet, we were brought up like this.”

“Yes, of course, like all normal children of twelve to thirteen years we experienced the age of puberty. Well, we spied on girls - it was our sin, I can admit, and many of us had sex, I would say, but that was not by force. It was by mutual consent. Moreover, everyone was very ashamed of that and preferred to hide it from everyone.”

There was a pause.

“How quiet it is here ...” I said.

“It was always quiet. But I always wanted to get out of here. Always. I thought that this moment would never come. Yet it happened and I survived.”

“How did you imagine the world while at the orphanage?”

“Oh, I thought a lot about it, I thought how people lived here. Sometimes I would go out to the store from the orphanage and it would seem to me that I had gone so far! I went and found a store where I could buy something, I made a discovery, cool!”

“What surprised you the most?”

“The buses surprised me a lot. I thought before that from point A to point B you need to walk. I thought the nurses walked to and from work. I did not even imagine that there was a special transportation that could take you from one place to another. I remember when we ran away with one kid and reached the bus stop, we saw so many cars for the first time. I had an awe moment. Then I saw a man getting on the bus and I was curious where would he go? My friend and I decided to check it out and we got into the bus as well. Then the conductor announced, “Next stop is BSMP!” I got even more surprised, I thought, “Oh, they can drive you to where you need to.” But when the conductor came to us and asked money for a ticket we were very

surprised, we did not expect that. They called the police. They immediately understood that we had escaped from the orphanage. We were returned to the orphanage and punished for the escape.”

Here we decided to turn back to the bus stop, as the clouds began to thicken and the rain was going to start at any moment. When we reached the parking lot again, we heard the familiar voice of the guard, “You girl, you're doing a great job helping.” The guard shouted to me and by his voice, I realized he was drunk. Evgeny laughed at that moment.

“I do not really help him, he can do everything himself,” I answered.

“Uh, I don't mean anything ... Just saying ... And what did you go there for?” the guard continued.

“Just walking,” answered Evgeny.

“I thought you went to the center ...” said the guard, “All right, all the best to you.”

“To you too,” I said.

We went on.

“There were a lot of nettles here before, every time I walked by I burned my skin.”

There was another pause. I decided to break the silence.

“What do you think education gave you?” I asked.

“Honestly, nothing. The diploma is just lying around. I cannot work normally because the social worker is the ceiling for me. There will be no career growth. Yet, I'm still ambitious. I want career growth, I dream about it. But I am ambitious within the reasonable limits, I will never step over people's backs in life, what for?”

“But if you were not educated, do you think you would have a different life?”

“Yes, of course it would be another life. There would not be any work, and I would have lived on a pension alone.”

At that moment the dog howled.

“Let's go to the five-storied building where my first love lived.”

“Yes, of course, let's go,” I answered.

We approached the yard. Near the house there were small gardens with bushes and flowers. Many cars were parked in front of the building. A little further there was a children's playground, where children were playing. After a short time the children noticed us.

“What is that?” children screamed, pointing fingers at Evgeny.

“My first love lived here,” Evgeny showed me, ignoring the children.

“And there was a sandbox, apparently they took it away.”

In one of the cars, an alarm was triggered. A drunken man, who was shaking from side to side, passed us. Evgeny looked at him and said, “In our time, I remember if a stranger walked through the yard, the boys would come out and begin to find out who he was, from what area, and they could even beat the face.”

“What is that?” the children shouted again, this time running towards us.

“Did he cut off his legs?!” the children screamed.

“Hey, just do not laugh ...” the drunken man shouted at children, who by that time managed to reach the entrance of the building and lean on the door.

Neither Evgeny nor I could ignore such close attention of the children any longer. Evgeny changed in face, became more serious.

“Let's go down there and then out into the street,” he told me.

The children ran up close to us, at arm's length.

“Is this a suit?” children were interested.

Evgeny sadly laughed. “Yeah, the suit...” He repeated after them.

“Then what is that?” children continued.

“It happens,” I answered to them.

“How does it happen?” the children could not calm down.

“Sometimes it happens, people are different,” I answered.

The children began to laugh wildly. Evgeny looked down all the time and continued to walk. Children continued to follow us,

“But how is he? He moves like that!” children pointed at his hands and tried to repeat his gestures.

“That's how it always happens, I am like a little beast, whenever I go outside I am like in a circus. People look at me,” Evgeny said with a sad laugh.

“Alright, that's enough. The more you talk to them, the more attention we get,” with a bit of malice he turned to me.

The children, on the contrary, were getting more and more excited, and began to shout even more aggressively and loudly.

“How can he walk?”

“Ok, enough. Good-bye,” I told children strictly.

“Where are you going? And how he'll go on stairs?” children continued.

We did not answer and kept going. The children were left behind. There was a silence; we both were plunged into our thoughts.

“Evgeny, you have now taught an important lesson to the children.”

“What lesson?” he asked me.

“That people are different. It offends me that in our country there are many people with disabilities and almost all of them are closed in apartments or institutions. If everyone walked freely on the streets, it would have been the norm and people would not react in such a way. So you taught them a good lesson now...”

“All right...” said Evgeny, already in a softer voice.

At that moment dogs started fighting behind us, we heard frightening howls and sounds.

“We left the place just in time!” I said.

“Yes, that's for sure ...”

We were walking towards the bus stop almost in silence, perhaps each of us was trying to process all the emotions and feelings from that day. Then Evgeny broke the silence.

“Well, how do you like the territory of my childhood?”

“It is an interesting place, nature is very beautiful.”

“And where are you going?” Once again we heard familiar voices behind us.

We turned around and saw the same children who caught up with us again. Evgeny and I looked at them strictly.

“Well, go back,” said Evgeny to them.

Surprisingly, the children immediately stopped chasing us and turned around. We continued walking.

Drops of rain began to fall on us...

Fantasies of Life

If not these four events in my life, my life would have been different...

Kostia, 30 years, Moscow region

Kostia⁸ and I were introduced to each other by Dima - another participant in the study, in the winter of 2017. I did not know much about him, except that he was homeless and currently lived with Dima. I arranged to meet with him in Dima's apartment in Moscow.

When I arrived Kostia opened the door. He met me very warmly and led into the kitchen. I instantly noticed Kostia's smile - it literally lit up his whole face. He made an immediate impression of a very kind, open and simple person. Kostia kindly offered me tea, I agreed. We exchanged a couple of phrases and then Dima joined us in a wheelchair. He told Kostia briefly about me, then I added something myself and explained in detail the purpose of the research and talked about his rights as a participant. Kostia agreed right away to give an interview, he felt very comfortable with me since Dima had told him about my research a while ago. Dima went to his room and we stayed in the kitchen for the interview. I asked him to sign a written consent to participate in the study and asked for permission to audio record the interview. He gladly agreed.

“My name is Kostia. I will be thirty years old soon. From a young age I was in the orphanages. The first feeling I remember at the orphanage is that I wanted to see my mother and father. I've just never seen them. Yet, I did not know anything about my parents when I was in the orphanage. At first, caregivers told me that I do not have parents at all; allegedly, my mother died during childbirth. Only later I got to know that my biological mother was alive, she just signed the refusal paper.

I hardly remember my childhood. As I was told, I was in two orphanages, somewhere in the Moscow region. I was told that I almost got caught up in a fire during my childhood, and that

⁸ All names changed to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

I was born under a lucky star. Yet, I do not remember anything myself. I remember only my third orphanage. It was in the village of Hlebino,⁹ Moscow region. It was a correctional orphanage for mentally retarded children, but there were normal kids, I'm serious.

We lived in a three-story building. As far as I remember, at one time we had seventy-seven people, and the largest number was 114. Then somehow it was reduced to fifty. Children were all friendly at the orphanage: there was no bullying. The only thing that our society did not like was when we snitched on each other. I, too, did not respect that type of behavior, because it was not *acceptubal* [acceptable]¹⁰.

The most typical day we had was like this: from Monday to Saturday we had to wake up at 7:00 am, and at 7:30 am we had breakfast. For breakfast we had porridge, or pasta with milk, butter, bread with cheese, with butter or sausage. Sometimes instead of porridge we had omelets, or yoghurt of different kinds. We had even a second breakfast, and for lunch we had salad, different kinds of soup, and bread. We had enough food. Then we had a snack time and dinner in the evening. Yes, we were well fed, although there was a crisis before - we had only barley and peas. But over time, the director found sponsors; we even called her a “beggar” for that reason.

After breakfast we had gymnastics, did all sorts of squats. At first I attended it, but then I began to ignore the exercises. Then we had two lessons, second breakfast, another two lessons and lunch, and after lunch three more lessons. Lessons were held in a nearby building. We were fed as if we were to be slaughtered. One of the boys became incredibly fat because he could eat almost everything. Pugovkin was his last name. We even set a record - who would eat the most plates of food the fastest. Once a guy ate fifteen plates of breakfast. That was the top record!

⁹ Name changed.

¹⁰ Kostia's idiosyncratic speaking style is reflected in the written story.

On Saturdays we also studied, but we knew that it was supposed to be a day off, but we studied. We were forced to. Yet, on Saturdays we had a short school day. On Sundays we got up at 9 am, and then hung out for the whole day.

When I was growing up, I was very short, everyone called me a dwarf. I was very angry and even fought back, saying that I'm not a dwarf. I only got taller when I was in the eighth grade. I started to smoke already from an early age, as long as I can remember. The elders frequently gave me cigarettes. I got drunk for the very first time in fourth grade. It was New Year's Day and one of the ninth-graders gave me my first beer, then champagne and vodka. There were fireworks, firecrackers around me and I remember I had so much fun, I thought, oh, what beauty and grace! I began to have fun, to dance, and smoke. Then I saw the director, went over and told her everything that I did not like at the orphanage. I told her everything. Then I was punished for this.

I remember how Tolik disciplined us all, very seriously. Tolik was the husband of one of the caregivers. He made us exercise, squat or do push-ups. The worst was when he beat us up when we did not obey. His wife was our caregiver, and I was her favorite. I no longer remember her name. She had a private house and she often took me and made me dig, plant in her garden, and taught me how to handle money. Although she was teaching me with anger, she was even telling me that I would end up in prison. Actually, she was right, later I was unfairly sentenced to jail. I will tell about it later. I think she loved me like her son, but I tried to escape from her and somehow I even hated her, honestly ... Once I played with the ball in the orphanage and she hit me so hard on my bare ass that she broke the belt. After that I *hatr* [hated] her very much.

It is still very painful for me to remember when Ivan Petrovich, one of the caregivers, got drunk and came to our room. I was then nine years old. In the room were Artem, Kolya and I.

Ivan Petrovich said something to Kolya and got angry. He grabbed Kolya by the neck and hit his head several times against the heater. He beat him right against the jamb, right here in the temple zone. Kolya died. Artem and I were in shock. Ivan Petrovich turned around, looked at us furiously and said, "If you open your mouth, you will not live, just like him!"

He *scareded* [scared] us so much that Artem began to stammer since then, and I could not say a word for half a year. An inspection came, a local TV, police, but this case was later closed. Ivan Petrovich remained working. It happened on April 26 at 7:12 pm. I even remember the time, because it emotionally hurt so bad. Kolya was my best friend. He had no mother, no one. I only recently managed to let go of this event and calm down. Especially during 2005-2013 I just could not calm down at all. I was a witness but I could not prove anything. He should have lived and lived ... he was quite an angel. Now I see him often in my dreams.

After some time, Ivan Petrovich got drunk with another guard and before my eyes he raped Oleg Krugov. Back then, I did not immediately understand what was happening, but I decided to go and tell the director everything. When I told her, she answered that he did the right thing. Either she was drunk herself or I did not understand her sense of humor. I don't know...

One day a commission came to us and I told them that they rape children here. After that, the guard came to me and raped me, and then he forced me to stand on my knees on peas for the whole night. He began to periodically punish me in that way: he made me squat with cushions on my hands, or forced me to give him a back massage, if he did not like how I did it, then he forced me to do a blowjob or raped me. Sorry for the revelation, but it's true...

Then he raped a girl, Lida. She was only about eight or nine years old. She screamed terribly in his room. Another caregiver walked by and said that he was doing everything right. The administration was aware of such cases, but they closed their eyes. I tried to stand up for the

girl but got beaten for that. Ivan Petrovich, the security guard, and another tutor gathered and beat me all together. They beat me so hard that my whole body was black from bruises. They even put me in the center and threw darts at me.

The next morning there was a general assembly before school, and I went to the director all in bruises, but the director said to me, "Well, isn't it enough for you, do you want more?"

I did not say anything, I felt so bad. I was so ashamed, I cried. Later I was sent to a psychiatric hospital. I went there about four times while I was at the orphanage. They were injecting me with some medicine from which I constantly slept.

After a while, I had a romance with my teacher. She was twenty-one years old, and I was ten. Well, it happened. In front of the whole class she took off my pants and Yes (laughs). She did it not only to me, do not be surprised. She was teaching Russian language in our orphanage. We had a romance with her, after school as well.

Once, I got very drunk and when I woke up I was naked and next to me there was a vice-principal...Neither of us could remember what happened. Apparently, someone saw us and later she got fired. I even tried to argue but it was not too *camping* [compelling].

I had a lot of romances with teachers and caregivers - it seemed to me even fashionable. We were sometimes seen together in bed - the whole orphanage saw us. I was caught with another teacher and a clerk, then with Zorina we also kissed and did other stuff.

In grade six, a family wanted to adopt me. As far as I remember, we were led to a room and they put five children in a row, two boys and three girls. As far as I remember, I asked, "Why are you putting me here?" I was very emotional and still I am. A husband and a wife came to visit us, I do not remember how old they were. They came from the U.S. His wife was Russian, and her husband was American. He barely spoke Russian. They often came to see me,

began to collect all the documents, and then one day they offered me to fly to the U.S. for two weeks. I said, why not, it was interesting for me.

In the U.S., I think we were in New York. I'd been there for two weeks. I was fed and given water there. They drove me to McDonald's and an amusement park - we skated, and I remember roller coasters. I remember that I almost fell from the sixth floor, and there were probably twenty-five floors in that building. I remember that it was very clean and I once threw a candy wrapper and my family was fined. But this life seemed boring to me, because firstly I did not know people and did not understand what they were talking about. Americans always came and visited us. I even saw a man kissing another man. I asked them, "What is it all about?"

"Oh, they are just friends."

Only later I found out that they were gay. But in short, I showed them my character there, made horror. Back then I did not understand what character was all about. I messed things up and broke the dishes. Their dog bit me and doctors stitched my wound, it hurt me so much. I was very angry and behaved badly.

When we returned back to Russia, I was asked if I would agree to go there. But I refused, with respect. They tried to persuade me, but I told them that I would not sell Russia for anything! Then another family wanted to adopt me, I also refused them. Only it was not the Americans, but Chinese, I think. I had an interesting childhood. I do not deny it.

When I grew up a bit from the sixth grade, I started to put all teachers and caregivers in place. Everyone was afraid of me, I run the whole orphanage. When I was in the eighth grade, I was immediately transferred to the ninth grade, because everyone wanted to get rid of me faster. I was not afraid of anyone. I already held in my hands the whole orphanage, even though I was constantly threatened, I was not afraid of anything.

As far as I remember, I started to put sponsors in their place as well. I told them straight to their face in front of the director, “Do you know that whatever you bring to us, we are not getting anything?”

For a moment, the director and the administration stopped breathing, I think. I continued, “Don’t bring anything here anymore, because they take everything home for themselves.”

I *snabded* [snubbed] the director very badly that time. The sponsors stopped coming after this incident. Instead, they started to give me personal money and asked me to buy something for the children so that the caregivers would not see. Once they gave me five thousand rubles (about \$100) and I bought candy. Then they gave me a separate room and I had a lot of food reserves: condensed milk, kefir [dairy drink], canned food. Children knew and often came to me:

“Kostia, is there anything to eat?”

“Yes, come in, eat whatever you want.”

I directly shared food with joy and was so pleased. I was even threatened by the administration not to feed kids, but I did not listen to them. I said that children have the right, let them eat. I even started to fight, because caregivers began to chase and attack me all together. Then we had a serious fight, the chairs and furniture was flying around. I defended my rights and all the children who liked me, they all stood up for me.

We often went to different summer and winter camps, had a vacation in the sanatorium in the Moscow region, in Sochi, and traveled several times to the Black Sea. The last time, we even flew on an airplane. Usually we traveled by train, but perhaps they found cheap tickets that time. Once I poisoned myself in camp. Do you know how? In Sochi, they were growing some kind of prickly tree. Another boy, Alex, from another orphanage suggested that I should try this weird vegetable or a fruit. I did not know what it was.

“How to eat it?” I asked.

“Just open it and eat.”

We opened it with mittens and a knife, and inside there were white seeds. I ate them and almost flew to another world. As it turned out, these were real drugs. Alex did not even say anything to me. He almost died himself. As they later told me, seven policemen could not stop us, especially me. I was already in grade nine, I think.

I woke up at the hospital *ezatly* [exactly] in a week. In a week *ezatly*. I woke up, and saw that I had black black eyes ... I looked in the mirror and everything what was white turned into black. People told me, “Well, congratulations, you were very lucky.” I said, I see myself, it was so scary – my eyes were completely black. Alex woke up a little earlier, in about three to four days. I even saw a document where it was underlined that my heart was not beating four minutes and twenty seconds. During this time I was not there, I was in heaven. I saw such a long corridor and there was a golden gate. I walked along the path, I saw rocks, flowers, and behind the flowers were bones. As I walked along the corridor, I heard a song, "Do whatever you want, Jesus! Do whatever you want in me! I'm sorry! Forgive me, Jesus!" [Singing] I brought this song to my friends from the church. Then I saw a very bright light and angels.

They told me, "Get out of here, we do not need you."

I began to fall into hell. I fell into the abyss from the mountain, and the mountain was so high.

There, the devil told me, “I know everything about God, I know everything about God.”

He began to expound and blame God. I visited all seven circles of hell and saw all the punishments – thirty-three punishments: they hang someone, someone was cooked in a cauldron and so on. While I was in heaven and hell, I also saw some saints – saint Nikolay, blind

Matriona, the Mother of God. I saw real house-elves. They had unusual wings. Then, I saw both horned devils and how they punished and manipulated people on Earth whenever something bad happened. I saw how angels tell us good things, but the devil tells us bad. When I came back from heaven, everyone was very surprised. I wrote my memories right in the camp. Surprisingly, people began to give me gifts in the camp, but I could not understand why did they suddenly change their attitude to me? Even a policeman came to me, the one who caught me. He told me how they were running after me. We became friends with him, even dated for a while.

After I came back from heaven and hell, I started to believe in God and I realized that since I was thrown out of heaven and hell that means I am still needed for something on Earth. I started to see things that no one else sees. Sometimes, I see Jesus walking or see the devil. And here constantly at 12 o'clock at night I see a girl in front of the windows, at that spot. People do not see her, but for some reason I see and she always calls me. I did not go to her. But I'm used to such things. I even began to predict the futures of others. I told many people when the accident or good things would happen. It turned out to be true at the end. I told people, do not go out of the house today, something bad would happen. But they did not listen to me and nearly got into an accident. Only recently people started to listen and believe me.

Just Forget About School

As far as I can remember, I started to miss school at an early age. I did not care so much, I even told other children, "Just forget about it." I fought with the caregivers because of this, I had a lot of arguments with them. I changed a long time ago since then. I used to be fighting all the time and I liked to fight. I could not live without scandals at all. But I fought for justice, I was not looking just for the fight. If there was injustice, then I ran there and dealt with it. Whoever was hurt was coming to me for my support.

As far as I remember, when I was in a kindergarten they did not teach us anything at all, neither how to read nor write. I do not remember elementary school at all. When I started to study from the fifth grade, I loved two teachers - Vera Ivanovna and Ludmila Zorina - they were my favorite teachers and I liked our school manager Olga Petrovna.

I did not like at school our physical education (PE) lessons. We had a teacher, Lubov Olegovna, and she either did not like me or she loved me on the contrary. Once we jumped through a sort of gymnast bar and one big guy who was like an elephant jumped and I already saw that the bar was barely standing together. I jumped after this boy and the bar broke. Lubov Olegovna started screaming at me, I told her the “f...” word. To punish me, she forced me to wash shoes and socks every lesson. Whenever PE lessons came, I did not want to go there, because she always made me do it. I was constantly freaking out. Where's the justice? I did not understand. Everything was just getting worse, worse, and worse. Sometimes we had two PE lessons, I was thinking was it a joke or what? I had to beg cooks to stay with them and help them in the kitchen, just to avoid PE lessons. Cooks loved me. I washed dishes there and for that they gave me condensed milk and sometimes money. On the weekend, cooks sometimes took me with them. They did not want to let me go, they treated me very well.

Another teacher of Russian language and literature did not like me too. She was a sister of the PE teacher. I said, wow, what a luck! I had to stay in the kitchen even more and skip the school. Then other children began to support me. The caregivers were outraged, but they could not do anything. Until I say, nothing could happen.

When we had school graduation, then I had a tense romance with another teacher. She had a husband and he knew about us. At first, there were scandals, of course, but then he was

calmly reacting, he even told us to marry. Now she's forty-two, she's twelve years older than me. For five years she could not let me go...

Adult Life

When I left the orphanage, the administration sent me to a college. I was offered some limited disciplines to choose from and I chose to be a cook. I chose to cook just like that, at random, I can say. I did not care. I just wanted to get paid a stipend. In addition, at nights, I washed cars. Each car was 200 rubles (about \$3). I earned about thirteen to twenty-five thousand rubles (\$200-400), it was good money for me. I worked from 11 pm to 6 am.

When I finished the cooking school, I continued to study another discipline: plasterer - painter. On the third day of college, I was caught by the locals and they beat me so bad that my body was all black. They wanted to forcefully inject drugs in me. They wanted to hook me up on drugs, they almost cut off my finger. But I managed to escape from them. I was frightened to death.

I fled to another area, Lyubertsy, and for two months I was hiding. I was very afraid that they would find me again. I understood that I did not need drugs. Then I found out that I was expelled from the college and that I had to return into the orphanage. When I returned back I was told that I have parents, although earlier they told me that I did not have any parents.

The orphanage administration made a decision to send me to my biological mother, who lived in the village of Bugalovo. She had a small two-room apartment, in which six other people lived. They immediately did not recognize me as a part of their family. A couple of times I was badly beaten, and at some point they even tried to change the lock on the door. My mother, who was an alcohol addict taught me to beg near the church. I began to beg, and eventually it became a habit. People started to give me food. Also, I helped priests to hang bells, repair them, make

and hang icons. I was given money too. That's how I lived. My friends and acquaintances were pissed that I could not find a normal job and that I worked in the church. Some of them did not believe in God, unfortunately.

One day we were taking rest with my mother on farming fields. We cooked shish kebabs and were enjoying our time. It was a very black-black day, very foggy. I felt like something bad was going to happen.

“Something bad will happen, one hundred percent,” I said to my mother.

“Come on, don’t say nonsense,” my mom answered.

In the evening we were surrounded by the police. They started to shoot at me with rubber bullets.

I started screaming, “What for? Why are you shooting me?”

“Shut your mouth. We need to close the case,” they answered me.

As it turned out, my good friend Kurochkin stole money and a phone and piled everything on me. Somehow, they even found a witness who saw me threatening a person with a knife. Kurochkin and I were taken to the police, and after sent to a jail. They recognized him and me as mentally retarded: I just answered some of their questions, I do not remember already what they asked me.

Then a cop said to me, "You'll go to the hospital!"

“What do you mean to the hospital?” I asked.

"Oh, you fool, you will not go to the prison."

The trial was held without me, all the paperwork was signed without me too. Later, they sent me into a psychiatric hospital for seven years. I was at that time twenty years old. By the way, Kurochkin was killed during the investigation. Someone stabbed him about thirteen times.

Apparently, he framed not only me, but at least five more people. How people say, sooner or later the rope will end, God knows everything. But still, I spent so many years in the mental hospital for nothing.

At first I was taken to the hospital for prisoners, I do not remember how the district was called. I had a beautiful life there. On the very first day, I discussion [discussed] with the head of the department and she understood me. She told me that I'm a normal boy and that she will not treat me with medication. All people were taking medicine but I did not take anything.

In this hospital, I stayed for a short time, about one and a half years. Then they closed the hospital and I was transferred to Kutsino. Tolik Burkin fell in love with me there. He was also a patient in the hospital. He fell in love with me in a smoking room. I did not even pay attention at first, but then he confessed to me, "I like you very much, well, maybe we can get down and dirty?"

I grumbled something, and then I said why not. I remember that day I was given a lot of tasks but still we managed to hook up. Nobody noticed. On the second day, too, no one noticed. And on the third day he could not wait till evening and began to flirt with me during the day. The guards saw us on camera; they punished us and moved us far apart. I said to Burkin, "You are a fool, you could have waited till evening!"

Not even three months have passed since Burkin when another nurse fell in love with me. I said, oh, God, why am I so "lucky?" She got drunk and closed me in her office and acted the whole show for me. She forcibly forced me to do *it* with her. She told me if I don't agree then she would tell the doctor that I raped her. I had no choice....It's good that there were no cameras in her office.

Also, in our psychiatric hospital there was one man, well, what would you call a person who eats humans? Oh, Hannibal, yes. He used to kill people before and make cutlets from them. He was in a special supervisory room. Once he bit the nurse in the arm and she got infected with something and died two months later. Everyone in the hospital hated him so much that they started to think how to get rid of him. The doctors begged me to make an injection for him that would kill him. They promised to shorten my sentence if I agree. At some point, I agreed. I was dressed in a thick rubber suit, I had a mask, so that I could not get infected from him. I was afraid of course ... I injected and after about three hours he began to fall asleep, and a couple of hours later he died. The official version was that he died from a heart failure. The doctors kept their promise; my sentence was shortened from seven to five years. They even paid me some money about twenty-five thousand rubles (\$500). Maybe I committed a sin before God, but ... benefit, is benefit. That's it.

While I was at the psychiatric hospital, we cleaned rooms and territories and I even helped doctors to do injections. Sometimes we would close with a nurse in her office and ...do stuff... That was pretty much my life there. When I left the hospital, I was brought to my sister's house. She drank from time to time. Whenever she was drunk she was chasing after me with knives. She is also an officially unrecognized psychopath. After some time, I started to beg near church again and help priests. I was given food, money and quite good money. My sister began to live off me. Another neighbor fell in love with me, then another one began to jump around me.

Later, my acquaintance Oleg Krugov sent me to the Protestant church, where only former drug addicts and alcoholics were. That song from heaven I gave to this church. I was in the Protestant church for seven months. At the church, Varvara Filina fell in love with me and we sinned.

Nevertheless, I went through hell there as well. One day a pastor in this church made me to sell 800 Christmas trees. They put a snowman suit on me and I stood in the cold for three days, selling Christmas trees. In this foolish suit, I could not even go to the toilet, I had to pee and poop right there. I sold all the trees. Then they forced me to sell Christmas and New Year gifts and I sold them all as well. I worked days and nights, I did not sleep at all. I started to faint because of so much stress. As a result, I was not paid even a penny and I realized that the pastor was directly stealing money from the church. I expressed my concerns and they told me that they would not keep me at the church and advised me to consult with Dima, who was a public activist and who was helping orphanage graduates.

Dima tried to help me. We began to appeal everywhere for help. After a while I was given a temporary accommodation in barracks. It was worse than my mother's apartment. There were no utilities and it was not possible to live there. On Dima's advice, I took part in a number of street performances, I was lying near the Duma [State Parliament building], and then at the Lenin Mausoleum but these actions did not help, I did not get any housing.

Orphanage Classmates

There were about fifty people in my cohort. Now about twelve became addicts. Someone was forcibly put on drugs and now they cannot live without them. I think the truth is that most of the graduates are gone. I do communicate with other guys. For instance, my acquaintance who graduated with sixty people told me that maximum twelve people are alive. I think the main reason for this trend is housing, and the second is work. Nobody employs orphanage graduates without experience, but where to get this experience in the first place?

I know Jutkov is still drinking, because he was left homeless. Although at the beginning he was given an apartment of almost ninety-six square meters, but he exchanged it for alcohol.

Pevtsov like me did not get any apartment. I, too, sometimes drink and do not limit myself, but I have never used drugs in my adult life. That is my taboo, I decided not to deal with drugs. I visited clubs and restaurants and slept with girls and boys - whoever was available. I was offered drugs in clubs, but I said no, drugs are not for me. I do not need them. That is why I know that even if I end up living on the street, I would not become a drug addict and get into trouble.

Now and Future

We tried with Dima to get housing for me, but nothing worked yet. To be honest, I'm now on the verge of breaking down, I am one step from living on the street. Recently, I became very disappointed in our government! There is no justice ... Pension is small, but prices grow like lizards. Disappointed ... I even lost myself in my life.... I do not know yet.

I also had a scandal recently in the church. I was at the church and saw how the priest during the fasting was drunk and stole money from the church.

“What are you doing? Aren't you afraid of God? Now it is time for fasting and not drinking and eating meat,” I told him.

He started to fight with me. People saw it. I defended the church as could, I did everything. But this case broke me, I drank for a week non-stop. Another priest told me to come back. A local TV even called me but I had nothing to say. I threw my phone in anger and broke it. Now I do not have a phone. I'm disappointed in people. It's not God's fault, it's people themselves. Not even three months passed, but it still hurts to talk about it ... I put my whole soul in this church, helped to repair it. People started to respect and listen to me and then bang, the end. I did not expect people to talk such nasty things against their own church. My soul could not stand it, I could say that spiritually I fell down but I still believe in God.

I have recently changed my life very abruptly. I am regaining my health. Despite the problems, absence of housing and the last scandal in the church, I believe that everything will be all right ...

“Are you planning to study?” I asked him.

Time will show. I have already learned so much that I started to understand people very well. When I came to the church and saw Andrew for the first time, I immediately said that he was using church for his own purposes. Another priest asked me why did I think so. I said that life taught me already...Then, I saw another nun and also said that she was not there for the sake of faith. I said that she was looking for her own benefit. She got offended at that time, but then a large sum of money was discovered in her apartment. So people started to believe me and say that I am young, yet very smart. Yes, life forced me. I really started to understand people well as if I was not thirty years old, but one hundred thirty. I became just like an X-ray, I can see everything.

It's a pity that there were no lessons in the orphanage on how to deal with money, how to communicate with people, so that we know about culture of the society. When I went out from the orphanage, I did not know where to go, whom to consult. I felt embarrassed and scared, *all the time*. If I knew a person that was not scary, but to approach an unknown person for the first time was frightening...It is true that orphans are afraid of the society.”

Our conversation was interrupted at that moment, someone knocked on the door. Valentina Anatolievna came, Dima's loyal volunteer. She turned out to be a very active and energetic woman in her sixties. She began to ask Kostia and Dima some questions. Kostia started to run around the apartment trying to find something she asked for.

At that moment, she went into the kitchen, saw me and said, “Oh, it's very hard for me with them. There is no money at all, not even food. We found this Kostia, he lived at the railway station. He ate with his bare hands when he came here. He does not know any limits in eating. Sometimes he would eat so much that his stomach would become swollen and he would call me for help. I would have to run in the middle of the night and make him an enema.”

At that moment Kostia came into the kitchen.

“Have you changed your underwear?” Valentina Anatolievna asked Kostia.

“Yes, yes, I changed it.”

"If I don't monitor him, then he will wear dirty clothes," Valentina Anatolievna told me in a quieter voice.

“Well, Kostia, have you found it?” Valentina Anatolievna asked him again, “Come on, I should go already.”

After a short time, Kostia found what Valentina Anatolievna asked for, I said goodbye to her and we continued our conversation.

“Well, where did we stop? Oh, yes! I was very afraid to communicate with the society, I was afraid to show my face, I was afraid to say hello to people. Life, of course, pushed and taught me. As people say we cannot escape from this submarine and ourselves. That's what kind of education is needed at the orphanage, even in a simple form. I also wished they taught us how to grow our own vegetables, to do house work and live with an open soul. That's the type of education orphans need. Yet, I believe that the system cannot be changed. Although you beat your forehead into the wall, the system has already been well established. It has existed for two centuries. It is difficult to prove something here, change something. Of course, I would like for caregivers to be normal, not such perverts that break children physically and emotionally.

Caregivers certainly do bad things not from a good life. Either their parents were evil or there was no good in their lives too. Even teachers do not have a good life ... They have nowhere else to work, their lives were broken and they continued to break children's lives. There were some good teachers and people, of course, but they were fired. Even the director was there not from a good life. The system was like this, you cannot break it. Now, at least, it got better: they started to repair buildings, food and toys appeared. Before, there was nothing, no sweets, no toys, nothing.

Yes, I started to like men in this system. I think it's all because I was raped by a man in the orphanage. If it did not happen, I might have not been gay. But this man was so stubborn, he could not be persuaded, he did it by force. Straightforward. I told him I did not want to ...but...I think my fate would have been very different, if not these four cases: I was left without parents, was raped, was poisoned by drugs and saw heaven and hell, was beaten in the college (so that I get hooked up on drugs). If not these four, I think everything would have been different for me...

A Woman of Steel: Nothing Can Break Me Down

I don't have problems in my life, I have just tasks that I need to accomplish.

Maria, 30 years old, Tomsk

I got to know Maria¹¹ in December 2014 through social media. She was highlighted in one of the posts as a successful orphan. At that time she was a well-known public activist in Tomsk, was in a happy marriage and had her own TV show. I got genuinely interested in her story so I messaged her and we began to communicate from time to time. Three month later, I saw her post on Facebook asking for help. Her husband left her and children and they had nowhere to go. I made a small donation to support her.

¹¹ Maria expressed her wish to keep her name in the story. However, all other names were changed to keep confidentiality of the participants involved.

In January 2016, two years after our initial acquaintanceship, I asked Maria if she would be interested to participate in the study and she agreed. After securing IRB approval and arranging my travel to Tomsk, I met Maria in person for the first time in June, 2017. When I arrived to Tomsk, the road from the airport to the hostel reminded me of Kaliningrad. The narrow roads were surrounded from both sides by trees. The drivers seemed to be quite aggressive as they were speeding and cutting each other's way.

Tomsk is considered to be one of the oldest cities in Siberia with a population of about half a million people. My hostel was located in a city center. However, when I arrived I did not really feel as I was at the heart of urban life. Everything seemed to be slow-paced, provincial, humble and unsophisticated: narrow streets, uneven pavements and roads, numerous small shops, cafes and fast food chains. The city architecture certainly carried the Soviet legacy, but neoliberal trends began to shift the landscape, making a wide array of advertisements, billboards, signboards of popular brands and restaurants a part of the city-look. Subway, Sushi spots, shoe shops were neighboring old wooden houses that were particularly charming in Tomsk. These wooden houses carved in various "gingerbread" style décor represented city's historical heritage that created distinct and delightful atmosphere.

When I arrived, it was a warm sunny day, the streets were covered in white poplar fluff. I decided to call Maria right away. She picked up the phone: I heard a rather low, confident and sharp voice. She told me that she would come in the evening to my hostel and we would pick a café together.

I went outside of my hostel a little earlier than we agreed. As I was waiting for her, I observed her arriving in a taxi. When she got out of the car, I saw a very beautiful young woman dressed in a light summary dress. She had long blond dreadlock hair. What struck me the most

were her gorgeous blue eyes. Her look was quite icy, sharp and focused. You could immediately feel that she was not a person to mess with. Strength, self-confidence, thoroughness and wisdom were emanating from her. In my mind, I immediately captured the resemblance of her image with strong and brave Amazon women. Her photos on Internet were not depicting this side of her. On the contrary, her social profile seemed more romantic, easy-going, and giggly.

We greeted each other and decided to go to the nearest café. We sat down at a table on a quiet veranda surrounded with flowers and wicker furniture. There was no one except us that day. At first, I felt a little intimidated by her icy-look and sharp contrast between her social image and her real self. However, as we ordered some food and began casual conversations the initial ice quickly melted away. I told her about myself, my childhood, and the research. Later she began to open up about herself. That evening we took a long walk around Tomsk that helped us to get to know each other even better. The next morning we agreed to meet for an interview in her office.

Her office was located relatively far from the city center in a building with many small firms and offices. At that time, Maria was working on helping local charities and organizations with their projects. The office was arranged quite simply. There were a couple of tables and chairs. The room was filled with several bags and items that were used for their charity events.

I explained once again the purpose of the study, benefits and risks, rights of the participants and asked her to sign a written consent form. After this official procedure, I began to audio-record the interview that lasted for a little over two hours. I prepared myself to be a sympathetic listener, but soon after the story began I realized how difficult it was to be neutral to the story as feelings and emotions started to overflow me. I felt shocked, angry, heartbroken, embarrassed and even ashamed that something like this was happening in the world and that (1)

many, including me had little clue about it; and (2) there was not much done to prevent it from happening again. Despite my high emotional response, I tried to keep the feelings within me not to interrupt the general flow of the conversation.

What was surprising for me was that during the interview Maria was very calm. Despite her rough and challenging life, she was able to accept and process her experiences with dignity and self-respect and share her story openly as a mature person who got over the past and is looking towards the future. The only major indication of her inner emotions was a pen that she was constantly twisting in her hands. Only once during the interview I noticed that tears started to appear in her eyes, but her voice has never trembled.

At the end of the interview, I sincerely thanked her for sharing her story and expressed my genuine admiration for her strength and human spirit. After the interview we went to have lunch together and she took me to her home where I met her two daughters and her mom. Maria was renting an apartment in a newly build house on a thirteenth floor. On the way to her home Maria told me that once her daughter asked her to help sell her craft works. Maria made a huge event out of it. She made posters, invited DJ and organized a holiday for her daughter and the local community. Her daughter was very proud of Maria that day.

When we entered the apartment, Maria's youngest daughter ran towards us to greet and hug her mother. The youngest daughter looked like a copy of her dad – she had brown hair and beautiful brown eyes. She was very energetic and smiling. The eldest daughter was a thin beautiful tall girl with blue-green eyes and long blond hair. She was quite shy and reserved. She had deep dark circles under her eyes as if life has already taken some of her vital life energy away. She approached me very gently and started to talk about her school and friends. She also showed me her pictures. Maria invited me to the kitchen where we had a cup of tea with a cake.

Here and there, a small kitten was running around, begging for children's attention to play. For a very short period of time Maria's mom appeared, said a couple of phrases and immediately disappeared as if she was shy to be around me. I played with children and a kitten for some time and then we went together with Maria to a gym. She wanted to sign up for a fitness program. After that day, we have met with Maria for a couple of times in the city, and had another interview in her office that lasted for another two hours. Since then we have mainly communicated with her through social media. Here is her story.

The Childhood's Hell

I was born in a village called Molchanovo¹² in 1987. The birthplace would forever remain in my memory as a gloomy, gray, restless and unsafe place. In Molchanovo, people were constantly killing, raping or shooting each other. I did not have a father, he was somewhere in Ukraine. I lived with a disabled mom in Zhukova street, in a private house. It was the brightest place of all my memories, probably because it was my mother's family nest, filled with energy of our ancestors.

Up to the age of four, I could not really remember my life, but after that events began to stick in my mind as challenges began to appear. My mom lost her job and got carried away in drinking alcohol. Our relatives started to attack her and push her out from the house. I must say that I have a large family. My mother's family had six children: four sisters and two brothers. Two brothers have already died. Among my mother's sisters I knew only aunt Olga and my aunt Irina. There was also uncle Zhenya, an innocuous man, he was like a bug crawling and not bothering anyone. Another uncle, also Zhenya, was in jail. I do not really know much about him. My mum's life was not easy as well. She was raped, placed in a psychiatric hospital and sentenced to prison for committing a murder. My mom witnessed a man raping her sister – my

¹² Geographical location names were changed to preserve confidentiality.

aunt Olga - and decided to stand up for her. She approached the man and hit him with an ax on his head. The man died.

All my relatives drank terribly, raped and beat each other. There was no such thing as kinship in our family, there was not any meaning or beauty of it for them. Therefore, when my mother lost her job and was left alone, the relatives began to squeeze her out of the house. We started to wander from one place to another. At first, we moved to Trudovaya Street. There was a terrible gray heavy house. On top of that, Igor, my aunt Olga's husband, was always coming and pestering my mother. Later, we moved to Pushkinskaya Street, where I lived up to the age of ten. This place was always cold and dirty. There was no food, no warmth and no coziness. My mom was constantly disappearing from home for long periods of time. She frequently changed her partners and, when I was five, she gave birth to my sister Marina.

When Marina was born, I immediately began to envy her, because my mother would recognize and love her, but not me. There was a time when I would brutally beat her for that reason. I was surrounded by aggression and violence myself, so I would express my anger on Marina. This is my sin that I have been living with for so many years. It is my cross to bear and I cannot forgive myself yet.

Nevertheless, when Marina was born, I was constantly living in a state of bombardment. I did not have any sense of security. My mom would show up at home three times per month, and the rest of the time we would be with Marina alone. During nights, alcoholics would come to our house, knock on doors and windows in search for our mom. It was scary. Our neighbors were alcoholics too, so if something happened to us at that time we would not be even able to ask for help.

The most difficult times were during winters. I remember when frosts came, we were

terribly cold, because our apartment was not heated. I tried to warm Marina with my own body, but it did not help much. Our refrigerator was always empty. There was nothing to eat. To survive, I searched for food in trash containers or begged on the streets.

When it was extremely hard, relatives took Marina and I survived on the streets on my own. When I felt that my life was on the verge of death, I learned to switch off. I would switch to an energy saving mode, where I would become like a zombie, who just walks around, moves, but feels nothing. I would lose all of my fears, emotions, and feelings. My body was in pain, but I did not pay any attention to it. I had an understanding that everything was temporary and that my suffering would end one day. I somehow intuitively knew that I had to hang to life for a while, turn myself off and let the time pass.

Despite all the difficulties, I was still a cheerful child. I loved to play and laugh. Among my circle of friends, I was quite active and cheerful, and among unfamiliar people I was more reserved. In Molchanovo, I had two real friends - Veronika and Ilia. We were always looking for some adventures and fun. Once we decided to organize pig-riding competitions. It was very funny.

When I turned seven, like all ordinary children I went to school. Yet, I was a different child from the very beginning. Internally, I was very independent and remote. I felt, as I was free from the school system. Externally, I looked like a dirty, neglected girl who would come to school with a plastic bag and sometimes without textbooks. Besides, I always stank, because during my childhood I suffered from enuresis and I often urinated in bed at nights. We did not have shower at home, so I went to school dirty and stinky. Children as well as teachers were frequently bullying and teasing me for that. The most embarrassing moments were when teachers would ask me to stand up in front of my classmates and tell me, "Maria, ask your parents to wash

you! We can't breeze!" The children would laugh and I would say to myself that I have neither a place to wash myself nor parents to ask...

I did not like to study at school at all, yet one of my favorite lessons was *trudy* (labor lesson, where typically boys would be learning practical "male" skills, and girls would learn "feminine" skills like sewing, cooking and doing crafts). I liked it for a specific reason – it was a chance for me to get fed. When we were cooking salads or any other type of food it was a real holiday for me. These days I would eat and get full. Yet, I would also get bullied for that. Kids would repeatedly say to me, "Hey, aren't your parents feeding you?" It deeply hurt. Perhaps, that is why I did not have any friends at school. Teachers and school administration were not understanding and supportive of me as well. I was always alone.

When I was in a first grade, another significant event happened to me. During the summer, before the first of July, all our relatives gathered in Zhukovo. All of them were working in the garden, digging potatoes, planting vegetables while I was playing in the house alone. During the play, my fifteen year-old cousin Egor opened the door and came inside. He looked at me and his look was very strange at the time.

He said, "Well, Maria, you want a baby, right?"

"Yeah," I answered, thinking that it was an invitation to play.

"OK, then come to me," he said.

I came closer. He took off his pants and raped me... I was very hurtful. I cried. When he finished, he said, "If you, bitch, tell someone, I'll kill your sister or mother, do you understand?"

I kept silence. I could not even grasp what happened to me at all. Was it normal or not? I was not really aware. Nobody explained anything to me and there were no adults in my life.

Since then, Egor began to frequently rape and beat me to the point that it became a

routine. Once he came to me again, but this time he was not alone. He came with four of his friends. At the time, I was eight years old and they were from thirteen to eighteen. They closed me in the room, tied me to the bed and took their turns to rape me. It was a game for them, they imagined that they abducted a woman and now they were mocking her. When they left, I felt truly broken and powerless. I did not understand why this was happening to me, why? Why?

After some time, Egor terribly beat my mother in front of my eyes. One day he ran into our house. He was very furious.

“Where’s your mother?” he shouted.

“I do not know,” I answered.

He raised his fist over my face and stopped an inch from my nose. My mom rushed into the room as if she knew that Egor was coming to beat us. As soon as he saw her, he attacked her like a lion, began to beat and kick her all over her body. I started to shake and cry, but there was nothing I could do. When Egor left, my mom was laying on the floor in a pale of blood. The walls were all splashed with blood as well. I was terrified to approach my mother as I thought that she must have died... I was petrified.

Another time, my sister and I witnessed my mom being raped. That day we lost her and searched for her around the village. When we ran up to aunt Olga's house, we saw that her husband Igor was sitting on the porch and smoking.

We asked him, “Have you seen our mother?”

”No, I have not,” he replied.

Then we ran to look for her even further, but she was nowhere to be found. We decided to return back to aunt Olga's house. When we reached her house, we climbed onto the bench to look over the fence to see whether she was there – and she was. We saw her laying on the ground

unconscious with a bleeding wound in her head while Igor was raping her. We were shocked.

A couple of minutes later, my aunt Olga ran out of the house and struck my mother.

“You are a fucking beast! Get out of here, slut!” Olga screamed and beat my mother in the face.

My mom opened her eyes. She could not understand what was happening so she quickly got up and fled naked into the village...

My mother had a difficult life. She was consistently beaten and raped. At one point she decided to live with a man named Yaroslav. He was very cruel, Marina and I were scared of him. He chased us around the house and kicked us with his feet. He forced us to finish our food in two minutes and if we could not manage he kicked us out of the table. Yaroslav was also a thief. He forced me to go with him to do his dirty "business." We would enter houses and steal until the day police captured him.

That day he got drunk and I had a feeling that he would be caught. I even warned him, but he did not listen. He grabbed my neck and dragged me with him. It was already dark. We got into the yard and heard some voices - the owners of the house returned. Perhaps, their neighbors notified them about suspicious noise coming from their home. As soon as we heard the noise, Yaroslav ran away and left me alone. The owners, of course, caught me and violently beat me. It was very dark so they did not even realize at first that they were beating a child. Only later when they called the police, they finally saw that they severely hurt the child. The ambulance immediately took me to the hospital. In the hospital, the police questioned me and I gave evidence against Yaroslav. He was immediately captured and put in jail. At this time, all my relatives were angry at me, as they thought that I betrayed this “poor man.”

I lived in such a hell for ten years. There was nothing to eat, there was nothing to wear,

there was nowhere to live until my mother appealed to the social service and asked them to place my sister and me into the orphanage. By that time, I turned already ten and my sister was five.

The Times of Uncertainty and Change

One morning an unknown car drove up to our house. Strange people entered our home, collected our belongings, accompanied my sister and me into the car and drove us away. We arrived in front of a gray two-story building. Some people met us and immediately closed us in a detention room because we were dirty, lousy and smelly. They washed us with soap, cut our long hair, and took a couple of blood tests. I felt as it was a form of abuse at that time.

Later we got to know that we were brought into a shelter for children. We were not prepared for this turn of events, as our mom did not warn us about anything. She made this decision entirely on her own. Now, I realize that it was the right choice. If we were to stay in Molchanovo, we certainly would not survive, surely me or Marina would have been killed.

We began to live in the shelter and learn about the system from within. I quickly learned what it was like when everything was not yours: the spoon was not yours, the toys were not yours. I also had to adjust to a strict daily routine. At 7 am we got up, then brushed our teeth, took shower and went to school. At school I studied differently: sometimes I got good marks, sometimes bad. It all depended on my mood. At that time I did not consider education important for myself. After the school we had lunch, worked on our homework and cleaned the rooms. After cleaning we had some free time, then we prepared for dinner, cleaned the tables, washed dishes and floors, cleaned up the territory and went to bed. At the shelter, we lived in groups that were divided by the age. I was in a group with five girls and five boys. Marina was placed in another group, so quite soon we began to lose contact with each other.

The attitude of caregivers and teachers was not very good: there was no sincere human

relationship. Perhaps everything was complicated by the fact that before the shelter I was subjected to violence. I had psychological problems, I was a difficult teenager, and maybe that's why developing close relationship with caregivers was difficult.

At the shelter, I was diagnosed with bone cancer. I have lived with it since 1998 and undergone ten surgeries. During one of the surgeries, doctors made a mistake and I started to bleed heavily for a week. All this time I was in a coma. Nevertheless, I could clearly hear and understand what people were talking around me, and it was painful, because I would hear them complaining about my bleeding and being tired of cleaning after “an orphan.” These words were so painful that I did not want to come back to life. In fact, I was alone in the dark, but I felt so good and comfortable in this darkness. [Since 2004, I am in remission so I hope the cancer left me.]

In this shelter we lived for two years. All this time I was in a state of obscurity. I would imagine that my mother would come and take us back and everything would be fine, or she would not come, but still there would be something better. I lived in the atmosphere of something inexplicable and incomprehensible. It was like a holiday and at the same time it was not. Sometimes the fear would penetrate my mind because of all the uncertainties. Before the shelter everything was clear: everyday life in Molchanovo was very predictable, yet in the shelter I did not know what to expect and what to prepare for. This ambiguity frightened me from time to time until the day when the clouds of uncertainty finally disappeared.

That day caregivers came to our room and informed us that we would be taken to the hospital for health examination. They lied. Instead of the hospital they brought us to an orphanage in the village of Kalinovka, thirty km from Tomsk. As we learned later, our mother was deprived of parental rights and the decision was made to transfer my sister and me to the

orphanage.

The orphanage was a typical two-story building designed for sixty children. At first, we jumped from one group to another. There was even a time when girls and boys slept together in a room. Then they finally divided us and we began to live in stable groups. In the orphanage, my relationship with my sister deteriorated even further. Somewhere deep, I still loved her and she did too, but the whole system prevented us from being able to feel and understand each other. Within this system, some kind of humanity and freedom were lost. I could not feel myself in my own body, I could not feel my identity. Everything was washed out ... My sister lived her life, and I lived mine.

The orphanage had exactly the same daily routine as the shelter. Everything was rigidly written down. Even the beds had to be made in a certain way; the pillows should have necessarily been folded in a triangle-shape and no other way. Whenever I did things my way, the caregivers immediately returned everything as “it was supposed to be.” All these rules were evoking nausea in me.

Indeed, the orphanage quickly deprived people of their personality. Everything was supposed to be the same for everyone: the same school bags, the same clothes. When we walked on the streets, people would instantly recognize that we were from the orphanage. Now I recall these times with a smile, but back then it was very hard to be like everyone else.

When I just arrived to the orphanage, I was a good child. I studied well, behaved well. Then the orphanage principle left and we got a new principle. At that time I really wanted to go to Anapa [city in Russia], but only one person from the orphanage was promised a voucher. I behaved very well in order to get it, but at the end another girl was chosen for a trip. I got very angry, as I thought it was unfair: I tried so hard, I behaved so well, but I did not get any bonuses.

All the bonuses went to those who constantly fawned with caregivers and orphanage administration. These children were given new clothes, were taken to interesting events, but I did not get anything at all. My life was only between going to school and home. I got very furious and decided that I would no longer behave as expected. At the beginning, no one could understand what happened to me, they tried to make me behave again, but after sometime they gave up and did not pay any attention to me. I could leave the orphanage for a couple of days and everyone pretended that nothing happened.

Compared to the shelter, the atmosphere and life in the orphanage was much tougher. At the shelter I was more open, sociable and active, but here I began to become even more reserved and aggressive. The internal system of the orphanage reminded a prison-zone. There were the “strong” ones and the “weak” ones. Almost all of the girls fell into the “weak” category, and if a girl wanted to have a peaceful life, she had to seek protection from a strong boy. In exchange for safety and security, the girl had to sleep with him. If the girl refused to be under anyone’s patronage, then she was cruelly chastened and punished as it happened to me.

Everybody pushed, pestered and beat me, yet I never broke down, I always fought back. There were a lot of attempts of sexual encroachments, but, fortunately, penetration never happened. I started to develop as a woman quite early - I had big breasts and a booty. For my shapes, I was even given a name Bomb. When my female body features began to be clearly seen, I had to wear several bras to keep my body safe and untouched. To protect myself from sexual harassment, I constantly wore the smelly period pads; otherwise there was no other way to survive. At any moment, the guys could make their way to the room, get into bed and start doing their nasty things. Nobody could do anything about it. Some caregivers turned away or closed their eyes, some were participating in it themselves...The system was like that, none of them

could cope with it or do something about it.

In our group we had a very strange caregiver. She was constantly walking around, screaming and beating everyone. She was very nervous. We also loved to annoy her a lot. For example, we would start a game: one person would go outside the orphanage and start running around the building and the caregiver would chase him or her. After a couple of circles, the person would pass the baton and another person would continue running. That's how we had fun and took revenge on her.

In the orphanage I had my favorite place: it was at the corner of the building, a staircase that led to the second floor. I often went there, sat down and imagined myself from a bird's eye view. I pictured myself as a bird floating in the sky, being so light and free. It was an inexpressible experience. I have always striven for freedom - inner freedom from barriers and fears, freedom in which I feel comfortable, exactly like a bird in the sky that flies and feels such a feeling of lightness and deep peace. Until now, I have not been able to achieve such a state of freedom ...

In the orphanage I had a good relationship with a psychologist. She worked with every child, but she treated me in a special way, in a different way. I began to tell her about my life. She was the first person to whom I opened up about my violent childhood and cases of rape. At that time I was fourteen years old. The psychologist was shocked to hear about the rape and she immediately sent me to a psychiatrist to check on my state. It was a huge mistake. At the psychiatrist, of course, I said all the things that he wanted to hear from me, but since then I stopped talking with our psychologist. I was upset that she reacted in this way. Nevertheless, on the positive side, the locked memories of my childhood were finally uncovered and fled freely from my mind and body, thus, placing me on a path to healing....

When I turned fifteen, I went to Molchanovo to visit my aunt Olga for the first time. We had fun there, we got drunk. Aunt Olga poured me alcohol and at night we hung out with her daughter Katia all over the village. We did not do anything good or useful there. My relatives led a loose life and they were developing all this dirt in me as well. For the second time, we went to Molchanovo together with Marina. Marina was wildly afraid of my cousin Egor since childhood, because he constantly bullied her - he could kick or spit on her. This fear remained in her and she was shaking every time in front of him. This time, we brought a lot of food and some money to aunt Olga. Once again, nothing good happened. Aunt Olga wanted me to have sex with an unknown man and she spent all our money. Our mother had to run all over the village to get some money for us so that we can go back to the orphanage.

After some time, a couple from the U.S. came to our orphanage and decided to adopt Marina. They needed permission from all the relatives.

That was the time when relatives showed off their power and attacked me, “You're a fucking monster, you are like your mother! You do not need anything at all! How can you give your little sister away like that? She will be cut into organs there!”

“Hey, look here, holy community! When you gave us away to the orphanage, was it OK? You did not even send a postcard or visit us. EVER!” I replied.

But the argument continued.

“Well, how is she going to be there? How are we going to be without her?” my relatives preached.

“I'll take her to my place!” my aunt Olga yelled.

“You will? To let your son Egor rape her? Are you out of your mind? Never ever in my life I will give Marina to you,” I said.

Despite their initial confrontation, Marina was at the end adopted and taken to the U.S. Our lives began to take completely different trajectories.

While I was living in the orphanage, I went to a simple rural public school. I had no interest in learning. For me, school was a place to socialize and have fun. In the orphanage everything was gray and boring, but at school we could run, laugh and joke with classmates. There, I could meet people not from the orphanage. The school was a place for me to expand my horizons, it filled my life with diversity. I was more pleased to be there as I could meet my friends.

“Well, let's go to school?” I would ask my friends.

“No, let's miss it.”

“Should we go for a walk?”

“Yes, let's do it!”

And we would go for long walks. It was so much fun. I was also lucky in our school to have a good teacher. She was teaching history and social studies, her name was Svetlana Ivanovna. She was very attentive – a real human being. In the classroom everyone lacked human attention, and she was aware of it, therefore, she had good relationship with everybody: children, adults and parents. As for other teachers in school, they constantly picked on children from the orphanage. If you were from an orphanage, then you were considered dirty, bad, and the attitude towards you was bad. If something was stolen from the school, it was immediately said that orphans stole it. Nobody really cared about the truth. Yes, orphans were very aggressive, but that's because the system and people were constantly attacking us, so everyone became more evil and behaved accordingly. I was not an exception. I was quite an angry and aggressive teenager.

At school I had a friend Maya. We became close friends with her, and I was very

attached to her mother. I even started to call her as my mom. I remember once I took part in a beauty contest "Miss Kalinovka" and I won it. After the contest, I was immediately sent to a hospital, because my throat was sore. In the hospital the girls from my orphanage visited me and told me that Maya all these time had been plotting behind my back. They told me that she damaged the condoms when I was about to have my first teenage sex. She wanted to get me pregnant. The other time, she added vinegar to my hair dye and I lost all of my hair.

I got really furious to hear about it. I ran away from the hospital straight to Maya. I called her outside and brutally beat her. This was the first and only time in my life when I so mercilessly beat a person – with my hands and feet. No one punished me for this, and I cannot say that I regret it. The only thing I regretted for a long time was that after this incident her mother rejected me. She said that I was no longer her daughter, and that she did not want to know me. Since then we stopped talking to each other. For me it was a very heavy loss ...

Overall, time in the orphanage was going very slowly. From time to time, I was put into tests and given new lessons of survival. Gradually, I and another girl finished the eleventh grade. It was something extraordinary because the majority of orphans ran away from school after the ninth grade¹³. I cannot say that this was my conscious decision or a strong desire to remain in school. Rather, I just went with the flow and that's it. I do not know why, but I always knew that I would go to a university. I just wanted it so badly. This understanding came from somewhere within me, I cannot say that the orphanage helped me realize this. I was determined to live not like my mother. I wanted to live better than her. I knew that my life depended entirely on me: not on anyone else, not on the system, not on the state, but on me. I also knew that leaving after the ninth grade meant to be at the bottom once again, because after the ninth grade you could only

¹³ In Russia, children have two main options: (1) they can graduate after the ninth grade and get access only to upper secondary education (vocational education); and (2) if they graduate after the eleventh grade, they can go directly to higher education.

go to low-quality colleges. And in college everything was similar to the orphanage with its strict routine and constant control. I would have to report where I plan to go and when come back. Perhaps that's why I decided that I would rather suffer a couple more years at school and go straight to the university as it was providing a dormitory and a good stipend. In this case, I could start living on my own.

In the eleventh grade, we had Unified State Exams (USE), however, at that time USE was still being tested nation-wide. On math, I remember I did not do anything – I just drew a smiling man's face. The exam committee still gave me a satisfactory grade and I passed. The other exams were similar – I got satisfactory grades as well. In general, I cannot say that school has taught me something valuable. I do not remember anything, neither in physics, nor in chemistry. I can tell a little about organs and about history. Other than that, I did not get fundamental knowledge, and I did not develop any social life skills at school either.

At the end of eleventh grade we had a graduation ceremony. The principle, surprisingly, took us shopping herself. We got very beautiful dresses. The whole orphanage was helping us to do our make-up and hair-style. We were absolutely gorgeous at the school ceremony. After the official part, we went to our friends' house to celebrate graduation.

At the house, all the village youth gathered to celebrate. There was a lot of alcohol involved. Guys immediately surrounded us – young girls. Among them was Dima Skleverov. We were together with him since the shelter. He constantly tried to flirt with me, even tried to corner me. He was a very dangerous man, because he could easily kill, stab or do anything to you. He often raped girls. When he saw me at the gathering, he grabbed and dragged me into the back room.

“Let's talk,” he said to me in a drunken voice.

“Listen, friend, we grew up together with you, there's no point in hurting me, right?” I told him in a calm voice.

“Oh, yes! We'll conquer the world with you. We will leave the orphanage now, create our own gang and we both will be in control!” he continued.

I listened to all this nonsense and then I tried to escape, but he caught me and cornered again.

“Let's have sex now, if we do not, I will not let you go! You know that I can take whatever I want myself!” he screamed at me.

Of course, I already knew by that time that rape was not the worst thing that could happen to a woman. The worst thing if he stabs you in the process or hurts you if you refuse. Therefore, I decided to play his game and I agreed to sleep with him, but after the event. He agreed and let me go. I went to a girl who had many strong brothers and asked for their protection, they agreed. When Dima approached me again, I threatened him with brothers, and he let me go.

Married Life

We celebrated graduation and got our school diplomas. I decided to apply to university to become a primary school teacher. I chose this department randomly. I submitted the documents and passed all the entrance exams perfectly. Nobody expected this to happen. The principle told me multiple times before that I had only one way in life, which is downhill and that I would never see a good future.

In June, I realized that it was time for me to leave the orphanage and start living on my own. I collected some of my belongings and the orphanage administration gave me two hundred rubles [about \$4]. Was it easy to transition into adulthood? No, it was not easy. I had nowhere to

live. I asked to live in a university dormitory for the summer, until nobody moved in. I was allowed on a condition that I would wash their floors in the evenings. I agreed. I had practically no money then. I lived for one chocolate bar a day: I ate one half in the morning, the other half in the evening. Only at the end of August the orphanage principle brought me some clothes and food.

During the summer, I went to my friend's barbecue party and met Semen there. We immediately liked each other. At that time he seemed like a hero to me, he was such a cool city guy: he was so big, and I was so small. We began to communicate, spent time together. After I slept with him, I learned that he was married and he had a child. At that time I was sixteen years old, I was very young and careless. I really did not care about his background.

Eventually, he divorced and I moved to his small wooden house where his mother, brother and sister lived. At first they were all against me: for them I was a child, and “an orphan.” They called Semen crazy. But we did not pay any attention to them, as our love was stronger.

While I was living with Semen, I was an ideal wife for him: the house was always clean, I prepared food, after the work I relaxed him. The money that I earned at the time he took for himself to cover his own expenses: allowance for his first child, various gifts and spare parts for his car, and loans. At that time I was happy to give all the money to him, because I thought that was the way to help the man I loved. I could not recognize that simply he was using me. A year later, I had to drop out of the university, because problems started to appear in our marriage. Semen started to beat me and cheat on me. I constantly caught him with girls and it made me mad. We frequently had conflicts with him.

Two years later, the local government decided to demolish their old house and we were

given a new apartment. When we moved to a new place, I found out that I was pregnant. I was eighteen years old. We made a decision to keep a baby. During pregnancy, I continued to work and earn money and I also applied to the university to study Cultural Affairs. This time I chose the profession more carefully, because I understood that I was closer to society than to technical spheres. I knew that I could not do physical work, because it would affect my health very much. Therefore, intellectual social work was the only way out.

To apply to the Cultural Affairs department, I had to pass a German language exam, but I did not know it at all, so I tried to find someone who could do it for me. I came across scammers who eventually betrayed me: I lost all of my money and I was not admitted to the university.

Semen got a new job in a bakery and met a guy, Artem. Artem literally infiltrated into our family and began to persuade Semen to sell the apartment and buy a car. I told Semen, why? We'll have a baby soon so we need somewhere to live. But Semen did not listen to me. He sold our apartment and gave 50 thousand rubles (about \$900) to me from the sale, 200 thousand rubles to my friend, and for another 200 thousand he bought a car for himself.

Semen sold the apartment to a girl with whom he later began to date and live with. I had to move out and rent an old Soviet type apartment in a very bad neighborhood. It was a very hard time for me. I was alone during my pregnancy. From time to time Semen visited me, shouted at me and left me again. When I was at the eighth month of pregnancy, he terribly beat me up. That day I set up cooking dumplings on the stove and went outside the apartment to check on the noise I heard. The gust of wind shut the door and the keys remained inside. I had to call emergency services for help. They arrived and broke the door. After that Semen came and beat me for my mistake. After this incident, I began to seriously question what would happen to us? Why are we expecting a baby? I did not know what to do ...

After a while, money that Semen gave me finished and I had to move to his mom's house. Three days before delivery, I was put in a hospital with severe contractions. In the maternity home, the doctors made a mistake as they somehow opened an amniotic sac ahead of time. The baby fell into a shock and began to push very hard. I was in severe pain from 9 am to 9 pm. During the lunch time I got a call.

"Hello!" I said.

"Hi! This is Karina, do you remember me? Today your husband and I spent the night together."

"Well, I understand, but now I do not really care about you at all, we will talk about it later," I shouted and hung up the phone.

I decided to call immediately Semen, "Semen, listen, please tell your whore not to disturb me!"

"Do not insult her, you idiot," he answered.

That's how my day of birth of my first child passed. The uterus did not open and I had a cesarean section. Fortunately, the girl was born healthy. When she was brought to me, she was such a small little pumpkin. She had beautiful black eyes, red hair, she was like a shiny sun to me. I experienced great joy and happiness. We called her Veronika.

The first day all Semen's relatives came to see Veronika and then everyone left. A couple of days later we went with Semen to register the child and receive her birth certificate. In the agency, they told us that we can become officially a husband and a wife. We agreed and signed all the paperwork without any rings, dresses or official ceremonies. On the first day of official marriage, Semen put me to the test. He scolded me, cursed and severely beat me.

When he finished his "test," he told me, "If you were able to handle it, then you're worthy

to be my wife!”

“Are you saying that my whole life will be like this, are you joking or something?” I asked.

At the end, he was not joking. He was not helping me with the child, he began to cheat on me and beat me again. I was at home with my baby alone, after cesarean section, with a scar from my belly up to the ear. It was really stressful. Veronika cried, and I did not know what to do.

When she turned one year, I attempted to get admitted to the university once again. This time I prepared for the German language exam myself and I passed it. I began to study and take care of Veronika. I always carried Veronika on my right side and in this place I eventually got a lump. After some time, the tumor began to bother me very much. I went to the hospital and I was told that I needed immediately a surgery.

I called Semen and said, “Semen, I will be in a hospital for a while, I have to undertake an urgent surgery to remove the tumor.”

“Are you going to lay down naked there? A bunch of men will look at you?” he asked me, “Can you cover yourself there?”

“You know what, go f...k yourself,” I replied.

I hung up the phone and undertook the surgery. I got a huge lump removed from my body. I was still under anesthesia when I received a lot of missed calls from Semen. I called him back, he started to shout at me again, telling me that I use every opportunity to get naked in front of the men. I left the hospital and returned to him again. Once I was back, I began to clean the apartment, because I could not tolerate the mess. I continued to work and study. Since I had no one to leave Veronika with, I was taking her with me to the university. I was passing exams with

her as well. Many told me that I took her to the university as a reason to evoke mercy in professors. It was very insulting, of course, I was thinking if only they knew what was happening in my life....

Anyway, at the university I was getting a good stipend, about 15-20 thousand rubles a month (about \$360), and once a semester they paid up to 80 thousand (about \$1500). I lived on this money. Semen continued to beat me in front of Veronika. He did not have any money or salary himself. He made huge debts, criminals took his car, they began to chase him and I was saving him. I was the person who fed both our and his family. Everyone knew that it was hard for me, but no one helped. Everyone considered it was a norm. At the same time, I had many restrictions: I could not wear short skirts, I could not meet with my friends, I could not do anything on my own, because he would immediately accuse me of cheating on him.

One time I met with my friend for a very short time. When I returned home, Semen opened the door and punched me in the face, “Oh, you bitch! Were you with your lover?!”

I ricocheted back to the stairs, thinking whether to go or not to go inside the apartment. Then I remembered about Veronika and decided to go: he better beats me than takes his anger on her. As soon as I stepped inside the apartment he attacked me and began to beat me. He threw me against the wall and by chance, he also hooked Veronika and she flew towards the wall as well. When I saw it, a wild power awoke in me.

I got up close to him and in a very low voice I said, “If you touch my daughter or me again, I'll kill you. I will kill you in a way that no one will ever know anything about it. Do not test me.”

Strangely enough, he got very frightened, and since then he has never raised his hands on me again. He would walk and scream, but never beat me again. Nevertheless, as time passed, I

began to realize that it was impossible to continue living like that. Veronika became all clogged and nervous, her eyes faded out. She was no longer a joyful little happy baby. I took Veronika, collected two bags of belongings, a basin and went to live in a university dormitory.

We started to live with Veronika on our own. I was trying to earn money the best I could: I washed floors, distributed leaflets on the streets. After some time, Semen contacted me and said that he changed, he rented an apartment and got a job. I decided to give him one more chance. The first month we lived well, he paid for the apartment himself. The second month I contributed a little. The third month, we had already split the payment into half, and the fourth month I began to pay for everything myself. Semen drown in problems at work and I found out that I'm pregnant again. It was just before the New Year, 2011.

Ten days before the New Year's Eve my back started to ache and the pain bothered me for ten days. On New Year Eve, we started to celebrate and everything became blurred in my eyes, I could not think clearly. I perceived the world as if it was in a fantasy game. We celebrated New Year, I went to bed and in the morning I did not wake up. As it turned out, I got a very bad fever and I lost my consciousness. The ambulance took me to the hospital and they found out that I had the swine flu in the last stage. At that time many pregnant women got infected with the swine flu and in three days it was killing them. The lungs were swelling and women could no longer breathe. How was I able to survive? I don't know.

Nevertheless, when I regained consciousness in the hospital, the first thing I noticed was my flat belly. The child did not make it. She died in the womb. It was a girl. Her death was a real tragedy for me. Until now, I was not able to fully recover from this loss. [That was the only time in her story when I saw Maria had tears in her eyes]. Yet, I understand that perhaps it was for the better, because with two children I would not be able to survive alone...

During the time I was in the hospital, Semen never visited me. He only called me and said that he was kicked out of the apartment and Veronika ate mercury. I thought I would die. I returned to him, started working, studying and taking care of Veronika. One day we came back from the university with Veronika and went to bed. Semen's brother Ivan got drunk and went outside the porch to smoke. He threw a cigarette and the wooden porch became in flames in seconds. I smelled smoke and got frightened. In the room where we slept, the windows had lattices, and the only way out of the house was through that burning porch. At the moment of danger my head worked very well. I grabbed the blanket, ran into the bathroom, poured water, wrapped Veronika and myself in it and ran out. We have miraculously slipped through. Firemen came and put out the fire, but I said to myself: that's it. That is the end. I collected all of my belongings and went back to live in the dormitory. It was May 2011.

A Chance for Happiness?

I began to work, took care of Veronika and myself. At first we had only fast-cooking noodles and tea to survive. At times, there was nothing to eat. But after a couple of months I put aside some money and we started to allow ourselves things we never allowed before. We started to go for rides on the merry-go-round, buy clothes, and spend time together. We started to live happily. Semen gradually disappeared from my life. During all the time I lived with Semen, I realized that I have changed a lot. After seven years with Semen my self-esteem was severely damaged. Hatred and aggression bloomed in me with new power. I became more closed than ever.

Without Semen life began to go back on tracks very quickly. We always had something to eat. Semen periodically took Veronika, but he did not take a good care of her. He often fed her chips, cola, and sandwiches. The last time he brought her to me, right from the doorway “the

water began to slit from all her cracks.” I was frightened and did not give him my child any more.

At that time I got a job in one charitable organization, then in another and my career in public activism began. At first I worked as a volunteer, then I worked in projects, became a specialist, then I took leading positions and started to develop independent projects and systems. In order to earn extra money, in 2011 I started to organize pickets for the political party United Russia. At this job, I met my second husband. I was appointed as a manager to organize other people to go on the streets and conduct public surveys. Alexei was among people in the list. One morning, I tortured Alexei with calls to make sure that he would come on time. As he later confessed, he was already ready to cuss at me. But when we met personally, he immediately liked me. We began to communicate. At first, I just used him for my own purposes. Since he had a car, I asked him to bring some things or take away. At that time, I was receiving a salary, but he did major part of the work. He took care of me. I told him right away that I had a child, that I was from an orphanage and that I did not want to twist novels at work. At that time I was not attuned to serious relationship, I was not ready for it.

But he persisted and invited me for a date. I agreed and three of us went to a café. Veronika played all the time in the children's room, and we had a very good time together in the cafe. He seemed to be so gallant, thoughtful, handsome - worthy in all aspects. He immediately accepted my child: paid attention to her and spent a lot of quality time with Veronika. Probably his kind attention to my daughter finally won me over and we began to date.

At the same time, I started to realize that I was not satisfied with myself. I started working on myself a lot. I literally broke and changed myself. I met a good psychologist who worked with me for six months. She opened me to the Vedic knowledge and we learned to apply

this knowledge together into practice. I also took up bodily-oriented therapy as I had to relive and let go of all my emotions and pain. Through the therapy, I was immersed in memories and lived them all over again - brightly, in pictures. Only this time I was more like an observer, allowing my body to let go of all the emotions and pain. After these sessions the pain has left me, and since then I can openly talk about my life. I changed a lot since then: I became more profound, calm, wise and cheerful. Life started for me from the scratch.

After a while, Alexei and I rented an apartment and started to live together. It was like a fairy tale. Our relationship was ideal, he organized dates, presented me expensive gifts: clothes, jewelry, phones, travel. He cared about Veronika, took her to the kindergarten, worried about her. We went to all the events together. For the whole year there were no problems.

Time was passing, yet he did not propose to me. I set myself the goal to motivate him. I went to Moscow for a week on a business trip and all this time I communicated with him in a certain way. When I flew back to Tomsk, he met me at the airport with flowers, a ring and a marriage proposal. I burst into tears.

We set a date for our wedding to February 14. He fulfilled all my desires: I had a beautiful dress, a wedding, a cafe, a beautiful ceremony. Everything was modest, but very fun. After the wedding we continued to live well together. I was engaged in work, I conducted creative public projects, wrote articles. I became a well-known public figure in Tomsk, conducted a TV show about family values and how to be a woman.

At that time one charitable organization decided to shoot a documentary about me, within the framework of the "Successful Orphans" project. For the film, we all went to Molchanovo to document memory places. We stopped at my mom's house to interview her. Then we went to my aunt Olga and for the first time I told her that her son Egor has been raping me for many years.

She was horrified at first.

“How could it be? Did my son do it?” she burst into tears and fled from the house.

After some time, she returned. This time she was in a different mood and began to attack and accuse me.

“Yes, you are a slander! You are crap! I do not believe you!” she was saying.

Of course, I was very upset. Also, when we were going to Molchanovo, I was afraid how my husband and Egor would meet. When we arrived, Egor stood in a doorway, and my husband at first did not understand who he was, and when he found out, he beat him well. When I saw how my husband was kicking Egor, I felt at ease, I felt very good. I was shaking all over, I cried - apparently my body released the inner block - it was *the moment of liberation!*

I was very grateful to my husband for punishing Egor. I felt so much better. I became even more attached to Alexei. I helped him in everything. For example, he dreamed of getting a job at the police department and we were looking for methods to make him lose weight and get a job. He ran from first to seventeenth floor. The selection process lasted a year and all this time I supported him and instilled hope in him. One day he came home happy and excited – he got a job.

After a while, I began to notice some weird behavior. I noticed that he started to flirt with girls. New conflicts arose and I decided to leave him. He apologized and I decided to return back to him. When I came back, Alexei got news that his mother was likely to be deprived of parental rights and his sister Tonya would be taken to an orphanage. Without thinking, Alexei rushed to his mom and brought Tonya to us. She was two years old. The girl was very difficult, with a backlog in development. She could beat her head against the floor to the blood and hurt Veronika. She did not have the mechanisms of self-preservation, she constantly fell down and

did harm to herself. She did not talk, she gave a piss any place she stood. She screamed a lot and made hysterics. It was very hard ... I was not ready for that. I did not understand how to deal with such a child. What to do, how to develop her? I had many questions and we tried to do something, but there was no special support from Alexei. He made a decision unconsciously, rushed to save his sister without weighing the consequences. He did not think of his capacity. He just took her and that's it.

So we started to live together – the four of us. Our life became a little disordered and aggravated. I did not know how she would call me, mom or not mom, Maria or not Maria. He was her brother, but she would call him daddy. I could not be her mother either, because if I were her mother, then I should have loved this child, but I did not. I just gave care, attention, custody, but not love. To fall in love with such a child in a day was impossible. I'm not a saint; I'm an ordinary earthly woman.

Some time later, Alexei brought his mother as well. She came under the excuse that she would take care of her daughter and recover in her parental rights. It all turned out the opposite - she did not take care of Tonya, she did not get any job, she hung out with men and got drunk. I was the one who took care of all children.

One day I woke up and went to the kitchen. I saw his mother was lying absolutely naked and my children were about to wake up. I woke Alexei up and told him to get rid of his mother, I could no longer tolerate her presence in our home. She finally gathered her belongings and left.

Alexei and I really wanted to have a common child, but it did not work out for a long time. Once we went to Thailand and traveled around different islands. In the Pranang cave there were phalluses of different sizes. The legend was that if someone had problems in life or could not get pregnant then they had to make a phallus, place it on the fool moon and their problem

would be solved. Of course, I did not do it, I just sat near these sculptures and took a picture. Yet, after a week or two my husband began to notice that I was behaving strangely, I was freaking out for no reason and getting frustrated. He grabbed me by the arm and brought me to the pharmacy. I did a pregnancy test and it turned out to be positive. We brought Sofia from Thailand.

My pregnancy was just magical. I wasn't aware of any problems. I had completely resigned from my work. Alexei surrounded me with care and love. He bought everything I wanted and took me to the hospitals. During the last months of pregnancy, I noticed that something was going wrong. He became distant and cold. He stopped asking about how I feel.

On September 4, I began to feel the contractions. I sat in the car and drove to the hospital. My water broke and doctors found out that the child had some problems with her heart beat. I was immediately put on the table and they performed Caesarian. Sofia was born all dirty. She was very plump – 4,120 gr.

The transition from the hospital was difficult. My husband looked remote, he did not even hug Sofia or me. He looked very strangely at Sofia, as if she was not his daughter. There was no joy. When we got into the car, he immediately loaded me with problems, saying that he got very tired with two children. While it was difficult for me, I sincerely believed that we could solve any problem with him together.

When I arrived home, everything was ready. We bought a bed, a stroller, and began to live peacefully. One day, the alarm went off in the car. I decided to go and check it out. I opened my husband's purse to take the car keys and I saw that he had a second phone. All types of thoughts rushed into my head. I started to think logically, why would he need one? I turned on the phone and realized that he was cheating on me since I was nine month pregnant. On

September 3rd he went on a date, and on September 5th I gave birth to Sofia. When I realized that he betrayed me, the whole world just collapsed. Everything darkened in my eyes. I could no longer understand what was happening around me. Sharp and acute pain paralyzed me. I had never ever in my life experienced such a pain.

When Alexei returned from his work, I did not argue. I just put his phone next to him, took Sofia, put her into the cradle, sat behind the wheel and drove off. I drove around the city for four hours non-stop and cried. When I returned he immediately ran towards me with a guilty face.

“I did not cheat on you, I just felt very lonely. I was tired, I decided to relax a little bit. Also...I think that Sofia is not my child,” he told me.

“Are you kidding me or what? She's a copy of you!”

“Once you went with a friend to a cafe, you smoked hookah and drank coffee...”

”Yes, we left at 7 pm, and at 9 pm I was already at home with you! If you want, we can go and do a DNA test! ”I screamed.

“Ok, I will believe that she is my child...”

“Alexei, if you want to keep our family, then let's have rules. You will check yourself and bring me a health certificate that you are not sick. You will stop drinking with friends at work. You can hang out as much as you want with our trusted friends. But if you go out, then I need to know where you are, so I have the opportunity to come and kiss you, just because I missed you. All money that you earn, you will bring to the family and show me so that I am sure you are not spending them on someone else. Furthermore, since I have three children you will give me your car, as I need to constantly move around with them. If you agree to such conditions, then we keep the family, if not, then no.”

When he heard my rules, he burst into anger and left the apartment. A little later he returned and agreed to my terms. Yet, at the end, nothing changed. Soon I realized that he continued to cheat on me. On top of that he began to humiliate me and say that I looked fat and terrible. I started to feel depressed. He was constantly disappearing somewhere. There was no help from him. I was going crazy, alone with three children. At one point, I could not take it any longer and I called him and asked for help. I literally begged him. I explained that I could not do this anymore. But he ignored me and I decided to leave him with my two children.

I went to a friend and wrote a post on Facebook asking for help. It was a massive scandal. My reputation collapsed - everything collapsed. In public eyes, I was a person who promoted family values, who knew how to treat men, whose life was perfect, and then, I abruptly was left alone with two children on the street.

The city certainly helped me with money and resources. Everybody told me: to come back and keep the family. I told them that I would make a decision myself. Alexei was angry with me after this post, because his reputation also suffered. He shouted that I myself was to blame, I shamed him in the eyes of the public, how could I?

For a week I lived with a friend, then I borrowed some money and rented a one-room apartment. During my pregnancy, many of my contacts were lost, so at first I began to work as a money collector. I put my seven-month-old Sofia into baby's backpack and for eight hours a day I went around the city with her. She was crying, but I had no choice, I had to work.

After a while I was finally given an apartment as an orphan. It was a very long story with the apartment, as I had to defend my rights in court. I've been waiting for it for many years. Finally, I was given a small apartment, though in a criminal district, but anyway I was very happy. I got an apartment in a new house, on the fifth floor. When I went inside the apartment, I

was horrified. The whole ceiling lied down on the floor and the whole floor was covered with a thick layer of water. It was impossible to live there. I had to go on a hunger strike so that the government would fix the roof and repair the apartment. At the end, I succeeded, the roof was repaired and I sold the apartment, added the maternity capital and we bought another apartment and a car.

Then I realized that I had to feed my family, I had to work, but I needed help with children. I decided to take my mother to my house, she agreed. It was very clear to me that my mom's lengthy experience of alcohol addiction could not disappear by itself. Therefore, we agreed with her that once a week I would take her to Molchanovo so she can spend time with her friends there, and then I would take her back. I would come back after her in a couple of days and search for her all over Molchanovo, take her back to Tomsk, give her all the necessary medicine to ease the hangover and bring her back on feet....until the next trip.

Now she asks to go to Molchanovo less and less frequently. Sometimes I look at my mom and think, "My God, these are two different people!" Despite the fact that a lot of dirt has accumulated for so many years in her, she is working very hard on herself. I understand that it is very difficult for her to babysit Sofia. For my part, I simply accept some of her qualities: fussiness, constant causeless panic, and fears. She has a very big fear that I will disappear somewhere, disappear or get lost. She is very afraid of losing people. She constantly needs to feel safe. She must have an apartment, food, cigarettes and, if something is missing she starts panicking. I know and accept her as she is.

With my mother life began to gradually improve. But even after that, I had another challenge waiting for me. Veronika started to feel unwell. We went to the hospital and the doctors diagnosed her with bone cancer as well. When I heard the diagnose, I came out of the

doctor's office all in tears, got behind the wheel, exceeded the speed limit and collided with another car. There was a head-on collision. I lost my car ...

Veronika had to urgently undertake a surgery. I did not have enough money to pay for her surgery and our apartment. I had to call and ask for help from Alexei. I asked if we could live with him for a while, and he agreed. Fortunately, the surgery went well and there was no news from cancer since then.

To be honest, when I was asking Alexei for help, I had a glimpse of hope that if he sees his daughter, he would change, but I was once again wrong. A month later he began to ask when we would leave him. I got angry and said that I was not going to go anywhere. Then he collected his belongings himself and left to live with a woman next door. Her name was also Maria. When he was leaving he told me that no men would be interested in me with two children. Veronika was going crazy, she literally howled and continuously cried to the point she could no longer breathe. For Veronika, Alexei was like her father, he meant the whole world to her. She called him dad. I thought I would not survive this betrayal. I was heartbroken and worried for Veronika.

We began to live alone. We saw Alexei and his new woman very frequently. I would walk with my two children and my mom and he would demonstratively show off in front of us how happy he was with this woman and Tonya...From time to time, he took Veronika into their "family" and lure her to his side. He was creating an illusion of the family and Veronika tried to fit in there. Luckily, I soon realized that this was a huge risk and I completely stopped any type of communication between them. Since then Veronika no longer calls him dad, just Alexei.

Occasionally, Alexei came and visited me. Even once he came and told me that he wanted to save our family. I gave him another chance. The week passed and everything was fine, and then it started all over again. He started to complain that I was not taking care of him as

before and that I had not recovered after giving birth to Sofia. In the meanwhile, I worked, after the work I cooked and cleaned, fed everyone, did laundry and ironing. I was very tired and Alexei did not help me at all. At one point I started to think that if I am in a relation, then my life should at least be a little easier. But in my case, it was the opposite – there was no help, no emotional warmth and support. Instead, there were constant complains and nonsense accusations, conspiracies with his phone.

One evening we had a family dinner and I invited my mother. We began to talk and gradually our conversation shifted to the past. My mom told me that she doubted that Egor raped me. As soon as I heard this, I got into hysterics. I started to shake. Alexei grabbed me from the table, took outside the apartment and began to molest me. I resisted, but he ignored my wishes, he brought me into the bedroom and raped.

I was so sick. I called my friend and she was trying to calm me until 4 am. Then I started to check Alexei's phone and surf through his contacts and social networks. I realized that he was shamelessly cheating on me all this time. He continued to chat with Maria, whom he left, with other girls and prostitutes. Then I said, "You know, Alexei, enough! That's it."

I went outside the apartment very furious. I broke his car with my bare fists. My hands were all dark and blue from hits. When we were breaking up he told me that he would take all the belongings to himself. I told him that this time he would go empty-handed. He did not listen to me and started to collect things.

"I'll call the police right now," I told him.

"Well go ahead! My men will come and there is nothing you can do about it! Call the police, go ahead!" he replied.

I knew that his friends would come and support him.

“Yes, I will call them and also call my friends journalists. I think it will be very interesting for them to document how the police officer treats his ex-wife.”

After these words, Alexei quickly collected a couple of things and left. Since then, I only communicate with him officially, mainly via messages or What's App. Whenever he stops to call Sofia, I punish him and he immediately behaves himself. He is communicating with me in a strange manner. I do not really know what he wants. He's trying to be friends with me but I keep telling him that he has his own life, I have my own. I ask him not to get involved with my life. I have a normal life now, I moved on, I am working. Everything is fine. I continue to grow and develop, I have projects and a family I love. My goal now is to raise children and I surely do not need a man who gets to my nerves. Perhaps, only now he began to understand what he had lost. Sofia is growing, she is an amazing girl - very talkative, intelligent and funny. She tells him, "Dad, Dad, Daddy." She's waiting for him ...

Graduates

Those who left the orphanage with me, their lives took different directions. We had a cohort of sixty people. Two girls - Svetlana and Katia - are now working. I communicate with them. One was in a civil marriage, gave birth to a child and now she lives with another man. Liza found a rich man and married because of money. Luda also gave a birth and lives with a man. He beats her in a terrible way. Olesia has two children from different men, but she was not officially married.

As for guys, there are no successful ones among them. Everyone either drank, or began to use drugs, or died already. Statistics unfortunately indicate that many children who leave the orphanage become unsuccessful. I believe that this all happens because many are lazy or not motivated to strive for something good. They do not care for themselves and for life. So we get a

large percentage of guys who are drunk or dead. I do not believe that this is because they do not have the resources, they have them, and they have skills.

Many say that graduates go into adulthood unprepared, that they cannot clean up and cook for themselves - this is a very deep and cruel myth, even stupid, I would say. The society is accustomed to exclaim, "Oh, orphans! They are so poor ... ". It is such a huge understatement of the abilities of orphaned children to think and make their own decisions. Yes, orphanage administration always makes a choice for a child, and the child does not learn to make the right choices. But each person can easily learn how to clean, wash the floor and cook their own food.

As for self-reliance, the graduates also develop these skills over time. Let's say about the apartment. Even if an ordinary person purchases an apartment for the first time, he, too, probably will not know how to pay for utilities immediately. He, just like the graduates of the orphanage, will begin to study it. Yes, it is possible that the graduate will need more time, because if a person grew up in a family, in ordinary conditions, then he saw how household relations were created, how mother brought bread from work, how she went and paid for an apartment. The orphanage graduates have to learn everything on their own. This is the difference.

In general, I do not believe that it is possible to radically change the system of orphanages, because it is very profitable to all. For example, a child is allocated sixty thousand per month (about \$1000) for food and clothing. If you look in reality, then the child eats a maximum of 500 rubles a day (\$10), new clothes are also bought to him infrequently. Where do the money go? It is unknown. Principles are good at filling their pockets. When the prosecutor's office checks orphanages, then there is a whole system of detours - a whole financial pyramid. That's why I have no hope that one person in the Duma will think and start to change something, because orphanages are very profitable. When we opened family-oriented centers in Tomsk and

began to send children to families, there was a whole scandal. Orphanages stood on their ears; they started yelling, "Why? Children are all sick, they cannot be given to families." They began to fight for children and won.

Therefore, the system cannot be changed radically. But I do believe that we can do something to improve it. We can, for example, clearly outline the situation to children. As someone once said that in order to heal a child, you need to correctly tell him about his illness, tell him why he is sick, and then he will recover. You can tell the children that the state is not their father or mother, it's just a resource system that can give them a quality future. Yes, it so happened that you do not have parents, but we are here to ensure that everything is OK in your life. Right now we can do this for you, would you like it? And there is no need to talk about love. It is absolutely important to vanish the system of "favorites" in the orphanages. It is necessary to ban the system of losers and to cancel hazing, so that children do not compete with each other. It is important to learn about children's personality, figure out who his friends are. This is of great importance. If he makes friends with the family of alcoholics, then of course he will definitely return there after graduation and will continue to drink, because this is a normal behavior for him, a style of life. And if you take a child to a diving club, then of course he will go to the pool, and then he can go to the sea.

At school, you need to talk with teachers, so that they do not in any way single orphans as a separate group. And do not scream and scold orphans, so that children are gradually not accustomed to criticism and attacks. It is necessary to rally the class so that the teacher helps the child learn how to build communication. We must immediately accustom children to the quality of life, to a decent level, to instill the idea of going to university, and not to a vocational school. Let's ask children, do they want to wash floors or work abroad? We need quality measures that

would have a powerful impact and instill quality in a child. Now children have about 100 events a year. Do ordinary children have so many events? It's just a conveyor of people and events, which sweeps, but there's no larger meaning in them. It would be much more interesting if they took the orphans to the Crimea, or taught them to ride horses, swim in a boat, or jump from a parachute.

Each child needs individual attention. Surely every child needs an adult and a kind of affection, without it he/she cannot live. Let it be a mentor outside the orphanage, an adult mentor with whom he/she can rest, spend time together and develop various skills. And, of course, the state should work out mechanisms that would provide children with apartments after graduation, without dragging them around the courts.

Epilogue

Despite the fact that my life does not seem simple, I find positives in everything. I believe that there is nothing negative. Everything is given to us for experience, for comprehension of wisdom and depth. Now I accept people as they are, I do not expect anything from life or from people. It might be easier for me to live, knowing that betrayal is normal. I'm just ready for anything and everything. If I have a problem, I no longer panic. Now I don't really have problems, I have just tasks that I need to accomplish. I make all the decisions with a calm heart, because I know that I can do everything. I learned to accept information from the world and people as it is without imposing it on myself. My state of my soul and mind is my state. It cannot be influenced by anyone or anything. I learned to clearly say NO if there is something I do not like or I do not want, no matter how much a person wants me to do it and how the society might judge me for my decisions. No one can knock me down. If I set a goal, nothing can move me to the left or to the right. As for my education, I cannot say that it gave me any serious advantage.

In my case, it did not play any serious role. It just happened that all my developments come from my life experience and from my social networks.

Right now, my family is my number one priority. Everything else like money, career, personal life come after. I did not have a lot in this life myself, so I want my children to have high quality life. To be honest, I have already placed a cross on myself and my personal life. I just accepted that my life would never be simple. It would always have some difficulties. Now I'm looking at my mother's life and mine and I see similarities: we both were left alone with two children. We are living the same scenario just the content is different. Therefore, I do not cherish any hopes for myself. It seems to many that I am devaluing myself in this way. But it is not a devalue - it is acceptance and humility. I'm just tired of looking, hoping, waiting, and believing. I do not expect anything anymore. I live my life and do everything I can for my family and myself. It is important for me to make my family happy. Yes, at times I feel very lonely, but I learned to accept my loneliness. If earlier I was still rushing in search of adventures, love, and success, now I live in peace. I can hang out alone: I can go dancing or just read a book. The worst thing is to be alone while you are married. The loneliness of a single is much easier to handle. I experienced both, and now I perceive my loneliness very calmly.

The only thing that I could not completely solve is my attitude towards men. I was left with resentment, anger, and aggression towards them. I do not know what to do about it yet. I have irony, pragmatism and even cynicism. I know that all men are traitors. I simply observe all the men and think, why even to start a relationship? Who needs it? Do I need? It is not a fact! What will I receive? I will have to wash, prepare meals, relax him in bed, keep my mouth shut, be always easy going and comfortable. No, I do not want that. I do not need it. Why should I bother? Just for the sake of being a married woman? Yet, I will have to deal with more

problems? Recently, I did not have any relationships with men. The second they allude to having sex before I am ready I immediately cut off all the communication. I cut off harsh, I do not give second chances. Maybe I'm demanding too much.

Now guys ask me why I'm so serious? Why I am so grumpy and uncomfortable? Now I lead a healthy lifestyle, I do not drink and smoke, so when I come to a bar or a club, it's not fun anymore. I observe drunken people, who start their erotic games and attempt to approach me. Well, that's what they typically say to me,

“Why are you so unhappy?”

“Why, should I? Should I immediately take off my panties?”

“Do you want to say that you are like an unapproachable wall?”

“Yes, exactly.”

I'm so annoyed by such talks. By far all these games are so obvious to me. From my experience, I've learned to understand motives of people from their first words. I immediately see what drives a man, what he thinks and wants from me. Everything is so uninteresting. So, when a man approaches me, I immediately tell him “NO”.

Once I conducted an experiment, a man sat down next to me again, and I immediately told him,

“No!”

“Why no?”

“Simply no and that's it.”

“You are strange.”

“You just want sex.”

“No, why do you say that?”

“So, you don’t want sex?”

“Hm...well, of course I want.”

“So, I tell you NO!”

I thought to leave Tomsk, because here everything reminds me of people and events in my life. I feel it inwardly that I need a bigger scale. I have such a feeling that there is too much love inside of me that I cannot bear and because of it I have stress. I cannot fulfill that sense of freedom and scale to the extent that I feel it. This force begins to eat me from inside.

I am often asked what helped me in life not to break. I do not know myself. Sometimes I think, how much more can I take? Did God decide to punish me for all the mankind? Is it his sense of humor? God, please, can you relax for a while or turn away so that I have fun for a while?

One mechanism that often saved me was my ability to shut down. Many people cannot just simply disconnect from their problems and start living like a robot, but I can. This ability saved me a couple of times. Also, I am very stubborn, no matter what I chose to live and that's it. Whatever happens, I'll run, if I get tired - I'll walk, if I get tired of walking – I'll crawl, if I get tired of crawling - I'll lie down and I'll look in the direction I need to run. I'll fight for life, for my children until my last breath. Life is short, in fact, there is not so much time left to leave something important for my kin. I do not know what my children will be like, I cannot take responsibility for this. But while I can do something for them, I will do it. My task is to leave quality behind.

The Sorrows of Wasted Time and Joyfulness of Hope

I am very far behind on everything...

Olga, 27 years, Moscow

My colleague from Teach for Russia introduced me to Olga¹⁴ in September 2016. She informed me in advance that Olga is rather reserved and perhaps she would be willing to open up only in her presence. I was absolutely fine with such a scenario. In late November 2016 we arranged to meet three of us in Moscow. We decided to meet near the subway station. It was windy and rainy that day.

My colleague and I arrived a little earlier, so we were waiting for Olga to arrive. When she came, we exchanged a few greetings and hugs. Olga was rather tall and athletic. She was dressed in a sporty outfit. There was a spark in her beautiful brown eyes. Her look varied from being naïve and playful to composed and even threatening.

It was very cold outside so we made a quick decision to go to a nearby café. My colleague had to leave and she asked Olga if that was fine with her. She agreed. Thus, we went to a café together with Olga. I offered her to order whatever she wanted as an appreciation of the time to come and talk to me. Later, she confessed that she did not have much to eat because she was in a rather difficult financial situation. She got enrolled in English courses that she had to pay for while not working anywhere.

That evening we chatted with Olga about our lives and got to know each other better. At the end we scheduled to meet for an interview in a large shopping center near Olga's home. During the interview, I got a feeling that it was not easy for Olga to recall past events. She often paused, fell back into the memories, and carefully weighed words and phrases. Also, she frequently could not remember certain past events. At times, I felt as if she did not want to tell her story and I asked her multiple times if she felt like stopping the interview, but she assured me that everything was fine and that she was glad to talk to me. After the first interview, I decided to meet with Olga in an informal setting and spend a little bit more time together.

¹⁴ All names in this story were changed to ensure confidentiality of participants.

We met a couple of times for lengthy walks and talks in Moscow. In this series of informal and easy-going meetings, I believe I was able to understand why Olga was so reserved about telling her story. First, she emphasized a number of times that she wanted to forget her past. It might be true that her mind started to block or even erase painful memories from her past. Therefore, her participation in the study gave her an opportunity to retell/reconstruct the story of her life in a way that she can begin to cope and live with.

Second, I found Olga incredibly forgiving and compassionate. Repeatedly, she told me that she forgave all the people who hurt her. She told me that they did harm only because they were unhappy and hurt themselves, therefore, they deserve forgiveness and understanding. She also told me that she saw little value in recalling painful events and talking about people that hurt her – because they did not fully comprehend their actions.

Thus, during the interviews it became apparent that Olga was very briefly commenting on painful experiences or not talking about them at all. She often jumped through them and focused on life-changing and positive experiences instead. Even when a draft of her story was written, she asked me to remove a couple of troubling events from her narrative. I wanted to clarify her motivation behind her wish as she was guaranteed full anonymity. She told me that she felt these events did not tell much and that other experiences were more important in her life. Of course, I fully respected her decision, yet I was partly disappointed because I felt these stories were significant.

Nevertheless, when her final story was written and reviewed by Olga, I began to feel as if it lacked depth because of all the omissions. I even thought not to include her story in the study, but then I realized that her story showed how challenging it might be for orphanage graduates to cope with their past and how the pauses and silences in orphans' stories can speak volumes.

These silent blind spots often indicate pain. At times, they bring a feeling of shame and embarrassment to the participants, creating cognitive dissonance and inner conflicts. Therefore, while reading Olga's story I invite the reader to understand her experiences not only through words, but also to read between the lines and listen to the silence.

Childhood

My name is Olga. I am twenty-six years old. I was born in 1990. It is unknown to me where and under which circumstances I was born. As my aunt told me, I was without my mother since my birth. My father died in a hospital before my birth as well. Thus, I lived in an infants' home, at the orphanage and then at the boarding school¹⁵ in Moscow.

What was happening with me before the age of seven, I cannot remember. I can recall some fleeting memories from the orphanage. I remember that one day, due to the fire I was transferred to another boarding school. It was very unexpected and scary: a new place, new people. The new boarding school was much larger than the orphanage. There were new teachers, new children and everything else was new. I was stressed.

In a new boarding school I remember that there were a lot of children, literally, a lot. We all played, ate, dressed up and were put to bed together. In the morning we got up at 7 am, at 8 am we had breakfast and at 9 am the school started. We had to get up quickly, get dressed, brush teeth and prepare for breakfast. We walked to cafeteria all together in a row. After breakfast we went to school. We had a class-schedule that we followed. At the elementary school, we had lunch and a quiet hour after school. At the senior level, we had lunch and then two to three hours of free time. After, we did our homework. If we did not have any homework, then we all

¹⁵ The government for the past ten years is constantly trying to reorganize orphanages and experiment with various formats. Their ultimate goal is to eliminate all the orphanages in the country. Thus, some of the orphanages were renamed into boarding schools. In this story, the boarding school and orphanage are used interchangeably.

gathered in a playroom. There was a TV and an old computer. We did not have any extra activities or classes, we just sat near TV all the time. Now it's strange for me that no one was eager to learn: there was no one who read a book or learned something during their free time, but back then everything seemed normal to me.

We lived and studied in groups of ten to twelve people. There were a lot of groups. There was even a group for orphanage graduates who were waiting to get their housing. In the past, we had two buildings: one was allocated for our school, homework and sports; and in another building we lived and spent all of our free time. Now due to the reforms, only one building remained. From time to time we would go for a walk. Only in ninth and tenth grades we were allowed to leave the orphanage and explore the city on our own, but many children ran away. They did not want to put up with the life in the orphanage.

The life in the boarding school was rather difficult, because all the children were different, both in terms of age and character. Constantly, we had various conflicts - we were often beaten, severely beaten by both children and caregivers. There were countless fights among children, including sudden ambushes and traps where two to ten people attacked and beat you. Often conflicts were due to material possessions: some children had assets and others did not. Some children had phones, players, and some had nothing. I do not even know how children got all of these things. Perhaps, they saved some money that was allocated for us monthly for personal expenses. I do not know for sure, but the struggle was relentless. If someone just said something or did something wrong, went by and said a trigger word, then the fight began. In fact, a person who won the fight would gain public recognition and respect, while the loser would become an outcast for everyone. Personally, I had a lot of conflicts, mostly with girls. Children and caregivers were constantly pulling my hair. While I was in the boarding school, I had bald

spots on my head and only by the age of twenty-six my hair had grown a little stronger.

In a boarding school, I have never had friends, neither among guys, nor among girls. In the orphanage, one day you have a friend, the next day you don't. I was lucky to live with two good girls in a room, as they did not like conflicts that much. One of them had parents who always visited her and brought her some sweets. The other girl, Anna, had no parents and relatives, but she was lucky. Swedish people used to visit our orphanage and take children to Sweden on vocation, so they chose Anna. They also wanted to take me as well at first, but by that time my mother was not deprived of parental rights, so I could not go.

I remember how Anna used to bring very interesting things from Sweden and how we surrounded her and asked her to tell and show us everything. We all were very interested in what she brought from abroad. At the end, some children were adopted in this way in Sweden.

Another good event I remember – we attended summer camps on the Black Sea. We collected cherries and peaches. In winters, we traveled to different cities in Russia and were given many gifts for holidays, mostly sweets. Now I'm upset that we were not given books or developing games, and we were not accustomed to strive for knowledge. From too many sweets we were feeling unwell.

While I was living in a boarding school, I always showed my character and fought for justice and honesty. For some people maybe I was too riotous. But a riotous person in my understanding is the one who walks, freaks everyone out, and slams the doors. We had such a girl, she was slamming doors with all her power, no one could cope with her, everyone was afraid of her. This is a riotous person, but as for me, I just could not keep silent. Many children were constantly silent, but I was always direct and I could say what I thought, probably that is why I got beaten so many times. I did not understand this before, only now I understood why we

were treated this way. The caregivers wanted us to shut up, to be silent. They wanted us to be incapable of thinking and to blindly follow their rules and be afraid. When I left the orphanage, only then I realized the agenda of the orphanage - they wanted to make idiots out of us, destroy our personality, so that we could not think. They wanted us to live till the rest of our lives with education of a cook, a seamstress, a builder or a gardener without a murmur.

This rotten system was constantly maintained by the use of physical punishment - we were constantly beaten, in front of others. We were beaten every time we said something that contradicted the opinion of the caregivers. I think that if caregivers admitted their wrongness and were on an equal footing with us, then there would be no violence. I believe that we were beaten, because adults knew that we were in some way right, but they could not openly admit it. Perhaps that's why, while I was living in the orphanage, I considered myself no one. We were controlled in everything, whom could I consider myself? Each person should have an identity worthy of respect, but I did not have this identity before eighteen years of age.

Nevertheless, now I'm not holding any grudges against anyone, I have forgiven everyone who ever offended me, beaten or created troubles. As there is saying that these people did bad deeds not from a good life. If a person is angry, then something is wrong with him, then he needs help himself. A person in a good mood will not humiliate others or do anything bad, so they must be pitted and be forgiven. They are not to blame for this; I think they did not realize what they were doing.

School

I remember my first grade. We had only one teacher at the primary school, but starting from the third or fourth grade we had different teachers. Per class we had two teachers. With some teachers, I was able to find a common language, but with others not. On the one hand, I'm

glad that we had different teachers, because in this way I had to learn to interact with different people.

Our boarding school was considered for mentally retarded children and only children from our orphanage studied in it. At a young age I did not understand a lot, we did not study well and nobody wanted to teach us. The textbooks were for the mentally retarded, the tasks were primitive, we were asked: "Count that! Write this! Do the exercise!" I was not interested in studying at all and I did not like teachers. I had a feeling that the teachers needed just to come to the classroom *dlya galochki* (for the record, for the sake of appearance), yell at us and that was the end of our lessons. Among the teachers there were only a few who really wanted to give us at least some knowledge. Most of the teachers did not care. I remember how one teacher used to beat us very hard. She had such a method of education. Despite the fact that she was not tall, wearing glasses, everyone was afraid of her.

Leaving the Orphanage

I left the orphanage at the age of nineteen. I remember that before going into adulthood I was tormented by a double feeling. On the one hand, I was glad to leave the system as quickly as possible, in the end how much more could I suffer there? On the other hand, I was scared, because I did not quite imagine how I would live alone.

Yet, in practice, everything turned out quickly and easily. I applied to get an apartment and first time I was offered a bad option, I refused it. The second time we were lucky to look at the apartments in a new building together with other graduates and I immediately agreed. While the apartments were still under the construction, I lived in the orphanage. During this time, I was collecting documents for the Alumni Center, the center that was supposed to track us for the next five years after we leave the orphanage. I also went to non-prestigious college to be a cook, I

formalized a scholarship and a public transportation traveling pass. I began to buy furniture little by little and bring it to the apartment. I did not have any difficulties, everything was easy for me. When I bought a washing machine, TV and all necessary furniture, I moved in and began to live independently. Many children, by the way, did not hurry to be released from the orphanage, as they asked to stay there and work. This is how people get stuck in the system for a long time.

When I went into an independent life, I began to slowly learn how children lived in families. I was shocked by the fact that many were engaged in early sex and drinking, and also badly argued with their parents. Therefore, I am somewhat grateful for the prohibitions of the orphanage, they have preserved values and moral principles in me.

During early stages of my independent life, I tried to often visit the Alumni Center for graduates, so that they knew I was all right. They always talked with me and helped me. However, I must admit that as soon as I got into an independent life, I got involved with a bad youth group of orphans. Now I already vaguely remember how I met them and under what circumstances: somehow it happened. It was a big group; there were a lot of girls and boys.

After that group, there was another group of youth. Among them was a girl, Inga, I really liked her. She was so brave and free, she was cheerful and I really enjoyed it. She always drank; she could easily meet with someone and was not afraid of anything. We often went to night clubs and danced with her. She danced well. At the club, she could arrange a drink or a meal for us for free.

After that, I spent time in other companies too; there were many different ones.... It used to happen that they gave me an alcohol drink right on the street. I was such a fool before. I trusted everyone, listened to everyone ... There were so many things in my life, indeed....

Actually, I could have been completely a different person today. After all, I almost

became an alcoholic. I contacted people who constantly surrounded me and dragged me around the nightclubs. I always drank, because of this I could not study well. It's good that I was smart enough to refuse what I was offered in clubs [drugs]. If I had agreed, I probably would not have come out of all this swamp. Something like this happened to many orphanage graduates, they got involved with a bad company that provided things that were lacking in childhood: friends, fun, joy, sense of importance. Of course, all of this was just an illusion, but the system rarely offered other alternatives.

I was pulled out of all these bad encounters by a lucky coincidence. Once, I saw a guard in a shop with a familiar last name. I asked about his family and it turned out that he was Victoria's brother, a girl from my boarding school. I found Victoria and told her about her brother, she was very grateful to me. At that time, Victoria was attending a nongovernmental organization Step Up. Step Up is a charitable organization that functioned as an evening school that helped graduates of orphanages to receive a diploma of full secondary education and enroll in more prestigious colleges and universities. Victoria offered me to go to Step Up as well. In fact, while I was in the boarding school, I heard about this organization, many children even went there, but then something happened and the principle closed the way there. There were rumors that children were returning late and principle did not like it.

I remember the very first day when Victoria took me there.

On the way, we talked and I remember that she told me, "Now you'll come there, sit down and have a cup of tea."

"Really? Will I drink tea there?" I was surprised.

"Yes, you can drink tea and talk with the head of organization."

Truly, when I came there I was given tea with some cookies. That is how I started to go

there. I liked it very much. Every time I left the organization, I wanted to come back. I was very surprised that there was no segregation in Step Up as it was at my boarding school: we had our own playroom for children and caregivers had their own rooms. But in Step Up we all sat and drank tea together: the administration, teachers and students were sitting side by side and everyone was doing their own business. We sat, talked and laughed. There was a really friendly and family atmosphere.

At first, I liked the place itself and the atmosphere. I did not really think that it was important to study. I graduated from the school for mentally retarded, which in fact gave me nothing. All of us in the orphanage were diagnosed with various stages of debility without any examinations. We were taught something, but very little. Now it seems to me that if someone gives a nineteen year-old graduate of such a school a book, there is a high probability that a person will be able to read syllable by syllable or not read at all. Therefore, when graduates leave such schools, they eventually realize that, in fact, they have nothing. With documents they were given after graduation, the way to higher educational institutions was closed. In addition, I realized that in the orphanage, we were completely inoculated against the habit and desire to learn. All aspirations were suppressed by the system. The system deprived everyone of interest in learning and closed all ways for development. The system allowed us to enter only non-prestigious colleges and get a strictly limited set of specialties - cooks, seamstresses, builders and a couple of more. In fact, the system put on our forehead a sign "garbage," thus, putting a person in a dead end and complicating any steps to move forward.

Therefore, I was very lucky that I got into Step Up and met amazing teachers who invested a lot in all of us. They always told us that it's never too late to study, at any age. Over time, I liked their subjects, and then, in general, it became interesting to study. I clearly realized

that it was necessary to study and when I realized this, the world just opened up before me, as if a big bright window opened.

In Step Up, there were many good people learning with me. They also liked Step Up, but at some point they stopped coming to the organization. Only a few stayed, really. Many did not have enough time to understand what they were supposed to understand, namely, that one must learn and that without education a person cannot get anywhere in life. Perhaps, teachers did not have enough time to make them understand this, although they invested a lot and put a lot of efforts into us.

In Step Up we had a program called “The Living Library”: people came to us and told their life stories. Artists, a girl from India, a rector and many others visited us. Each had his/her own amazing and inspirational story to tell. But most of all I remember a story of a boy who had cerebral palsy. His hands dangled and he walked very badly. He told us how he tried to find a job in Moscow. He traveled around the city, he had almost thirty interviews and no one wanted to hire him. Yet, he did not give up and persisted to follow his goals. As a result, he got a job in a very good company, in a well-known bank. He was recruited and now he works there on a computer. Thanks to his perseverance, his dream came true: he long dreamed of going to Barcelona to watch football. He had this dream come true! He's amazing! I still keep in touch with him.

Besides, my Step Up teachers influenced me very much. I had an amazing math teacher, she always invited me to her home. She had a wonderful house with many dogs. I visited her with great pleasure and was genuinely shocked by the fact that the teacher was ready to invite me to her space where her child and husband lived, and where I could see them all. I was so amazed by it. She taught me a lot, not just math.

Irina Gennadievna was my favorite teacher of literature and Russian language. Thanks to her, I began to read books in awe, to look for information on the Internet. Now I often think why I did not read while I was at the boarding school? I could read so many books while I was there ... So much time was wasted. If I only had a desire, I could just sit and read, read and read at the orphanage. Instead, I have to read *now*, although it's time to work on other tasks according to my age. For example, I now need to learn a foreign language.... I am very far behind on everything, now I am carrying out tasks that should have been completed ten years ago.

Nevertheless, Step Up changed my whole life and only thanks to this place and these people I became who I am today. They gave me hope - this is very important. Step Up opened a lot of doors for me, especially after all the nightmares that were going on in the orphanage. Therefore, I will not be tired of repeating that Step Up is simply an amazing organization. Alas, it is the only one in Moscow. I would very much like to have more such organizations, but everything is arranged in a way that there are not many good places.

Now, I really would like children who leave orphanages to know that they have endless opportunities before them and that they are, indeed, very capable. In fact, there are many talented and intelligent children in the orphanages, yet the system makes idiots and morons out of them.

Life After Step Up

I finished the Step Up program and entered a more prestigious college to become a travel agent. Step Up did not leave me immediately after graduation, they helped me to apply to college and supported me all the way through my studies.

When I was studying as a travel agent, I started to go to a swimming pool. We were taken to the Olympic Stadium. There was a very good woman in the college - a physical education teacher, she was an athlete. I became friends with her and she taught me how to swim. She

taught me to professionally swim and jump into water. When she left, another man was hired and he did not do anything. He just sat all the time. That's all the difference - one person just sits and does nothing, and another one really teaches. I often compare this woman and a man to Step Up and the orphanage... Although sometimes I think that if at the orphanage we had wonderful Step Up teachers, then I do not think something would have changed, because the system was stronger. This system would break good teachers and they would not be able to work in it.

Now I really want to go to university, but I have not tried to apply yet. I do not have enough knowledge, to be honest. I still have a lot to learn and much to achieve. I do not know yet what to study, but I think that it would be a good idea to continue to learn what I already know, so, perhaps, I can be a geographer.

Before, I wanted to be a lawyer. A friend of mine sent me on a special assignment to one very famous law firm, where many foreigners worked. She told me to observe what lawyers did and see if I'm interested or not. In the organization, I met a boss, a beautiful Frenchwoman who drove me around the office and told me a lot. I spent all day there: I talked to everyone and asked questions. It was very cool. At the end, I had the opportunity to talk with a very important lawyer and after talking with him, I realized that I probably do not really want to be a lawyer, so I'm still thinking about what to do.

I do not go to Step Up anymore. I got an opportunity to go to India. My friend presented me a one-way ticket. When I arrived at the airport during check-in, I was told that they would not let me fly because I did not have a return ticket. I started to panic because the ticket was expensive, about twenty-six thousand rubles (around \$400). But then I was advised to buy the cheapest ticket to a neighboring country. I went and quickly bought a ticket to Nepal. I ran back to the counter registration and I made it to the flight.

I flew to India. The first three days were very hard, I was sweaty and dirty. I could not even swim in the ocean. Then I turned to my friend for help, she worked in India for eight years. We knew each other very little, but I did not have anyone else to ask for help. I told her that I did not have much money. She eventually helped me to find work and housing: I started working in two families and babysitting their children. At first, I worked for one family from the U.S.: the mother was Russian - Lena, and the girl was born in the U.S. My job was the following: a mother left every morning and I was with the girl all day long. I needed to go to the store, cook food, clean house, take a walk with the girl and put her to sleep. I've never done these tasks before, so everything hit me at once. How I coped with this back then, I still cannot imagine.

I lived with them in a house and given this, Lena paid me very little, twelve thousand rupees (about \$200). But I really liked them and they introduced me to another family: they were also Russians - Lena went to them for yoga. In this family, the mother, Larisa, did not seem to be doing anything, and her husband taught professional yoga. They had two children - one boy was six years old, another two years old. I sat with their children a couple of times - we went to the sea together and they invited me to the Himalayas with them. Can you imagine? I had to go to another side of India to the mountains.

When I arrived, they rented a room in a house for me. I was very well paid and fed. My job was to lead an elder child down to the school bus and then meet him from the school. With the little one, I needed to walk and feed him for half a day. Sometimes I was left alone with two children for the whole day while Larisa and her husband went for a walk. I had a very cool time with their children: we raged, played, went to a cafe, and threw pillows. Larisa gave me a lot of rest, she said that a person should rest so that he/she has more strength and energy, and I agree. Many businessmen do this; they give their employees a full rest, so that people work better.

For her kind attitude, I always did a little more than I was required: I could clean their home or sit at once with two children at no additional cost. Their family was very grateful to me and I was very happy to work for them. When I left India, they invited me to work in Israel. They wanted to go first to Bali, and then to Israel. Lena also wanted to invite me to the U.S., but I refused.

When I returned from India, I set myself a goal to learn English. I found English courses in Moscow. They cost five thousand rubles a month (about \$100). There were computers and it was possible to come at any time and independently study language at a convenient pace. At first, I really liked it, but I realized that I needed to earn money, yet I could not learn and work at the same time. I decided to leave the courses, but then it turned out that the contract that I signed obligated me to pay the entire amount in the event of the termination of the contract. The firm formalized the contract in such a way as if it was a loan from a bank. I had to pay off to them a huge sum of money....

First, I got a job as a saleswoman, but I did not like it and it was difficult to work. It was hard, of course, to live, because I was not paid very much and I had to pay a loan for the courses. Since September 2017 I have left to Jerusalem, the Holy Land. I live in a monastery and work in a refectory. It's very beautiful there and I like it very much, I'm loved and treated well, even cats love me. I have a feeling that this is my second home after Step Up. I learned how to learn independently, cultivate myself and instill a culture of reading.

Family and Relationships

With my mother, we rarely talk. I help her from time to time and try to support her. We are different, of course. She did not bring me up, she did not give me much, but I have no right to take offense at her. She is my mother and she gave me life. I try to love her very much, she did

not forget about me completely. She visited me at the orphanage, though rarely. Sometimes she defended me: she saw that I had bruises on my head and went to the director and caregivers to ask what happened. I also have two brothers, but I do not communicate with them. They grew up in other orphanages. During all the time, they visited me at the orphanage only four or five times. Somehow they were never really interested in me. They have a life of their own and I have my own.

I have never had a boyfriend. I did not fall in love with anyone, and I did not date anyone in the boarding school although many others did. It was considered cool if a guy was after a girl, gave gifts and paid attention. I did not have any of these; maybe I did not like anyone, or something else. After I left the orphanage, I did not meet my love either. I'm already tired of waiting for someone to appear, because, of course, I want to love and take care of someone. Although sometimes it seems to me that I'm not yet ready for a relationship, I think I'm still stupid and I need to learn a lot. It's true, I know so little ... I want to study and learn!

Many graduates from the orphanages date with each other. They create families and have children. This is not the best indicator, because they do not know much and do not know how to live. They lived at the orphanage and they sent their children there as well....

Other Fates, Other Stories

The graduates from the orphanage had different lives. I know that many in the boarding school returned to work there, they did not want to break out of this system. Others ... One girl I found in a subway, she was lying with homeless people. I picked her up, gave her money and sent her home. Many, I heard, already became alcoholics. The girl who was the best in our group, who studied superbly, gave birth to a second child, started to drink as well. I know that her child got into an infants' home because of this. Yet, she was one of the best ... apparently the

life circumstances forced her into this path.

My neighbor in my building sold his apartment. One person told me that he bought another apartment somewhere in another city. But I do not know whether it is true or not, I'm worried about him. Many told me that one boy hung himself straight in the street on a pole: either someone hung him, or he did it himself. Some graduates became addicts and started to drink. Many turned their new apartments into a tatter, they lived surrounded by the garbage and gave birth to children in these conditions.

A person who has been in this system for a long time, and then leaves it, s/he does not know what to do, where to go ... S/he is simply lost. I had such an experience, but I figured out very quickly where and what I should do. When children come out they have many rights: study for free, get a scholarship and a subsidy for an apartment, free public transportation pass, stipend and many other things, but no one talks about it. Yes, the child was given an apartment and money, but s/he does not know where to go. Then orphans begin to realize that for so many years they lived on everything ready - they were fed, put to bed, taught, but in fact a person must do these things by himself/ herself. That's how they made idiots out of us.

Post-Scriptum

I do not want to offend or accuse anyone with my story, I just want the graduates of orphanages not to think that for them all the doors are closed. I want them to know that they have the right to do more: strive, learn, develop, become a person. I want them to know that after the boarding school they have the right to be happy, they have the right for love and forgiveness.

A Story of Burnt Flour, Human Pain, and Public Activism

We can devote a lot of time to our problems, but we can at least try to live,

at least for a little bit...

Dima, 25 years, Moscow

I got to know Dima¹⁶ in July 2016. I found him through social media. One of the posts was devoted to him and I decided to write him a message. In my message I introduced myself and told him about research that I was planning to conduct. I asked if he would be potentially interested to participate. He left me his phone number and asked to give him a call and arrange a meeting. We arranged to meet in his apartment at the end of July, 2016.

I arrived to Moscow on July 26, 2016. It was a very warm and sunny day. To get to Dima's apartment, I had to take a subway and walk for about twenty minutes. He lived in a five-story building in a rather nice neighborhood that had many trees and small shops. I was very surprised that Dima sent me in a phone message not only his exact address but also a code from an entrance door. I thought that, perhaps, it was a little risky to give a code to someone he barely knew. Nevertheless, I found his apartment and rang the bell.

A male voice asked me, "Who is it?"

"Hello, I came to see Dima," I said.

The door opened and I saw a smiling young man. I knew from the photos it was not Dima.

"Come in, come in, Dima is in the room."

This young man took me into another room where I saw Dima for the first time in my life. I saw a very young man, with fair hair, and large, childish-naive brown eyes. He was

¹⁶ Dima expressed his wish to keep his name in the story. However, his last name and all other names were changed to keep confidentiality of the participants involved.

sitting in a wheelchair. He greeted me. His voice was very vibrant, dynamic, clear and loud. He invited me to sit down and offered some tea. I agreed. He ordered the young man who opened the door to make me tea. In a couple of minutes, he returned with a cup of hot tea.

While I sat down, I was trying to look around to understand where I was and what was going on. I heard some other male voices coming from other rooms. After sometime a couple of new males appeared and sat with us in the room. They seemed to be curious as well. I began to talk about my research and myself but Dima was not really focused on me. From time to time he would interrupt me and give some orders to people around.

“Sergey, did Tolik call? No? Then call him and ask how he is and if everything is fine,” Dima said.

Five minutes later, Sergey came back and reported on his phone call with Tolik, thus, interrupting our conversation. Dima apologized a couple of times and asked me to continue. However, almost every five to ten minutes something was happening – someone was calling Dima or Dima had to call. I felt that I came in the midst of emergency. Dima was clearly behaving like a boss – confident, dynamic, firm. Others seemed to fully acknowledge and appreciate his leadership. His orders were immediately fulfilled. I was sitting there and everything around me was constantly moving, changing, evolving. People were coming and leaving the room.

However, these constant interruptions gave me a chance to look around. I was sitting in a room that looked like Dima’s office. He had a desk with a computer on it. On the wall there was a large poster with the rules. While I can’t recall all of them, it was written to respect others, be always on time, be tidy and so forth. Despite constant interruptions, I managed to tell Dima about my research and myself. He told me that he got over the past events and he was open to

share his story. He passionately told me about the project that he was working on. This project called *Trudenok* (hard worker) was aimed to provide job opportunities for orphanage graduates with debility status. He avidly told me how difficult it was for the orphanage graduates to get a job and how unfair it was for them to be officially labeled “idiots” while they were quite normal guys. I remember I asked his opinion on horrifying statistics about the orphanage graduates and he told me at that time that he believed it was nonsense. He said he could see from people around him that they were really striving for a good life, they were trying to do their best. Strikingly, about a year later he changed his mind on the matter and the reader will have a chance to read about it in the story below.

After this initial introduction, I have not seen Dima for another four months. All this time, I kept in touch through social media and followed his posts. After securing IRB approval, I asked Dima to meet for an official interview. I should admit that it was quite challenging to complete the rounds of interviews with Dima. For a couple of times, we arranged to meet with him and I arrived to Moscow specifically for that purpose and he canceled meetings at the last moment due to his health issues. Every time, he sincerely apologized and asked me to reschedule the interview. At one point, I was about to give up and start looking for another participant. However, finally we managed to meet three times for in-person interviews and one time we talked over Skype.

However, it was challenging to conduct interviews with him not only because of the logistics, but also because I was witnessing his degrading health condition. Each time we met, as if part of him faded away: he became thinner, darker circles appeared under his eyes. During the interviews he twisted in pain and shivered. I was truly worried about his health and urged him on a number of occasions to contact the doctor. Also, I offered to stop the interviews but he refused.

He was genuinely interested to tell his story. He shared that this pain was typical for him. As a matter of fact, during the interviews he never complained about his health even though it was evident that he had some serious problems.

In summer, 2017 he finally went to the hospital. An immense bedsore appeared in his body. It was very deep: the bones were visible through it. The doctors identified that some tissues in a bone started to die and his muscles started to slowly perish as well. They performed surgery to remove all the dead tissues and Dima got to a slightly better state for a while. Yet, recently the relapse occurred and he is now in a critical condition.

Birth. Mother

I was born in prison in 1992. My mother was sentenced for murder. As stories from neighbors were going on, my mother and, presumably, my father, axed a head of a stranger. They needed money for vodka. Until now, it is not known who caused the fatal strike. As gossips went, my father did, but my mother took the blame, possibly hoping that her sentence would be shortened due to her pregnancy. At the end, they were right. My father seamlessly disappeared, and my mother was sentenced for ten years in a prison.

For some time I stayed with my mother in a prison, but then I was transferred to the infants' home number 1091, where was my brother Slava. In this infants' home, we had seven to eight children in a group. We had mostly elderly caregivers. I remember that we had some lessons, games and meetings with volunteers, but most of the time we were left to ourselves, we did not do anything special. Often priests came to visit us, they preached and baptized children right on the territory of the infants' home.

I remember when we peed in beds we were put in the middle of a room with wet sheets on us. We stood there until sheets were completely dried. I cannot say that caregivers enjoyed

doing it, they simply had nothing to do: they sat all day, talked, went to each other to drink tea. To make sure that we did not bother them, they closed us in our rooms for the whole day and minded their own business. Of course, we could not complain, because at this age we did not even realize that it was not something normal.

During the summers, we were taken for vacation in psychiatric clinics or sanatorium-hospitals. There, we were constantly closed in rooms and only occasionally went out for a walk. We walked in rows, we could not make a step neither to the right nor to the left. This is how "wonderful" our summer vacations were.

Slava was growing up with me, but back then I did not quite understand that he was my brother. Our mother sent us postcards and chocolates from time to time. One day, a caregiver took Slava and me by the hand and led us into the yard.

She led us to a gazebo, in which a woman was sitting and told us, "Here is your mother!"

For us, this meeting was completely unexpected. The actual encounter I remember very vaguely, literally two or three memories. I do not remember the exact appearance of my mother until now, I just remember she had curls and a bright face. Her name was Lena. This was the first and the last time I saw her, she died in prison in 2010. For me, until now, it remains a mystery how she was released to visit us.

Back then I completely did not understand that she *was* my mother. I basically did not realize that I was in the orphanage and that I was left without parents. My life seemed to me ordinary and right. I thought that it should be like that everywhere, that it was normal to live with a lot of children and caregivers around me. I had no idea that every child supposed to have parents and that they should raise him or her. For me, everything seemed normal.

When I turned six years old, a commission came to our children's home to determine our further transfer to other institutions. In this commission there were about ten people: various specialists and orphanage administration, psychologists, lawyers and some other people from outside, possibly from the Ministry of Education. The commission asked us questions from the simplest to the most difficult ones: How old are you? What is the capital of our homeland? And so on. Nobody prepared us for anything, we knew nothing about this commission and did not understand why it was needed. For us it did not seem important at all. The commission appointed me to a general educational institution - boarding school No. 1931¹⁷, and my brother was sent to the correctional boarding school No. 301. Our paths parted.

Boarding School № 1931. Paradise

The new boarding school was remembered as a boarding school with good conditions. Now I can even call it a paradise. We slept three to four people in the room. Our bedroom was furnished with expensive furniture, beautiful curtains were on the windows and we had toys. From an early age we were accustomed to work: we carried buckets of water, washed and cleaned ourselves. We had a large territory and we could freely move around and play. We often went somewhere - to exhibitions, museums, and events. We were taken to a church voluntarily. I was not very interested in religion then, I did not understand the meaning of it, so I did not want to go to the church.

We had caregivers, also from the Soviet era, mostly elderly, with their own vision of raising children. There were certainly punishments, but everything was easier there. Caregivers behaved very respectfully, gently and kindly. We felt that we were needed. There was no *dedovshina* (hazing, bullying of younger children) there; all senior pupils communicated very respectfully with us. I did not hear any curse words from anyone. We even had a school board, in

¹⁷ The numbers of boarding schools were changed throughout the story to ensure confidentiality.

which everyone could participate. I remember how we went to these meetings and could express our opinions and listen to others.

In this boarding school we were engaged and given good education, not *dlya galochki* (as a formality or for the sake of appearance), but for real. Unfortunately, at that time, I did not appreciate this, because there was nothing to compare my experience with. I was not interested in learning. I did not care. Gradually, I was among those who “could not cope with the program.” I did not cope with it not because I was really incapable of learning, but because at that time I did not understand the importance of education. Because of this, administration of the orphanage decided to transfer me to the correctional boarding school No. 301, where was my brother.

Correctional Boarding School № 301. Boys in Dresses

It was 2002. I remember when I arrived at the No. 301 boarding school, a woman took my hand and led me to my first lesson. I went into the classroom and was dumbfounded. From behind the desks in front of me stood up thirteen boys, all bald with their heads painted in green color. Some of the boys were dressed in women's dresses. I was shocked. I could not understand what was happening. Only then I realized that some of the boys were actually girls, whose hair was cut off for their bad behavior and caregivers colored their heads with *zelenka* (green antiseptic liquid that remains on skin for quite a long time). Before that, I always saw girls with long hair and pigtails; it never occurred to me that girls could be without hair. This was my first lesson at this school.

After the lesson, my brother Slava was brought to me, but they presented him to me as follows. An elderly caregiver, aged sixty, all wrinkled and dressed old-fashioned, asked me if I recognized Slava. I said no. It sincerely seemed to me that we did not know each other and that we had never met before. During the time while we lived with Slava in different orphanages, we

grew up and changed a lot. She asked the same question to Slava and he answered the same, that he did not know me. When the caregiver heard his answer, she hit him and asked again the same question, to which Slava gave the same answer. This lasted for about ten minutes, each time her punches were becoming more rigid and stiffer. As a result, he did not recognize me and the caregiver told us that we were brothers.

Life in this correctional boarding school was very different from the previous boarding school. Here I could already meet completely different children, healthy as well with some deviations. The boarding school was spacious enough, with a large territory, but everything there was uncomfortable. Ten people slept in each room. On the windows there were no curtains, there was old and simple furniture: a bed, and a bedside table, a bed, and a bedside table. The closet was one for ten people. Because of a lack of furniture, Soviet school desks were placed in our rooms. The desks did not stand for us to study, but to put our clothes on. Everything was very modest and poor. The corridors were painted in a dirty green paint. The toilets were terrible: the tiles were chipped off, there was no toilet paper, everywhere was very dirty.

There I continued to go to the primary school. We had only one teacher, we did not have any schedules, and neither we had grade books. We came to the classroom and sat there for six hours. We could all the time study the same poem. During this time, a teacher could leave for a while to drink tea or just do her own business. While she was not in the classroom we had fun, talked with each other and made noise.

After school we went back to the orphanage, had lunch and then we had a quiet hour. During the quiet hour, we did not feel like sleeping, because we were tired of sitting in the classroom so we talked, played games and ran to the girls' room. Older caregivers were extremely angry for our activities and often invited elder kids to help calm us down. Two or

three high school students were coming and mocking us. The simplest mockery was to stand by the wall. We were forced to put our foreheads against the wall, and push our feet half a meter from the wall. Our hands were laid behind our backs. In this position, a high school student approached us from behind and knocked down our legs. We fell, smashed our foreheads, but we had to stand up and get back into our place. Sometimes we were forced to crouch with cushions. We got up, stretched out our arms and elder children put pillows on our hands and we had to crouch until complete exhaustion.

From time to time, high school students collected us - the whole group and forced to wash their toilets. It was very dirty there, because they smoked and spat. We scrubbed their toilets, and they stood, laughed and showered us with cursing words. It should be noted that in this boarding school I heard for the first time cursing words. When I first heard the word “bitch” and “whore” I was shocked, because before that I had not heard them anywhere. On the contrary, in this boarding school cursing was the norm, it was spoken by everyone including caregivers.

One of the worst punishments was when girls were put on top of our bodies. Elder children brought us bald girls with green heads and forced them to lie down on top of us. It was very disgusting for me. Seniors laughed and enjoyed themselves. The girls whimpered. Sometimes girls were brought to our room, forced to undress and stood in front of us, while everyone laughed at them.

Caregivers were also quite brutal. One teacher, Elena Vasilievna, although she was already quite old, liked to wave a rag and beat everyone in the face. She was famous for her cursing language, which she constantly used and spoke. Her cursing was so strong as if she came out of prison.

Another caregiver, Olga Vladimirovna was younger, she was about thirty years old. All boys in her group had fringe haircuts. At first we envied them, we thought it was fashionable. We all dreamed that we also had such fringes. A little later I realized why she liked this type of haircut. When she was angry, she grabbed the fringe, screwed her fingers around it and beat children against the walls, accompanying it all with cursing language and obscenities. It was her distinguished style of raising children.

The director of the boarding school seemed kind at first, but with personal experience, I realized she was rough and even tough. We could always openly approach her and complain. She listened to us but did nothing. She did not have any pity or sympathy. She knew about all the punishments and silently supported them.

During the nights, we had shifts of caregivers, whom we called “nighters.” Usually they were young students who had not experienced life themselves. They came and sat in the corridor drinking tea and coffee. At this time they were entertained by elder children, they got acquainted, flirted and joked. So that we do not distract them, they lined us up against the walls in the corridor or forced us to do something. They did not care about us. The whole corridor and walls were covered with children. We stood like that up to 2-3 am, listening as they laughed and laughed...

In this orphanage, I stayed up to the third grade. The boarding school was reorganized, according to rumors due to the fact that it had a very bad reputation: it was called “a dump” and “a black spot” in Moscow. My brother and I were transferred to 305 correctional boarding school, where I stayed for nine years and from where I transitioned into adulthood.

Correctional Boarding School № 305

When I got into 305 boarding school, at first it seemed to me that life there was much easier, but it was not quite so. The boarding school was much larger. We had three different institutions on the territory. Our institution had two buildings: a bedroom with a dining room and a school. Thanks to the vast territory, we felt freer, because it was difficult for caregivers to track us. We could walk freely, and then say that we were in a medical unit.

In the rooms from seven to ten people slept. The rooms were also poor, but still they were nicer, because there were curtains and wallpaper, and even some ragged toys. In each group lived about two domestic children, these were the children of the caregivers and other employees. They went with us to summer camps and lived with us, yet they studied at different schools. We did not see them until lunch, and after that we were with them until evening. The attitude towards them was certainly quite different; they were treated much better. We could not offend them, because we knew that they were caregivers' children. They went with us to sanatoriums and camps: usually someone from the orphanage was sent to a psychiatric hospital, and domestic children were taken instead.

Yes, children were sent to the psychiatric hospitals very often for the slightest disobedience. They were usually sent for three months, and the shortest for twenty-one days. The guys who returned after three months in the psychiatric hospital were unrecognizable. They became like zombies and they were all laughed at. They could not even open their mouths and say anything. They were all swollen, their reactions were slow, they gained weight and seemed much older than their age. Often, when they returned to their normal state, they ran away, because they felt that caregivers, who sent them to the psychiatric hospital in the first place, offended them. For the escape, they were sent to a psychiatric hospital again. Those who got in this way in the psychiatric hospital three times were immediately transferred to a psycho-

neurological boarding institution (PNBI) because they eventually turned from humans into nonhumans. They were injected with Haloperidol, Chlorpromazine and other drugs. The first years we were pricked with these drugs right in the orphanage. A little later we found out that we had a deputy director of a psychiatric hospital working in the orphanage and she had access to all these medications.

Seeing the effects of the drugs, and seeing children after the psychiatric hospital, everyone was very afraid to get there, especially frightened of the idea of being transferred into PNBI, because PNBI was the worst nightmare. It was literally *the end of life*. Residents of PNBI did not get any housing, they were forever doomed to become a patient of an institution where they no longer could do anything, where they had no rights. The administration of the orphanage knew about this, but continued to send children to PNBIs. They disposed our fates however they wanted and whenever they wanted, that's why children were all afraid of this and tried to keep silent and behave themselves well.

In comparison to a previous boarding school, there was a terrible *dedovshina* (hazing). If in the previous boarding school the elder students mocked us only when the caregivers let them to, then here, elder children were cruel on their own. They could easily shut anyone's mouth. Here I saw for the first time how high-school students refused to do something that a caregiver asked them, or they would just say "f..." word to caregivers and would not be punished for that. I often heard that not only caregivers but also the director argued with children. Elder children always laughed and mocked everyone. When we walked from one building to another, high school students stood near the entrance, freely smoked and spat at us. The caregivers could not do anything, it was the norm. Often, male caregivers fought with elder children, but it was clear that caregivers themselves were afraid.

In this boarding school many graduates of the same orphanage remained there to work. All of them were without special education, they just finished the correctional boarding school. Orphans-caregivers behaved much more rigidly than ordinary caregivers. They had a great imagination and they punished us as they pleased, the director gave them her full support. Indeed, former-orphans were her right hand. The director always respected them, because they could control a large number of children. Despite their cruelty, we still respected and obeyed them, because they could find a common language with us.

Almost everyone who worked at the orphanage took many working hours and different roles, because of money. We saw the same person from morning till night and so every day. On the weekend, we saw the same people as well. We had a caregiver who was waking us up, then she taught us Russian language and other additional classes, took us from class to class to other subjects. She was our head teacher, she led homework hours, put us to bed at night, and fed us.

Many compensated their small salary with theft. We often witnessed caregivers leaving us without food and taking it themselves. We were terribly annoyed and offended by that. But there were cases when we ourselves supported caregivers. When we began to be appointed on duty in the cafeteria and we had the power to distribute *kefir* (dairy drink), we gave it to one kind woman. We understood that she was poor and in need, so we quietly put kefir in her bag. We were even happy that we had an opportunity to help her in this way.

While I was in the boarding school, volunteers from the "Big Brothers, Big Sisters" foundation visited us - they were people of completely different level of education and age. It was a kind of an experimental program, for the first time in this boarding school. Each of us was assigned to one adult and we talked with them. Our communication lasted for several years and

during this time we managed to become close friends. Each of us had a mobile phone and we could already meet with our mentors whenever we wanted.

In winters and summers we went to the camps. The camps were of Soviet type. I remember how we were often closed in our rooms or in heating cabinets that were no more than one meter large. It was very hot there, yet we could spend half a day or the whole day there. One caregiver, a former orphan herself, particularly liked to do this. We could not do anything, because she had such rules of upbringing. Elder children often got drunk in camps and no one could do anything about it. There was even a case where in one of the camps drunken orphans broke windows on the whole floor. They took revenge on one of the caregivers who fought with them earlier. We could not just pretend that nothing happened because everything was happening before our eyes. We saw all this horror.

In this boarding school, we had a punishment by an isolator. We were given a bucket to cope with our needs and sent to a room where there were a couple of beds, and windows with bars. Everyone got into this isolator at some point without exception. It had a door to the street, which was very convenient because often children from their detention sentence were sent immediately to the psychiatric hospital: calmly and quietly. A car drove up, a child was put inside and taken away. On the other hand, since the isolator was on the first floor, we had at least some kind of communication opportunity. The children could go to the window and talk. It was not scary to stay in the detention room for two days, but when we were sent for two or three weeks, we started to go insane.

At the age of fourteen, when boys suddenly began to be interested in girls, and girls with boys I realized that when I look at a girl I do not have any reaction, but when I look at the boy I have an interest. At first, I could not understand why. I thought it was something terrible, that it

was a disease. I could not accept it in myself. But in the orphanage, about fifty percent of young boys were probably like me, so this fact was calming me down. To check myself, I once slept with a girl. After that, I literally felt sick and disgusted, I do not know why. Maybe because I saw in the first grade bald girls with green heads, who were put on top of us? Or was it something that I was born with? I don't know. After this experience with the girl, I knew for sure that I liked guys.

Over time, I learned to understand which of the boys were the same as me, and who was not. In the orphanage, everyone tried to hide this truth. Between us, we knew who was gay and we had contacts in the shower and in the rooms. We tried to find different ways. Many of my friends at the orphanage tried to overcome homosexuality in them, but nothing happened. Only one boy in the orphanage did not conceal his sexual orientation and because of this he was turned into a loser. He was not beaten, but constantly mocked, teased and called names. That's why we kept silent. My friends sometimes suspected me, because from childhood I had a delicate gait and peculiar mannerisms. But I did not admit, I pretended that I was dating girls.

From other vivid events, I remember how in 2005, on our floor, a pipe broke through and feces poured out of it. We were awakened in the middle of the night and forced to clean, because we did not have janitors. The pipe was somehow covered with rags, and we were up to three o'clock in the morning collecting all this sh..t with our own hands. We were all dirty, smelly and angry. After we finished, we were not even allowed to go and take a shower, we had to somehow wash ourselves in sinks.

In 2006, a pedophile – Alexei Pugov worked at the orphanage. He himself was a graduate of this orphanage. Pugov was respected and treated well. He was about thirty-two years old. Several times he was seen taking some children from our floor into his room on a first floor.

Many saw him, but pretended that nothing was happening. In 2007, the end was put to his actions. One of the “nighters” could not keep silent any longer. She saw that one child was missing, Stepan, and she went to look for him. She went into Pugov’s room and saw a scene of violence. She immediately went to the director and told everything. The director did not call the police, but forced Pugov to resign at his own request. Since that night, Alexei Pugov did not appear in the orphanage and everyone pretended that nothing really happened. Stepan was put in the isolation room that same night, and then he was sent to a mental hospital.

In our group, there were two boys who were favorites of Pugov. They always went to him, he took them and drove to McDonald's, bought them gifts. We even envied them, because they had things that we did not have. It was them who told us why Pugov suddenly disappeared. They were very upset and depressed by grief. They tried to prove to us that all this was not true. I think it was easy and more convenient for them to see a picture in this way.

When Stepan returned from the psychiatric hospital, he also told us the details. As it turned out, Pugov repeatedly raped Stepan in his room. He offered him money and gifts in return for silence. Stepan was silent, he was very much afraid of Pugov. That night when everything turned out, Stepan was locked in the isolation room, and the next morning Pugov's colleagues came to him and filmed Stepan on camera. They said that they did not believe him and that he needed to prove that he was actually raped by Pugov. For two hours he was beaten and cursed upon as Pugov’s colleagues were trying to get all the details out of him, although by that time Pugov had already been dismissed, but Stepan knew nothing. So instead of help, Stepan got even more punished.

School

Our lessons at the boarding school began with the words "You are retards!" Caregivers and teachers constantly humiliated us verbally more than physically. Our faces were constantly "lowered in the mud." We were told that we do not deserve anything. One teacher constantly complained that she had a daughter in another city, and that she was working here with us "idiots," wasting her time.

Teachers were constantly changing at the school. Young specialists were hired, they could not cope with us and quickly left. We had from twelve to seventeen people in the class. Since we were constantly surrounded by cruelty, we also became cruel. We behaved badly: we could afford to curse freely. Swearing was the norm for us, during the lessons we shouted dull words and laughed at teachers. There were some good teachers, but they did not always withstand our behavior and left. We were enraged because old teachers replaced young teachers with Soviet harsh methods of upbringing. We could not do anything about this. We had to obey.

In this boarding school, almost all lessons were held *dlya galochki* (as a formality). All lessons. Music lessons were taught by the principle, but she was never there, because she was busy with her own work and reports. We sat with high school students and watched movies on TV. During Russian language lessons, we were taught the same grammatical case for three to four lessons straight. One half of the group learned everything in one lesson, while others sat and pretended to learn. We were learning as long as our teacher needed. Sometimes we were forced to read a book, poem or a story and then retell it for seven lessons in a row. The teacher did not really care that someone had learned everything a long time ago. It was not in her interests to make curriculum more enriching, she followed her instructions and materials. This way teachers had a lot of free time - they were busy with their own business, wrote notes, reports, and other

paper work. Why would they waste their personal time after the lessons? It was more convenient for them to do all the things during the lessons.

Despite the fact that we had a standard correctional curriculum, we were always behind even that simplified program. Not because we were so uneducable, but because it was beneficial for teachers to lengthen it. Teachers were not interested to teach us. At first, we tried to help each other out, we thought maybe the program would go faster, but in reality teachers were not in a hurry. Everything was just *dlya galochki*. They did not have a goal to make people out of us, they did not care. It was terrible because we already had a correctional simplified curriculum, yet even that curriculum did not reach us fully.

Sometimes in the history lessons we were allowed to watch TV and we spent six lessons sitting and watching different programs and movies. Two minutes before the end of the "lesson" the teacher came and gave us questionnaires on the topic, for example, the World War II. Of course, no one knew the answers, because we all watched TV with teacher's permission. We would randomly choose answers and she would give us satisfactory grades. Everyone seemed happy with that, the teacher had time to rest and no one was hammering us with boring information too.

When teachers were ill or could not come to work, we were given substitute teachers, most of whom did not have pedagogical education. They sent us a janitor for a lesson, so what could he give us? He could turn on the TV and talk to us, that's all.

We had a subject called "Self-orientation." We had to be taught how to cook, but of course we did not learn anything. A teacher came to us and said, "Today we will prepare eggs for you! How will we cook them? Oh, you know I did not get money for the ingredients, so we will not do anything." The only thing that we ever cooked was pancakes on water. We found some

old flour in the cafeteria, mixed with water and fried in a frying pan. These days the entire orphanage smelled like burnt flour, but this was the only thing that we could cook ourselves. Constantly somewhere there was not enough ingredients, although I believe that with proper management the director could have solved this issue. She just did not care. She was busy with her reports and she was more interested in statistics than our lessons that could teach us something for real. Okay, we somehow somewhere managed to get some knowledge, but in fact a lot of children were sent to PNBI just because they did not know some things...

The vice-principle also did not control quality of lessons, because she was constantly busy with the reports too. She could stop by our classroom to see whether everyone was present or not. For them, in the first place was our attendance and official performance, while no one checked the quality of education. Everything was wasted.

The director herself often took children from the lessons. She led a folklore ensemble, to which she allocated at least some time. She gathered the most talented children and took them to festivals. I also attended it, we traveled and even won prizes and certificates. I left the ensemble several times, but the director made every effort to get me and other guys back. For example, she could prohibit going out on weekends, not letting children to go to the Olympiad game and other important events. Therefore, we had virtually no choice but to attend her ensemble.

Nevertheless, there were a few really good teachers who sincerely wanted to invest knowledge in us. I remember two teachers in Biology and Mathematics. The mathematics teacher was already elderly, but she was a wonderful woman. We could behave badly, but she did not care, she continued to teach us. One day she got up and said that our class would not just have mathematics, but also elementary algebra. She saw that we were not fools, but quite

intelligent people, so she changed curriculum, as she wanted. She even organized additional lessons of math for us.

Larisa Petrovna taught Biology, she had a Ph.D. degree. She herself was an emigrant, I do not remember exactly where she came from. During two hours of lessons she gave us extensive and enriching material. In two hours we had to look through the entire textbook. She brought and gave us her own books and materials. We immediately recognized and felt teachers who wanted to invest knowledge in us, when they knew and believed that we were educable.

My brother also had a good teacher, her name was Marina Sergeevna. She worked for several years and almost resigned three times. She constantly repeated that we were not mental retards, that we were just pedagogically neglected. She always said that whatever she was teaching us – it was something that people of our age were supposed to know. She organized an enormous number of events for us: she talked about ancient Rome, about the World War II, invited veterans, pilots, she held many different meetings with famous people, talked a lot about space and brought interesting books. Thanks to her, my brother had a chance to visit all the museums in Moscow. This is not because the boarding school was so good, but because she was so good. Marina Sergeevna sincerely tried to make inaccessible - accessible. She covered up for her educational work that she considered necessary for us. She often sent the entire classes and took them to the Red Square or to her *dacha* (summer house) for the weekend; we helped her with her garden. All of these she did according to her own will, she was not paid for it. She did not even have an official plan for these events, because she knew that the director would not approve it. I remember how in the seventh grade I was at one of her events and the director came. She sat for a while, then slammed the door and left the event. She said that she forbids to hold such meetings.

Other teachers simply hated Marina Sergeevna and constantly understated her. Everyone thought that she was crazy, that she did not demand “the right things” from us. We also often used her kindness. She often gave us loans. Whoever approached her and asked for money, she always helped, she said that she felt sorry for us. But it happened that someone bought alcohol with her money and she was reprimanded. Because of such cases, she was forced to leave three times, but she refused. As a result, she again supported us and came in 2011 to me, she gave an interview about the theft in the orphanage and the abuse of power. As a result, this interview was never shown on a federal channel, but the orphanage administration saw her on the video that I posted on the Internet. She was noticed in the background. She was fired. She returned to her home in Voronezh. We continued to communicate with her. She could not stay at home for a long time, she went to work in another boarding school with children with disabilities. Marina Sergeevna was certainly a wonderful person.

On a good side, we also had a sufficiently strong base of clubs in the boarding school. The whole floor was allocated to them. We had crafts, sports and arts. Teachers were mostly good, they really were after the results and we won a lot of contests and learned a lot. But there were clubs where we still did not do anything. For example, in sewing classes the teacher was excellent, she perfectly sewed curtains for the whole boarding school, but she was afraid to give us the equipment to sew on, because she was afraid we would cut ourselves. We could sit all five lessons learning the safety instructions and in the end still not sew.

Our shoe repairing classes were the opposite. The teacher gave us hammers, thirty pairs of shoes and told us to repair heels. He did not care if we hurt ourselves or not. It was important for him that we don't just sit or watch TV. He wanted us to be busy. At this time, he would go to his office and drink. He is already dead, may his soul rest in peace. He was drinking straight at

work and no one could do anything. He devoted many years to a boarding school and administration could not just dismiss him, especially since he could go to the Ministry of Education and tell what kind of machinations were being plotted at the boarding school. Therefore, no one really went after him, he was an elderly man, and everyone felt sorry for him.

In general, I cannot say that we were eager to learn. No, we were not. When we realized that we were not given full curriculum and that attending lessons would not give us anything, it became all the same to us. We did not go with great desire for lessons. We were also horrible at homework. We came for two hours in the evening to the class. The teacher as usual was busy with her own business, she always wrote some reports. We did not want to study. So we sat in the classroom, exchanged glances, joked, and listened to music. Nobody scolded us, as teachers did not care.

Surprisingly, we had some excellent students. They were even awarded for their achievement during school ceremonies. The boarding school conducted statistics according to which every year we learned better and better. It was so much ostentatious, just *dlya galochki*. It was important for them to emphasize their professionalism, but not ours. They were not truly interested in developing our skills and knowledge. This approach, eventually, led to the fact that many graduates became criminals or turned into people who did not need anything from life.

When we were already in the ninth and tenth grades ourselves, the caregivers started to call us for help and we had to punish the younger ones. I do not remember a single case when my classmates punished anyone, because *dedovshina* all went away. Although before that, many admitted that when they would be called to beat the little ones, they would definitely go, but for some reason, when they really had such an opportunity, they did not. In 2005, there was a

completely different situation. There was no *dedovshina*, it was simply eradicated somehow. But lawlessness began on the part of caregivers. They could do anything with children.

We had a caregiver who was known and feared by everyone – Tamara Igorevna. Her groups of children walked on a string. Her children wore the same clothes in the boarding school. They had no personal opinion, or rather they were forbidden to have it, because only the words of Tamara Igorevna and her rules were important. All other caregivers said that this was an exemplary group: children walked in rows, no one escaped, no one drank or smoked. Everyone said that this was an example for everyone to follow. Only no one knew that her miracles of pedagogy had already led to terrible consequences. Graduates of her group became alcoholics, no one lives in their own apartments - everyone subleases their apartments, and no one works.

There was another caregiver, Suhoreva, whom everyone hated. She did a lot of meanness to us, but the last drop was her unjust beating of Irina. Irina participated in the folklore ensemble, headed by the director. They were supposed to perform somewhere in Moscow and Irina made a bright make-up and manicure with the permission of the director. When she came back to the orphanage, she decided not to wash off her make-up, because it was something special for her. When Suhoreva saw her, she grabbed Irina by the hair and dragged her to the toilet. She beat her head against the toilet and swore at her, called her a prostitute, slut, and then she locked Irina up in the back room, where buckets and mops stood. We witnessed this scene, discreetly tossed the recorder and recorded all of her words.

Everyone hated Suhoreva. She not only allowed herself to beat children up, as happened with Irina, she also stole our money: she took our monthly allowances for herself, wrote false reports and attached false checks for the goods she bought. She constantly humiliated us during

her Russian lessons, she said that her daughter was an excellent student at school, and that she had to work here with us - rubbish, garbage, and retards.

She constantly began all the lessons of the Russian language with the words, “You are retards, you will never achieve anything and will not receive anything! You are nothing and no one!”

For the slightest fault in the lesson, she threatened to send us to a psychiatric hospital. In fact, we were afraid, because we saw how people came back from it. I began to realize that it was scary. I'd rather behave and be silent. So she psychologically terrorized us. In addition, she could leave us without food, close us in a room for the entire day or send to an isolator. We could no longer accept such injustice. When she beat the girl against the toilet, other caregivers saw it and no one did or said anything - it was terrible, so we decided to call her accountable for her actions ourselves.

We began to prepare in advance. We turned to volunteers from the fund "Big Brothers, Big Sisters", and told them everything. They did not know what to do, because they were afraid to help us, since they could no longer be permitted to visit our boarding school. Therefore, they advised us to try to collect evidence ourselves. In addition, we decided to enlist the support of our labor teacher, he taught us one to two times a week. We explained the essence of the problem and he promised to support us if everything goes under the law.

We drafted a document with accusations, gathered the whole class and, during the holidays, called Suhoreva into the office. I, as the most active leader, told her everything. When I announced accusations against her, I immediately gave the floor to those people who suffered from her hands. The meeting was recorded on tape. At the meeting, Suhoreva was trying to justify her actions, talked, cried a lot, and cursed. As a result, she got up and left.

The next morning Suhoreva woke us up as usual, although it was clear that she was angry and tearful. At the first lesson a whole delegation came to us: the director, the labor teacher, the deputy for educational work and the head of the academic part.

“Stand up, everyone!” the director told us.

We obediently stood up.

"Where's the recorder?"

I had a voice recorder and I was not going to hide it. The director took the recorder and turned it on in front of us. By their faces it was clear that they were very surprised by the way we all set this out. We did everything tactfully, without cursing, reinforcing our words with the Criminal Code and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Suhoreva burst into tears, began to act, saying that she was an honored teacher, with two higher degrees, diplomas and achievements, and that children treated her so unfairly.

“I cannot do this anymore, I'm not going to work here anymore! I do not want to see anyone!” Suhoreva cried out in tears.

The director was clearly upset when she heard this statement, because Suhoreva was such an indispensable teacher in her eyes. She began to calm her down.

“So, Dima, you will go to the psychiatric hospital! All the rest will be punished too!” the director made her verdict.

At that moment, many got frightened, stood up and said that they did not support the protest and that they had nothing to do with it. The director forgave them. Labor teacher also did not support us, although he promised. But still there were my classmates who stood by me. The whole delegation left the classroom. We were scared. I realized that I could be sent to a psychiatric hospital at any minute.

That day all of us were very stressed. All the caregivers walked and looked at us, yet children admired our actions. Surprisingly, the same evening the director sent only our group to the circus, did she want to calm us down? It was unclear. When we returned from the circus, I decided to run away, because I realized that I would soon be taken to a psychiatric hospital. One of my classmates had a mother and she arranged with her secretly so that I come to her. Her mother was also from the orphanage, she had a serious mental illness, and from time to time she drank. I took the keys and drove off. At first I decided to meet with a volunteer from “Big Brother, Big Sister,” who was a lawyer. We met in McDonald's, I told her everything and handed over a voice recorder. For some reason the director did not take it from me, or we had a copy of the record, I do not remember exactly. The lawyer took the record and left, promising to help to defend my rights.

I arrived to my classmate's mother. The orphanage administration was searching for me for three days. All this time I could not find a place, I was very worried. I rushed from corner to corner, constantly drank coffee and smoked. On the third day in the evening I was found. Since I did not have parents, they did not know where to look for me, but then they somehow guessed that I went to my classmate mother's house.

All these three days volunteers defended my rights. They came to the orphanage and issued an ultimatum to the director that if they put me in a psychiatric hospital, they would raise a scandal and the information would go beyond the boarding school. They asked to find me and return back to the group. At first the director did not want to accept their terms, but later she agreed. When they found me, I was escorted to my group in the presence of volunteers.

The next morning when I woke up and went to the field in front of the boarding school to do exercises, all the children met me as a hero. I was walking along the field surrounded by a

group of fifty children, they all asked questions, asked how I managed to avoid the psychiatric hospital. At this time Suhoreva stood aside and looked at me with hatred. She stood and did not know how to react, apparently she went and reported everything to the director.

During the first lesson, the director again came to us and made a scandal. She threatened me and told me not think that I got away with everything so easily and that now I'm such a hero here. She let go of the steam and left. Over time, the whole situation was gone. The director issued an order for a new form of accountability for our money and made some other changes. Suhoreva ceased to deceive us and gave us money strictly according to documents. We continued to be punished from time to time, but, overall, life drastically changed for us, everything was different.

During the time I was in the orphanage, the country was changing and the orphanage was changing. Already, even the caregivers were behaving fine, but another trend appeared – *halyava* (freebie). The TVs appeared on every floor and this is probably the worst thing that happened, because we began to watch TV for days. We already had toys. We had everything. I remember when we did not have a TV yet, we still ran and stole books and read, then brought them back. When TVs appeared around the orphanage, everyone began to degrade day by day.

In grade ten, I started to analyze and compare how I lived in the orphanage before and what was happening now. I saw very different children, these children had everything - toys and sweets. They were forbidden to clean and do physical labor. It is not surprising that in the first grade they opened the door with their feet, became ignorant. They have lost all educational programs: the younger children did nothing, neither washed nor cleaned. There were washing machines and janitors. Already they did not have caregivers who were eager to teach them anything, even through cruelty and power. We were forced to clean, wash ourselves, but they

were not. Today we would see different graduates who will not be able to clean and wash after themselves. It's one thing when teachers do everything *dlya galochki*, but when children cannot develop it's a completely different story.

Slowly, everyone started to graduate from the orphanage. We began to receive first news that someone got into jail, someone had died from drugs or something else had happened. In the eleventh grade, a commission came to us again, which had to decide whether to let us into an independent life or not, to give housing or not.

There were about thirty people in the commission. When I entered the room, they all sat with such clever faces, all of them with higher education.

They flipped through my profile and asked a couple of questions like, "What was the color of your swimsuit last summer?"

I answered, "Blue!"

"Thank you, bye!"

This commission was also *dlya galochki*, although seemingly educated and important people were involved in decision-making. Yet, they were also not so interested in doing their job, they probably did not even think that they could make a mistake and not let a person out who, in fact, might be even smarter than them. What a pity...

Post-graduation

The commission decided to release me into adulthood. But we were not immediately released from the orphanage, for about a year we had to live in a post-graduate group, which was in the same orphanage. It was a kind of experiment, the director told us more than once that such a group existed only in our boarding school. We lived there until we were given a house, a year or two. In this group we already had much more freedom. We could move freely and leave for

our own affairs from the orphanage. We still had breakfast and lunch in the boarding school, but at any time we could cook something for ourselves, because on our floor we had a stove and a refrigerator. The only thing that was bad is that janitors cleaned after us. Maybe they wanted to make our life easier, thus showing their sympathy, but I think it was wrong. We started to cook for ourselves, but cleaning went into the background. Therefore, in my cohort we have a lot of untidy guys: I often go on a visit and see not quite decent living conditions.

The most difficult part of my life during this period was meeting with the society. I went out and realized that I was alone. I felt uncomfortable, because I did not know if I was doing something right or wrong. For example, I did not know how to use the subway, it seemed that other people somehow looked at me strangely. We were not taught how to interact with the society. However, they well explained to us all our rights and told us what privileges we were entitled to receive. It was very useful, but on the other hand they made too much emphasis on benefits, which certainly affected the negligence of many graduates.

My brother graduated from the orphanage a year earlier than me in 2010, so we were shown our apartment with him at the same time. When we first came to see it, we were horrified. We certainly heard that the police evicted a whole rabble from there, because the apartment was abandoned. Even at some point our uncles appeared and tried to take the apartment for themselves. Surprisingly, our boarding school defended our rights for this property. The apartment was in a terrible condition. While I was living in the post-graduate group, Slava and I already began to look and buy materials to renovate the apartment.

While I was living in a post-graduate group, I entered college and evening school. We were the first correctional class that was introduced to the eleventh grade, before that there were only ten correctional grades. In grade eleven we were offered six professions to choose from the

college - a painter, a cook, a seamstress, a carpenter, a shoe repairer and a packer (to assemble and glue boxes). Now of course it's ridiculous to think about these options, but we had no other choice. If we wanted to pursue other specialties, we needed to finish an evening school first. The government paid a scholarship after the orphanage only if we were enrolled in a college, therefore, many graduates went to college just to receive money.

I decided to be a cook. I chose this profession only because I thought that in the evening school I would get a proper education and choose a decent profession, like a lawyer or something else for myself, but I'll still need to learn how to cook. Therefore, I do not regret at all that I learned cooking. The other graduates: some really went to college to learn, while others went only for money. Yet, the majority was deciding based on the following principle – to go where the most fun company gathered.

In the college, we studied in a correctional group. There were children from different orphanages and a couple of people from dysfunctional families. What surprised me unpleasantly was that we were a black spot of the institution. Everyone knew about us, they pointed their fingers at us and always looked like we were a herd of morons. During official college ceremonies, we stood in a very far corner and were treated like something very terrible. Yes, not all of us were with perfect appearance, because disability manifested itself differently in some of the graduates. The teachers were very good, though, very attentive. They worked with graduates of orphanages for a long time, so they shared stories from their personal lives. I still maintain good relationship with them.

In general, the year of my life in a post-graduate group passed very quickly. One day, people from the orphanage helped me to collect my belongings and brought me to my apartment.

My independent life began.

Independent Life

As soon as I arrived at the apartment, we began renovations with Slava. Like all graduates, I started to hang out and spend all the money. While we were in the orphanage, we had accumulated some sum of money; in addition, we received money from the college. Some graduates received up to 300 thousand rubles (\$5,000). We went to clubs, drank and “burned” money just like that. We had fun. We were not taught in the orphanage to plan the budget, so we lived for one day, no one thought about the future. Moreover, I had a feeling that everyone owed me. It seemed to me that I should not be responsible for my actions, that there always be someone who will handle and do everything for me. Now there is no such feeling, of course, but back then it seemed to me that everyone owed me everything. My classmates just felt the same about everything: they started spending money, electricity, etc.

It was such a carefree time. We all visited each other and often stayed overnight. In our apartments there were always a lot of people, this habit came from the orphanage, we used to live in a group. The state gave many orphans apartments in the village of Kotelniki. There was a huge number of graduates from different orphanages living there. Everyone very quickly became acquainted with each other and formed a fairly wide social network. Yet, this circle included only graduates of orphanages. We did not have any friends from the society, we were friends only with orphans and we did not have the desire to expand our circle of acquaintances.

At that time I began to notice a real problem with my brother. He always sat at home, closed in his room. He did not go to a college, even if he had money he spent it at home, he asked us to buy him something and bring it home. He behaved very calmly, he was not interested in what was happening outside the window: was the weather good or bad? It did not matter. He was at home watching movies. Sometimes his orphanage friends visited him. They sat together,

in silence, watched movies or cleaned the apartment. When I saw his way of life and I began to analyze it. I could not understand him, it was very strange for me and it worried me.

In 2011, my brother found out that I'm gay. He spotted me with my boyfriend in our apartment. Slava reacted to this news quite calmly; at first, he said that it was abnormal and he was a little angry, but soon he calmed down. After a while, he apparently told his friends about me and they started to mock me. They created false accounts on social networks and wrote to me, and then forwarded our messages to other friends. Despite the fact that I did not admit that I was gay, my classmates started to leave me and stopped talking to me.

The first real trouble that happened before my eyes occurred to my classmate Anna. She was different from everyone, she was very smart. She mastered the educational program in five minutes. The only thing was that her health was rather weak. In her childhood, when she climbed over the fence, she fell on the ground and damaged her kidneys. Then her classmate threw a book and a corner of the book hit her in the eye, so she was left without one eye. Her character was impudent, because she felt that everyone owed her. As a result, a commission decided to transfer her to a nursing home. It was a shock for us. We immediately went there, found out what was happening, began to demand that she be released. Two weeks passed, but she was kept at the nursing home. We came to her once again and “kidnapped” her through the fence. I brought her to our apartment and provided a separate bed. We began to prepare letters and send them to all possible government agencies. We passed the first round of letters, the second, the third, but received the same answers - the replies only accumulated. Then we appealed to social networks and journalists. Two months later we obtained new housing for Anna in Kotelniki. My colleagues, orphans, and sponsors bought her new furniture in the apartment and she began to live on her own.

Unfortunately, she did not live well for a long time. By nature, she was very kind and eventually began to invite other orphan-alcoholics to visit her. Over time, she married an orphan and their house became like a dumpster. They started to let other orphans in their house, together with them they partied and drank. I used to be an optimist, and still I am, but at that time I dreamed that everything would be fine, that she would take the right path. But now I understand that it is too late for her to change. Her addiction and system have already broken her.

Nevertheless, the news about success in her business with housing spread among graduates. Many people started to contact me for help: someone needed TV or broke something, some people lived in bad living conditions. I decided to found a charity group "Protection and Assistance" to help graduates of orphanages. In addition, I was interested to visit orphanages in Moscow and Moscow region and see what was happening there. I also wanted to establish communication between the orphans and the society. To my call, ordinary people began to respond, at first mostly young people, and then elders. They worked as volunteers and went with us to orphanages. Yulia, my neighbor, was one of the first to join us. Since then, she's been with me every day. A little later I met Valentina Anatolievna, she is already elderly, but very active. She also became my devoted friend and supporter.

In this project our main rule was: the person who gets help, helps. Graduates who applied to us for help had to travel with us to the orphanages. In exchange, we helped them in their affairs: wrote to various authorities, invited journalists. Therefore, graduates of orphanages went together with other volunteers. Watching the communication between orphans and society, I was happy, because there were no quarrels, no one was in conflict. I began to understand that such communication was very important. This communication was especially important for Slava. I saw how he constantly shut himself away from people and the society. The first time when I

invited volunteers home, Slava shied away. He was constantly hiding in his room. When older people came, he more or less socialized, but when younger ones were coming then he immediately ran away.

For five years of existence of our organization we gathered a great team of volunteers and about twelve graduates. We visited orphanages, talked with children, organized events for them. At some point we decided to take a lot on ourselves, namely we decided to look for pedophiles in orphanages. At first, we started looking for Pugov from our orphanage to punish him, but we could not locate him.

Once we arrived with a big company to our friend Oleg. In his apartment we saw Kudrin, he was visiting Oleg as well. Our volunteer, Petr, identified Kudrin as a pedophile. As Petr told us, Kudrin repeatedly raped him. Without really thinking we forced Kudrin to sit on the sofa, someone managed to hit him in the face and we began to question him. I, as the leader of the organization, conducted the interrogation. It was important for me to shoot everything that was happening on camera, first for our PR, and secondly to show that our volunteer Petr caught a pedophile. In seven hours we knocked out of him confessions on seven episodes. Now I do not know whether they actually took place or not, but he talked about them. As a result, we called police and transferred the record to them, this case was covered in the media. In three months, he was put in prison.

After a while, I began to question if I had acted correctly. I started to learn more about Petr. Petr was certainly a handsome, energetic and charismatic guy, with a beautiful voice. I learned that in the orphanage in which he lived for some time was a terrible hazing and that violence there was the norm. The perversion blossomed there as well. I also learned that Petr himself was gay and already when he was sixteen years old he attended gay clubs. I talked with

many friends and realized that it was not merely Kudrin's fault, but Petr's too. Now I think that Petr was just a seduced youngster who had an intimate relationship with boys already in the orphanage. He is a boy with a crippled soul, and for sure he just slandered Kudrin, I do not know why, maybe on emotions. I was also surprised that none of the graduates gave testimony against Kudrin in all other episodes, only Petr did. Perhaps, the seduction took place, but nothing more. Kudrin himself refused to talk on polygraph, and now it's too late to do anything. In general, Kudrin is now in prison and I have not spoken with Petr for a long time.

At about the same time, my path in street demonstrations began. At that time, the state decided to demolish Bauman dormitories and evict people into the street. We staged street performances and literally after several attempts we were able to raise this topic among public and provide housing to one woman who asked us for help. For me it was a sensational victory, I realized that street performances were very powerful.

We continued to travel to orphanages and eventually I came across the word *halvaya* (freebie). In our colleges, there were frequent delays in scholarships, sometimes detained for half a year, and how we were supposed to live was unknown. No one could get a job, because they studied, so I started to solve all these problems and visit my friends. I saw that their refrigerators were really empty. Then I decided to ask for help one public fund. Dr. Lisa, a famous public activist, agreed to help us. I brought all twenty-three graduates to her. She made a call for help, spoke on the radio and collected for us all possible help: domestic, legal, and also helped us in finding jobs. She herself found companies, organizations and held regular meetings with us. I coordinated everything: gathered statements from orphans, directed them where they needed to go. Later I was given lists of vacancies where orphans could just call and be employed. By this time I had already finished college and decided to go to work as a secretary. I worked for twenty-

seven thousand rubles (about \$500): I printed documents, ordered different products, developed telephone database - I worked with a computer.

None of the other twenty-three graduates called and got a job. They simply did not want to, although many people tried to help us, found the companies and made agreements with them. Only then I realized that no one needed any work from the very beginning. Everyone just kept asking for something, saying, "Give me this, give me that." Eventually, I understood what they were doing, they studied for two years in a college, then summer passed, they went back to study for two more years. In total, some graduates studied for six years and all this time they received a scholarship from the state. I myself similarly received two professions, first a cook, and then a painter.

In my college, I met a boy, Ivan. He was a very tall and hunchbacked guy. Despite the fact that he was twenty-three years old, he drank awfully, he was even hit once by a car, because he was drunk on the road. My classmates, who visited his house, said that it was terribly dirty and empty bottles were all around the place. I made friends with him and began to pull him out of this swamp. He started to come to visit me often and even drank less. But in the end, he never quit his alcohol addiction and our ways parted. But when he was with us, he told us about the government labor exchange program. Anyone could register with the labor exchange office and get a referral for a job interview. If three times the employer refused a candidate, then the labor exchange paid a decent amount of money for unemployment. Ivan himself managed to be registered with labor exchange twice.

By this time I decided to quit my work, because I was terribly bored doing monotonous tasks. I did not want to go for the third time into the college because I wanted to finish the evening school and seek a more prestigious profession. Therefore, I decided to appeal to the

labor exchange. It was certainly not a simple experience for me. I had to go to three different employers and in simple language explain to them, “I am an orphan from an orphanage. I really need money and the labor exchange pays good. It is a chance for me to live, please write me a refusal.”

At first, of course, I was not aware of all the machinations, only now I understand that this was already a system of deception and again *halyava* (freebie). Again the same life that pushed me and other graduates to use the state system to our advantage. Fortunately, I was not spoiled by the system, I once took money from the state, the state is rich, but I witnessed how many graduates became spoiled after getting used to a freebie lifestyle.

Over time, benefits paid by the labor exchange ended, and I started to think how to live further. I was about to finish the evening school and I made a fateful decision to start leasing my apartment. By this point, many graduates already leased their homes and lived together in another apartment. In other words, when all possible ways for receiving funds from the state came to an end, everyone began to rent their homes.

Similarly, Slava and I moved to our friend Sergey, who was also from an orphanage from a parallel group. He lived outside the city in a five-story building on the fifth floor. The apartment was old and the ceiling leaked. Slava slept in a kitchen. We lived with Sergey and I continued my active charity work, we organized many events for graduates and children in the orphanages.

Slava

My brother fell in love with Polina, who was also from the orphanage. She had quite a strong physique; she was even called in the orphanage - a peasant. She already had at that time two children. She was a proud lady, she refused a father of her children because of a quarrel.

Slava often visited her, left for ten days, lived with her, then came for a couple of days home and again left. He helped her with children, babysat them, and invested all his money there. We saw that she was using him. When she needed him, she called and asked to buy her something. Slava immediately searched for money and went to her. Yet, whenever she was bored with him, she kicked him out. Slava was very frustrated by her behavior.

One morning an open package of sugar, weighing five kilograms, fell on Slava from the windowsill. On the same day, someone mistakenly transferred 100 thousand rubles (\$1500) to his debit card. I looked up on the Internet later, it turned out that there was such a sign - if sugar fell, then the wealth would come. Slava waited for a while, and then decided to withdraw money. He took the money, gave some to me, to my friend and went to buy a crib for Polina's children. Our friend Egor went with him. As Egor told me later, while they were making purchases, Polina called and asked Slava to bring her vodka. Slava told her that he would not buy vodka, but soon he would come with a crib and food. After shopping, Slava went to Polina's home. All further events were told by Slava.

Slava went to Polina. At her entrance stood a man of Caucasian appearance. Slava did not pay attention to him and entered the building. Already on the first floor he received a blow to the head. Slava turned and saw the same man who stood at the entrance. As it turned out, Slava had seen him before in photos with Polina, it was her "supposedly" friend. The man struck another blow on the nose and Slava began to bleed. The man grabbed him by the neck and dragged him to the elevator. When they went into Polina's apartment, she sat in the kitchen and drank alcohol. The man, too, was tipsy. They put Slava on the table and started to mock him. I do not know all the details of what was happening that day, Slava told only some parts. But that day they broke

him psychologically and physically. They gave him a knife and told him to cut himself. He refused, but they forced.

Polina took Slava and dragged him to the children's room and shouted, "Children, this is not your father! He is a bitch!"

Then Polina started calling me on the phone.

I picked up the phone and heard that she was drunk, "Hey, Dima, come here and take your brother. We beat him up here!"

"How did you beat him? Are you out of your mind or what?"

I hung up, at that moment I thought she was just joking or they once again quarreled and she kicked him out. She continued calling me, but I did not answer. When I finally picked up the call, she handed the phone to Slava and I heard a voice of a broken and humiliated person who spoke to me in tears, "Dima, do not worry about anything."

I realized from his voice that things were really bad. I started to shiver. Polina continued to tell me on the phone, "If you do not come right now, your brother will have big problems."

I called my friends, they arrived. Polina continued to call me every ten minutes, telling me what they did to Slava, up to the point that they went to wash off his blood. I put the phone on the speakerphone and we all listened to what was happening there. She beckoned me to come to her, but she did not give me the address. We searched for her address among the friends, but nobody knew. They knew only the area in which she lived, but no one knew the exact building or the apartment.

Calls continued, in the background it was already clear that Slava was crying and asking for help. I went into hysterics. We called the police and told about the situation. They asked us to wait. We waited until 2 am, but nothing happened, the police did not call back. We got together

with friends and went to search of Slava. While we were looking for him, Polina kept calling, but Slava had already started talking more calmly and telling me that everything was fine. At 4 o'clock in the morning we decided to go back, already all angry. By this point, we were ready to tear Slava apart, because we began to feel that they had deceived us. We approached the apartment, opened the metallic door, inserted the keys to open the inner wooden door, but the door did not open. We realized that someone closed it from the inside. Only Slava had keys. We got angry even more and started to swear at him.

We knocked the door out and entered the apartment. It was dark and silent inside. We went into the living room first - there was no one there. When we came to the kitchen, we saw that Slava was lying on the floor, covered with a sheet. We opened the sheet and froze in horror. His whole face was broken and in blood, there were visible traces from shoes and bruises. The nose and his head were broken, the face was all swollen. I began to walk around the room and cry.

We tried to wake Slava up to ask what happened. He did not react. Only after a while he barely opened his eyes. We asked him questions. At that moment, he said that he was beaten by three people, but then he denied and said that there were two. We called the ambulance and the police. He was taken to a hospital right away. He was so scared that he refused to be hospitalized, he was afraid to remain alone.

Our friends went to Polina's neighborhood to investigate, they contacted police, I wrote a long post on the Internet about what happened. Police with my friends went to her apartment. A loud music was playing, but she did not open the door.

We did a lot during the very first day. Slava always cried, because he could not understand why they did this to him. He was very frightened, so we decided to send him out of the city to the organization that helped graduates of orphanages.

While we were in the police station, we finally saw Polina and that man. When we met we attacked them, and they attacked us. As it turned out, Polina came to write a counterclaim to the police, saying that allegedly Slava raped her and her friend came to save her. Apparently, some of her friends suggested what to write and how to talk.

Three days passed, all this time I went to the police, collected evidence, looked for witnesses: *all by myself*. We lived like in barricades in the same apartment while Slava was out. It's been three days and I understood that *everything* led to a dead end. Another ten days passed and again no one did anything. Investigators constantly escaped from any type of communication and questions. We understood that nothing was happening - no investigation started, nothing was going on, everything was all the same. Although, if desired, police could have easily looked at the video recording of the camera in the building and found evidence.

I made a call over the Internet, collected people and we went to the police department to seek the truth. I came there accompanied by thirty-five graduates. They did not want to let us in, but after we organized a big scandal they allowed us to enter. We sought a meeting with authorities, but we were told that there was no one at work. We walked around the institution very agitated, swearing obscenities and behaving rather aggressively. We invited TV and eventually we got to meet with a deputy chief. He invited journalists and me to his office and promised that everything would be done on their part. We left the police department happy and rejoicing, the boys clapped and applauded.

To put even more pressure on the police, we all went to Polina's apartment. We did not have time to approach her house, as two police cars had also arrived to support us. It was agreed that if Polina came out of the apartment, then the police would take her straight from there. We knocked at her door, but no one opened it, only a dog barked. As I found out later, she stood very silently behind the door all this time.

We inspected the entrance and found blood on the first floor, in the very place that Slava was talking about. In the trashcans near the house we saw that Polina had thrown out almost everything she had ever been given by Slava, apparently trying to get rid of everything. All this was filmed by journalists and recorded by the police. We went home.

Five more days passed and again nothing happened. The investigator was not answering, the journalists promised to help, but in the end they did not do anything. I felt wild despair, I did not know how else to attract attention and punish them. On top of that, Polina constantly called, wrote messages and threatened me. We sat like on barricades and smoked cigarettes one after another. At one point, I was so tired of everything; there was a wild emptiness inside of me. I decided to leave the house and take a walk. I went out, passed a couple of blocks, bought a can of beer and drank it. When I got home, I told my friends that I could not do this anymore, that I would kill myself. They rushed to calm me.

The evening came. Oleg went to take shower and Igor was in the living room. I smoked a cigarette and climbed over the edge of the balcony. Igor saw this, but he could not believe that I was really ready to jump. I was very calm. I did not have any hysteria or fuss. I climbed over and shouted, "Bastards, you will answer for everything!"

And I jumped...

I woke up in a couple of days in intensive care. It was a shock to me that I was still alive. I pursued one goal - to die and somehow with my own death raise the topic of cruelty that was at that moment. It has always been important for me that people do not go unpunished. My mother killed a man and she was punished, but why do we have such injustices? For me, justice used to mean more than even now. I simply wanted the case to be investigated and given an objective judgment.

The hardest part was of course to find out that I did not have any sensitivity in my legs. I had no idea that I could become disabled on a wheelchair. As it turned out, these three days while I was in intensive care I had a surgery and my friends defended my rights to install a titanium structure that was very expensive. As a result, my friends pushed through and when the structure was installed, I opened my eyes in the hospital.

In the intensive care unit, the light was constantly switched on, the windows were opened and I caught pneumonia. I left the intensive care unit even sicker than when I got there. After resuscitation, I laid in three different hospitals. Then I needed a second surgery, because my titanium structure started to rot. I spent more than half a year in different hospitals. My life literally turned upside down. I rethought my whole life experience. I fell into depression. When I came back to the apartment, I did not quite imagine how to live, how to bathe, how to do everything I did before the injury. But I adapted quickly. We changed our bathroom so that a wheelchair can fit. I continued to engage in charitable activities of "Protection and Assistance." Everything seemed to start out well.

At the same time, I started to go to gay clubs, themed parties and my gay acquaintances began to come out one by one. I began to wonder, why couldn't I come out? What's wrong with that? Why should I live and hide? I understood that many would not accept it, especially

religious people. But one day I decided to confess and write a post in Vkontakte, so that all my friends and acquaintances would see right away. I decided to put everyone before the fact.

My post was taken very harshly: threats, accusations, insults in social networks began to pour into me. I began to get messages, calls and threats saying that people would come and beat me. They wrote such things that I should be killed, that they don't even want to share one road with me, that they are disgusted. They wrote whole poems to me. I still have more than 400 unread messages in Vkontakte since that time. I'm not even interested in reading them. Mostly my former friends and classmates from the orphanages wrote to me, saying that they were offended by the news. But sometimes Christians wrote to me and their words were no less cruel. A couple of times they came to my house and really tried to beat me. I had to call Valentina Anatolievna for help. There were times when I was afraid for my life and health.

My coming out had greatly affected not only my life, but also our project "Protection and Assistance." Our sponsors and volunteers refused to work with me and I realized that I needed to either close the project or transfer it to someone else. I worked with Gryshin in this project, he was my right hand at that time. I decided to transfer the project to him. Here I should honestly admit that during the existence of the charity project, many people profited from it. But Gryshin especially made "black" money. At first, I was shocked, but eventually I got used to it. Yet, after some time it became very embarrassing to me and I decided to tell about the risks to our sponsors. I contacted the sponsors and informed them about Gryshin.

Over time, of course, Gryshin learned about my conversations with sponsors and began to take revenge on me. His people came to my house and threatened me. Because of it, I decided to temporarily leave Moscow. When I returned, though, the persecution continued. One day, an unknown person fired at our apartment from a pneumatic gun. We still have traces of bullets in

the rooms. I had no doubt that this was the work of Gryshin, since I knew that his friend had a pneumatic gun. Fortunately, after a while, everything calmed down.

I continued my social activities. Together with Elizaveta, we organized several street-performances in order to draw public attention to the problems of orphans. With Elizaveta I met during the project "Protection and Assistance." As a volunteer she traveled with us to orphanages, helped everyone, and introduced us to some good people. She herself is a very creative person and through street performances she raised a number of important social topics.

One of our joint performances was devoted to the topic of cruelty in orphanages. Elizaveta tied an iron cot to her back and walked with it near the Red Square. At the center, she publicly treated my bedsores. We wanted to show that my body was a mirror of the system in which I lived. It was the result of cruelty and indifference.

After that, Elizaveta and my friends built a supporting frame for me, with its help I was able to shortly walk on my feet in one of the largest children's shopping center. We wanted to show that despite all the trials, punishments and pain – we [orphans] were moving on, we were fighting. I personally got hooked on these performances. After all, as a child, I dreamed of becoming an actor and it was a kind of opportunity for me to talk about important social problems through acting and creativity.

Life slowly took a usual path, but I must say that after my confession regarding my sexual orientation, my circle of friends had radically changed; merely truly loyal people remained with me. After some time I started to meet completely different people. If during the project "Protection and Assistance" I communicated mainly with Putin supporters, people from the party, then after coming out, absolutely new different people appeared - the oppositionists,

with more liberal views. They had different values, a different vision of the political situation in Russia. I listened to them and I agreed on many topics.

Later, one of the oppositionists, Tolik Kapustin, persuaded me to take part in political demonstrations. At that time I was only interested in social issues, and I was against political rallies, marches or single pickets. But Tolik caught me on my love for artistic expression. Eventually I agreed and probably I got involved in it too much. We created various street performances and many of them I developed myself. Tolik admired my imagination and creativity. Our performances were quite successful.

After some time another challenge was waiting for me. Slava started to communicate again with Polina. He closed the criminal case against her and started to date her. He believed that he had a very special relationship with Polina and he did not want to listen to any of us. He started to degrade: he refused to help me with bandages. I could press help button twenty times a day, yet for the whole day he would not come even once, he would just stay in his room. I knocked on the wall, but it was useless, he did not go out. He really started to degrade because of his relationship with this girl.

Watching my brother, I decided to create a new project for the employment of graduates of orphanages *Trudenok*. By this time, I realized that it was somehow ineffective to help healthy foreheads out of various charitable funds. Yes, many had diagnoses, but I believed that they were able to work independently and earn money. It was important for us to give people an instrument. Moreover, I wanted my project to help graduates, because there were a lot of funds that helped orphans, but not many that helped graduates. I could not put up with many people coming to me and complaining that they were not employed because of their mentally retarded status and a correctional orphanage. I thought it was unfair. I started looking for jobs and

accepted requests from the public. Basically, we offered courier services, cleaning of premises, and other type of physical work. I believed in this project with all my heart, I lived by it. Our apartment turned into an office, every day graduates came here. The project went very well, we had orders, I was approached by many people, the project moved well on the Internet.

Through this project I met Kostia [another participant in this study]. I will never forget how he came to us. He came so fat, dirty, and smelly. [Laughing] His friends told us to take him for a night, but we could not even imagine how to live with him in one space. As a result, we accepted his application for *Trudenok* and started to help him with housing. We let him stay with us for a while. After some time, he was able to find a common language with everyone and started to live with us. Unfortunately, up to date, we could not help him get his own apartment.

I also managed to lure my brother into the project. He began to work, though not for long, for about two months. Then he started to escape from work. But his departure was the beginning of his independent job search. He realized that there was no money and that he had to look for a job. When he settled himself as a boiler washer, my happiness was boundless. It was a real victory!

Over time, other graduates started to let me down very much. They could work for two weeks, and then stop. I had to spend huge amount of efforts and energy to get them to work every day, as if I needed it. I tried different methods of stimulation and motivation, so that a person did not fail the client or me. How many times I had to call everyone in the mornings just to wake them up. How many times there were serious upsets: sometimes they took more money or stole something. In general, many began not only to use and abuse everything they could, but also to use me.

Graduates continued to fail me, some kind of incomprehensible attacks began, both from orphans and volunteers who taught us Russian. One girl posted a very insulting post about me and accused me of stealing money. Then she removed the post and wildly apologized. She said that someone told her that I was stealing money. It was dishonest. I did not receive any personal profit from this project, and then I was accused of stealing.

In general, at some point, I understood that I could not cope with managing the project and I said STOP. We stopped all the contracts. Our project had already got into big debts by this time. The project existed on donations and on grant's money. The third part of grant's money we voluntarily refused because I felt that we could not continue to work, and it was not fair to pay off debts from grant's money. We could collect more money and continue to work, but how would it all end in a year?

In the end, it turned out that I burned out all my health. It turned out that not very reliable people were working with me. Now many people write and ask why I closed the project. They say they have nowhere to go ... But when I weigh all the pros and cons, I understand that closing of the project was the right decision. Despite the difficulties, I have acquired a colossal experience and I am grateful to *Trudenok* for this.

Now and Future

Now I'm at a critical point. I constantly have to find myself. When I came out, I pushed a lot of people away from me: orthodox, volunteers, respected citizens. Now I closed *Trudenok* and I pushed away those whom I attracted as part of the project and it turned out that there was no one left. Just a couple of people stayed with me.

My medication is a separate topic, this summer it almost killed me. I was in such a pain, I cried, I did not know what to do with it. I had an opportunity to take serious medicine and finish

everything at once, but this was not my way out. I used to have a lot of suicidal attempts, but this summer I did not have a desire to end my life. I want to live, I understood it. I just do not know how. Perhaps I just need to wait a little ... pull myself together. I feel like a lamb that walks alone, tries to prove something to others. It's very difficult, I cannot prove anything. People from past appear from time to time, but more with negativity and accusations, although what kind of claims can they have today?

In terms of personal relationships, I have not had anyone for almost four years since I got into the wheelchair. At first it made me very jarred because many people rejected me. Of course, for society it was wild, that I'm of a different sexual orientation *and* in the wheelchair. I had some kind of sympathy, there were guys who came and got acquainted with me. There was even a person with whom I tried to live for two months, but it was very difficult for everyone to look at bedsores and I understood it. Rather, *I learned to understand*. Previously, I was depressed when I thought about it, but now I'm calmly accepting everything. I understood that what's on my body is scary, very scary. And people, men are very afraid of this. It scares them away.

I'm determined to continue to live, but I just cannot imagine how. Now my task, having thought and decided, I probably will launch one more project, probably this is the last project I want to do. I want to create a project that would still help those who are completely doomed by fate, such as Kostia, those without shelter, without a family, without anything. I want to help Kostia with the apartment, with furniture. He is thirty years old and wants to live. I see how badly he wants it. He sometimes says such things, I'm ashamed for example, to be with him in the same subway car. But he does not say anything because he does not think, but because he does not know. It is very hard for him. Of course, this system affected him. He was lying in a psychiatric hospital, they mocked him in the orphanage, he lived in worse conditions than me.

He is very hardworking, but in terms of social adaptation is difficult to say. With us, he can still seek something. But whenever he leaves us for a couple of days, he returns as a different person: all clamped, even he cannot cook his own food. I understand that he wants to probably eat, but he has such a state of loneliness and it is very jarring.

Although I stopped talking to many people in my life, I am still aware of what is happening with my other classmates. With many something terrible happened - out of fifteen people, about ten do not work. I observe a huge number of systematic problems among graduates. We have Artem - he has an apartment, but it's always open. He himself lives on the streets. He is an adult, twenty-four years old. Artem does not live at home, he does not work and does not study. He wanders and wanders on the streets and he likes it and no one cannot convince him to live a different lifestyle. His friends tried to force him to live normally in an apartment, but it was useless. He had such a shift in his head, because he believes that walking on the street, drinking, and begging while having a one-room apartment is perfectly normal. This cannot continue for a long time, because Artem will eventually become homeless after a year. Someone will take advantage of the opportunity and take his apartment from him. Other girls, like Irina, also got into trouble. Someone at the subway asked her to get credit. On top of that, these unknown people registered a couple of shopping pavilions under her name. Now, these pavilions are currently listed among non-paying taxes. Also, Kirill has to pay off credit for eight million rubles (about \$150,000). Some criminals found him and forced to take credit as well. They beat him terribly at nights and during the day they dressed Kirill in a formal suit and took him to banks where he signed all the papers. In banks, employees were also in cahoots. Despite the fact that Kirill is a tall and strong guy, he was so afraid of these people. They broke him

psychologically. He took credit to four million, but during this time, another four million ran into interest.

There are a lot of such stories. Most of the graduates are in the pit. And I understand that it is their fault, but nobody told them or advised them how to live. The worst thing is that many graduates are so scared after the orphanage to go somewhere, even to ask for advice. Thus, I would like to try to unite the efforts of people, lawyers and help graduates who are completely lost in life, whom life has broken. It's not that I feel sorry for them, I just need to do something about it.

Therefore, I want to launch a media project and broadcast everything that happens step by step - where we turned for help, where we went. For example, Kostia's situation is already on the edge. We don't know where else to go, we found one lawyer and want to go to court. We need to appeal to a higher court, or even file a complaint with the European Court. It takes a very long time, though, I used to do better and faster before.

I'm not afraid that I will be used again. In my twenty-four years, I feel very confident because I've seen so much shit, I've just learned whom to trust. I simply learned. Before, I could not say the word NO. I used to hate myself for it. Now I have already been trained through many events and I am grateful for life that it taught me.

Now it is not a simple period with my brother. There were times when we had serious problems in relationships: we had conflicts, he was getting angry. It should have happened someday, but I did not expect it to happen this fast. I said once, "Slava let's sit down and talk." We sat down and talked and it became much easier for me. Yes, this problem will exist. He still meets Polina. He helps her, I'm jarred that he helps her, and she uses him. But I tried to find pros.

I realized that in spite of everything Polina is pulling Slava up, albeit mercenary way, but he begins to develop, to find answers and seeks work.

Since childhood, I dreamed of acting, I dreamed of going to the theater. It did not happen because of my injury and because I did not finish evening school. I want to finish my evening school and go to higher education, but I do not know yet where. There were thoughts of going to become a lawyer or to be a journalist. I will study in any case in half a year or a year. I had only two months to finish my studies in the evening school, but after the injury they threw out my documents. I have to learn again.

Now, of course, I regret that I jumped. I had big plans for life. I began to think how much I lost and how much I could have had if I had not done this stupid action. But there is no time to lose. I will study and most likely become a journalist. I'm very interested.

It surprises me that my brother and Kostia are not eager to read, even something small, at least on the Internet, let alone the book. I do not have many books, but still I have a few. I read a lot anyway. I believe if a person does not read this is complete degradation. I now observe as my brother degrades. He does not read even elementary texts, even a page a week. The education that was given to us in the orphanage was for mental retards, they deliberately prepared idiots for us. This TV is the same thing. But I have joyful news that one of my classmates finished evening school, studied for a sportsman and went to the army to remove his diagnosis. I am happy that at least there is one such person among my classmates.

I still have the status of a mental retard. To change it I need to finish my studies in the evening school, and graduate from the university. But this is not enough. For example, Alexei also had to go to military service. Because when you study, you prove to yourself that you are not an idiot and that you are capable of learning. But to go to the army is a very serious step -

you are put in a psychiatric hospital for two weeks. They take your documents out of the archive. Your portfolio and behavior are examined, checked and then they revoke the status.

I also thought to go to the psychiatric hospital right away to be checked. But when I left the orphanage, I did not want to do this because then I would have to go to the army. I was afraid to go there, because the orphanage was in fact also like an army, and again I did not want to return to the system. Now there was simply no time or desire. On the other hand, this status does not bother me. The case lies in the archive, yes there is debility in the degree of such and such, but I do not see it every day.

Life Before and After the Injury

Before the injury, I was such a cheerful, carefree guy. I was different from the masses, I was always respected. Now it seems to me that if I could return everything back and if I did not jump, then I probably would not be a very good person. I think I would be gouging. Previously, I did not understand many things such as human relations and friendship. Everything I learned later and many conclusions were made after I was already in a wheelchair. I started to understand a lot. I think that the life forced me into a wheelchair so that I can learn. Before I was very simple. I treated everything around me with ignorance. It was important for me to earn money, work, and study. I wanted a career. I wanted to earn money, to start a family. Yet, I did not have a clear understanding of what a family was. What does it mean to earn money?

It seemed to me that all those who came to my home were my friends. I did not distinguish acquaintances from real friends. For example, earlier we had holidays in the following way: we were going to a stormy company, drinking vodka, dancing, and singing karaoke. We gathered neighbors, acquaintances and everything was just a show. We did not enjoy communicating with each other, we just had a merry-go-round, a drunken booze.

Everything was simple, in the manner of the orphanhood brotherhood. Now I have a completely different attitude to leisure, friends, and to people. Now I can determine where is black and where is white. I know when it is a good idea to take advantage of the situation, and when is not. I realized that some opportunities would provide fast benefits, but later they may ruin my life.

Before I made a lot of mistakes. I did not appreciate what I had, but had a lot. I am not even talking about money, it's about the inner feelings and about who was close to me. If I return everything back, I would not be like I am today. I had to learn somehow, and I learned through a number of events, including a wheelchair, coming out, and the closure of *Trudenok*.

Now I learned to find advantages in everything, although earlier I could not do it. I would never have admitted my mistakes before. Never. It was not a shame, I just did not want to. I thought that I was not guilty. I could offend anyone with my words or deeds and I thought it was normal. Now I can do something wrong, but later realize the mistakes and blame myself for them. Before, I could not correct my mistakes, now I'm trying to fix them. I'm not the same Dima who sought to help orphanages for the sake of vanity and for the sake of someone praising him. There was time when I was like that.

Now I have nowhere to draw strength from. Previously, before the injury and after the injury, I managed to pull a smile in the mornings, take strength from somewhere, believe in something, desire something, but recently I had wrong thoughts. I did not want anything. Imagine when you do not have faith in future, when you do not have a close person whom you could trust... It's very hard. Also, when you have an injury, countless bandages and heavy-heavy everyday life and heavy weekends, it's very hard for me when it's all the same. I cannot take it. I'm not so strong. I cannot sit in such degradation. We all will lose everything. There is no future if we only watch TV and do nothing.

I'm saving my brother and Kostia now. Kostia is a very nice person, but recently he carries this [verbal] diarrhea that everything is bad, everything is bad. He constantly recalls that the whole world offended him. Well, yes, but how much can you complain? How can you live like this by constantly blaming others? This is not entirely right.

My life is also not very good. I often tell Kostia to pull himself together. It's difficult for all of us. We can devote a lot of time to our problems, but we can at least try to live, at least for a little bit... Despite everything, there are things from which we can get joy and happiness. I now really like to walk in a park. I get a completely different pleasure from the park than before. For me, the park used to be somehow uninteresting. But now, I simply enjoy coming to the park, take some snacks, talk to my friends, ride around the park or throw a stick to a dog...

When Orphanhood Takes an Unexpected Turn

I often think that I do not deserve many things in my life...

Anna, 20 years, Saint Petersburg

I was introduced to Anna¹⁸ through my friend in April 2017 via Facebook. I knew very little about her. My friend assured me that Anna was a very special person, she was very smart and intelligent. We shortly exchanged messages between us and agreed to meet in person in Saint Petersburg. Unfortunately, for various reasons we could not finalize a date because whenever I had a chance to travel, she was not available and vice versa. I even thought about searching for another participant. However, Anna was sincerely interested in participating in the study and we decided to arrange a Skype interview.

I spoke with her on Skype for the first time just to get to know each other better. Surprisingly, we had an instant connection between us, as if we had known each other before. I

¹⁸ Anna expressed her wish to keep her name in the story. However, all other names were changed to keep confidentiality of the participants involved.

shared my background, she told me a little about herself. We were somehow able to relate to our experiences and quickly identify that we share common values. She expressed her only concern that her story might not be very representative of all the orphans in Russia. I told her that I was interested to know about different experiences and that her story might be beneficial in that regard, since it would add a depth of understanding on the variety of life and educational experiences of orphans. She happily agreed to help me in my research.

Anna left very positive impressions on me. She had a kind face, intelligent, yet slightly naïve and soft eyes, her speech was soft and sweet as well. Yet, behind her delicate and soft personality I could feel drive, intelligence, persistence and power. I could not help but compare her appearance with Emma Watson and her character Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* movies. She certainly gave the impression of being a right, noble, and excellent student and a person.

Throughout the interviews Anna was very gentle and respectful towards me and people in her story. It was so important for her not to harm or offend anyone. Even when she was making some critical comments, she would frame her comments gently without attributing harsh words or judgments. At times, she would adopt a position of a researcher, distance herself from the situation and discuss it in objective manner.

Beginning of a New Life

Once I returned from school to the orphanage, when suddenly a caregiver rushed into my room and told me that I was called to the principal's office. I got terribly scared. A thought, "What have I done?" immediately crossed my mind. Even though I could not recall any wrongdoings, I was worried.

When I entered the principal's office, I found her happy and smiling. That was quite

rare, because I often associated her with an iron lady: harsh and sometimes even cruel. In my childhood, I often thought she was ready to eat me alive. In her office, there were four other children - three boys and one girl, and a man about forty years old, unknown to me. Suddenly, a stranger spoke to us in English and began to ask us questions about our goals in life, what we desired, what our hobbies were, what we were doing and how we spent our free time. None of us could understand what was happening. Who was that man? What did he want from us? We knew English very badly, so we were afraid even to say a word. After some time, they let us go and we all forgot about that bizarre day.

After a year and a half, the man returned and we were called once again to the principal's office. He asked us similar questions and let us go. The next day the principal invited only me, and the stranger offered me the chance to take part in an exchange program that involved living and studying in a private school in England for a year. At first, I got frightened, because I had never been abroad or flown by airplane, but everyone at the orphanage kept telling me, "Do not even think, go by all means!" Finally, I went.

That was the beginning of my new life.

Birth

I was born in St. Petersburg in 1997. My father left us when my mother was still pregnant. I have never seen him and I do not have any desire to find him, because he is a stranger to me, indeed. Up to the age of six, I lived with my mother. She had serious health problems and often stayed in hospitals. Whenever that happened I was taken to my mom's friends and acquaintances. Therefore, due to mom's illness, I was constantly handed over, lived in different houses and changed kindergartens.

When I was seven years old and went to school, my mom's acquaintances realized that

they would not be able to constantly look after me, so my mother's friend Katia offered to send me to a school that was also an orphanage. That format was quite unusual for St. Petersburg: the city's prestigious school had an orphanage affiliated with it. Children from ordinary families attended the school, but also children who were left without parental care lived there.

I got to the orphanage in October 2004. My mom was in the hospital at that moment and I had a feeling that she did not make the decision herself to send me to an orphanage. Honestly, I think she was not in a position to decide - her friend Katia was in charge. Katia brought me to the orphanage. I do not remember exactly how she explained to me what was going on, but probably she told me she would take me to a boarding school. Katia was my second mother, so I never accused her or my own mother of sending me to the orphanage.

I remember how we came inside the building. The floor decorated with stones stuck in my memory. Katia stood with me for about fifteen minutes. Later I was met by some people and taken for a physical examination. For a long time, they discussed and looked at my documents. After a while a woman came down, took my belongings and led me into the group. As it turned out, she was my caregiver.

The first days were very gloomy. I really missed my mother and Katia. I myself did not have a clear understanding of what was going on. It seemed to me that once again I was brought somewhere, and that soon I would be taken to another school. I did not have a feeling of having a permanent home, so I could not even imagine that I would stay at the orphanage for a long time. At first, I was not ready to live with someone else, with children of different ages. In our orphanage there was no division of children by age. In each group, there were children of mixed ages, because the administration of the orphanage wanted to recreate the living conditions similar to a family. Yet, the atmosphere was very far from one in the family, because the phenomenon of

dedovshina (hazing) flourished in the orphanage.

I shared the room with two girls who were older than me. They did not treat me very well. They caused troubles for me while I absolutely didn't deserve it. As a child, I was very calm and quiet. I did not have conflicts and did not create problems for anyone. In spite of that, those two girls constantly attacked and humiliated me. For them, hitting me was the norm. They made a lot of trouble in the shower. We had bath days when we all went to a large shower room with closed partitions. The boys and girls bathed separately. The tap switches were placed very high, so caregivers asked elder children to adjust the water for small kids. These girls always made either very cold or very hot water for me. Sometimes they carried my clothes away, while the shower room was far from our bedroom and I had to use the stairs to get in there. With my clothes taken away, it was a challenge.

Overall, it was very hard for me to put up with all these events. There was a lot of resentment in me, but I did not complain to caregivers. Most likely, I was afraid that children would call me a snitch and would treat me even worse. Yet, perhaps I was silent partly because of my inner pride: yes, I was deeply sad and ashamed, but I thought I could tolerate it.

A couple of months later, Katia and my mom began to visit me. My mom was limited in parental rights (not deprived, but limited), and Katia became my official guardian. They started to take me on the weekends and walk with me. Every time they came, they brought some presents - sweets and cookies, which I gave to the caregivers for storage. Later, when I got presents, elder children came and took everything from me. I was very sad and hurt, but not because I was left without sweets or cookies, but because my mother and Katia worked, earned money, went and bought me presents, and then the elders came and using their pseudo-authority took things they did not deserve, did not earn and that did not belong to them. I was very upset

because of such injustice. One day I could no longer stand it and told them everything. I still remember what and in what tone I told them, "How can you do this? My mother did not work for you!"

The Orphanage

The buildings of the orphanage were built in the 70s and 80s. There were two of them, and they stood parallel to each other. At first, in one of the buildings there was a boarding school for gifted children, and in front of it there was an actual school. Over time, one building was reorganized into an orphanage, and additional building was built, connecting the two existing structures, thereby forming a shape similar to the letter U. In this new building, two floors were given to the school, and the other two to the orphanage. The new building had better conditions, because there was more space and the groups had their own kitchens, thus, children had the opportunity to organize joint gatherings.

In the old building there were four floors, and on each floor there were two groups. On each floor, you could see a long corridor and many doors. The group occupied about three to four bedrooms, an average of four people slept in each room, but in some cases there were fewer number of children in a room as well. In the bedroom, we had one cupboard for everyone, everybody had their own shelf and a pair of hangers; there was a chest of drawers and each child had his or her own drawer; there was a dressing table and everyone had their own shelf. We had an ottoman-bed, inside of which we kept clothes. We were asked to put a blanket on top of the bed, which I simply hated, because it looked terrible and disgusting. I had a feeling that no one ever washed the blanket and that it was from antediluvian times.

Also, each group was assigned to a classroom, where everyone had their own desks and shelves with books and notebooks. It was possible to come to the classroom and read, but that

was done very rarely. There was also a playroom, where we had a huge bookcase full of books, a TV, a big sofa and lots of toys. Everyone spent most of the time right there. Actually everyone watched TV and played, but hardly ever anyone read books. Before the age of fourteen, I myself had no love for reading. I read what they asked me at school, but without any interest.

In the orphanage, we were generally well-fed, but everything depended on the cooks. At one time, we had wonderful cooks and everyone loved their cooking. There were days when we did not like meals, but we accused our nurse, because she was responsible for creating a menu. When good cooks left, one man came to replace them and the food became very bad.

As for clothes, there were a lot of prejudices. In slang, all orphans in St. Petersburg called the orphanage "*bator*," from the word incubator, because everyone looked the same. The clothes were always given to us according to seasons - separately for summer, winter, and demi - seasons. I can't say clothes were exactly the same, but maximum they were different in color. For example, we were offered three variations of autumn jackets in different colors. One way or another, we had a sense of similarity and many of us wanted to have something different. This desire especially intensified in adolescence, when everyone wanted to stand out and express himself or herself even more. Therefore, children often searched for ways not to wear clothes from the orphanage.

The contingent of the orphanage was constantly changing as well. At the beginning, we had children who were left without parental care, but they were all mentally developed. Over time, due to the fact that some orphanages were closed in the city and children were redistributed to other institutions, it happened that children with different diagnoses got mixed. Sometimes children who came to us obviously had problems: someone went to school late, someone had deviations in development. In my understanding, mixing children with different developmental

needs was highly incompetent, because caregivers and teachers did not have professional skills and knowledge to work with such children.

These children needed more time and attention; they needed an individual approach that did not exist in our orphanage. As a result, these children became hostages of circumstances, they were surrounded by the environment where they did not have proper support and where they could not express and develop themselves. Because of that, these children quickly fell into the category of "bad" children. They became outcasts. Since they did not receive proper attention and support from caregivers, they naturally had outbreaks of aggression, as well as hysterics. Terrible conflicts often arose between them and caregivers, which resulted in sending these children to a psychiatric hospital.

I believe that administration was sending children to a psychiatric hospital not to punish per se, but in order to absolve themselves of responsibility for unstable children who could do something crazy in the orphanage. If something bad happened, then the head would fly from the shoulders of the management. Therefore, the administration went to such a vile and hypocritical step just to get rid for a while of a child who could create problems for them. Children who spent some time in the psychiatric hospital came back like absolute vegetables, because they were constantly fed and injected with negative sedatives. Could such an approach have radically improved anything? I doubt. I still do not understand this method of work.

Evolution of Caregivers at the Orphanage

In elementary school, I had very strange caregivers. Igor Ivanovich was a very strict and quick-tempered man, the man of mood. Although he was a very educated person, he was completely incompetent. He periodically had outbursts of rage and one day he grabbed one girl by the hair, dragged her down the corridor and hit her head against the sink. I saw this scene with

my own eyes, because I ran after them. For me it was a real shock. Even now I do not understand how could he do this? Therefore, it was very difficult to deal with him, especially for younger children. If elder children understood that he was in a bad mood, then little children could not comprehend why suddenly he started shouting at them. In any case, they felt oppressed. Fortunately, a year later Igor Ivanovich was fired, because he drank at the workplace.

Another caregiver was strange too. She always wanted to show her best in the eyes of authorities, although I intuitively felt that she did not care for children. Her son studied at our school and, I believe, it was convenient for her to work there. Over time, she left too, but there were enough of hypocritical caregivers apart from her. For example, as soon as an inspection came or authorities visited our group, the caregivers immediately began to treat children well, calling us bunnies and sunshine. Instantaneously, we became such good kids. Caregivers smiled, praised us and bragged about how well we did homework and how everything was going well in the group. But as soon as the guests were leaving, the tone of the caregivers was changing and we could hear, “Well, you, donkey?! Open the textbook!”

I still do not understand how children could be treated like that. Therefore, while I was in the elementary school, I was very sad, because I did not have any friends and did not like my caregivers. I had no one to talk or communicate with. I walked like a loner and I could not make friends with anyone.

Fortunately, in the fourth grade two girls who tortured me, were taken by foster families in the U.S. At that time, the topic of foreign adoptions was very popular, and many of our children were leaving to the U.S., until the government imposed a ban on foreign adoptions. As soon as these girls left, I felt free to communicate with children from other groups. In grade five, I asked to be transferred to another group. I came to the head master and said that I wanted to be

in a group number four.

“So why do you want to go to this group?” the head master asked me.

“I made friends with children there and I do not like my own group. I cannot do my homework calmly as nobody helps me and talks with me.”

The head master was very surprised by my request, because group four was considered very authoritarian and serious. In this group, there were strict caregivers and everyone called this group "obedient children." Whenever the group four won in the contests, everyone said, "Well, it's clear that all the bookworms have gathered there." No one wanted to join this group, because everything was strict, everyone observed the regime and the caregivers gave no indulgences, like watching TV or staying in the playroom during the night. In other groups, that was a norm and children were very happy with such liberties. In the group four, that never happened, at night everything was locked with a key and mobile phones were taken away.

As a result, I was transferred to that group and I believe that was a correct step. Yes, there were still conflicts between us and not only “obedient” children were in that group. There were many difficult children as well, they were just all accustomed to a firm regime. The caregivers in that group were really good, though. A mother and a daughter worked with us. The mother was seventy years old, and the daughter was forty-eight. Despite the fact that they had been working in the orphanage for many years, they professionally did not burn out, as it happened with others. They always worked hard and invested a huge amount of energy. They quit when I was in grade nine.

When they left, two young women came - Inga Alexandrovna and Valeria Viktorovna. They were amazing, thanks to them I was able to withstand the high school years from ninth to eleventh grades. They did a lot for us, they spent their own money, despite the fact that they had

their own families. They worked very hard, but many children took everything for granted. It's hard for me to understand what led them to work in the orphanage.

For example, Inga Alexandrovna was only twenty-four years old. At first, she worked as a night caregiver, and then accepted a permanent position. I could see how hard it was for her. She always wanted to do something good for us. I was very sorry for her, because children often let her down. She tried to build trusting relationships with children and treat them well, but it did not always work. Sometimes she allowed children to go to the store or take a walk in the city, but if the child did not return on time or if he/she was caught on smoking or drinking alcohol, the caregiver was seriously punished. If a child ran away, then the caregiver was seriously reprimanded and the escaped child was registered with the police. For the caregiver it was a huge stress and, alas, that happened quite often. Children of course apologized, but the next day they were ready to do the same. After some time, these children wondered why suddenly the caregivers were losing trust in them, and why they began to treat them more strictly.

Because of these situations, caregivers often gave up. Watching all of this, I even developed a system that I called "Evolution of a Caregiver in an Orphanage." The evolution is that initially, it seems to me, many caregivers come to the orphanage with good intentions, but then a child spat into their souls once, twice, and thrice. Over time, caregivers started to think, "Well, why should I do this? Why do I open up so much, open myself, try to do something good and bright into the lives of these children, yet it's one-way street?"... So it turned out to be a double-edge sword. As a result, the caregivers eventually turned into ones who sat in one place and absolutely did not care how children studied, whom they communicated with, what did they do besides the school... Perhaps it is not good to say it, but I'm just analyzing everything retrospectively.

Many caregivers who came with good intentions, got disappointed and left. On the one hand, the task of the caregiver was to raise good people from us, but that was not always within their reach. Children came to the orphanage at different ages. If children had entered an orphanage at the age of fifteen, while since childhood he/she saw how their parents had been drinking, and since ten years old he/she began to smoke and drink, I do not think that it was in the power of caregivers to change and make completely different human beings out of them. Because of all that, caregivers often had a feeling of powerlessness and despair. They did not understand what to do, even their pedagogical education did not play an important role, in my opinion. Therefore, very often the caregivers would come, get very disappointed and leave.

I personally was very lucky with my caregivers. They worked with us very competently and professionally. Even when they were really angry, they never allowed themselves to humiliate us and say offensive words. Although in our orphanage it was normal that adults called children idiots and promised them the fate of janitors. I believe that such phrases could settle in children's mind. When you are constantly called an idiot or constantly promised a hopeless fate of a janitor, then of course there will be no motivation to strive, to live, or study well.

Caregivers in other groups were completely incompetent in this regard. They were saying offensive things. The most terrible was their poking at the fate of children's parents by saying that children would become like their parents, "Your dad is imprisoned and you will go to jail too!" When caregivers mentioned parents' lives, usually children reacted very vividly. Talking about parents was a very tough trigger in the orphanage. Even if some children responded calmly to such attacks, then Igor Ivanovich, for example, said, "Do not pretend to be clever! You will have a future where you do not need to use your brains much." There were many situations like these. In a state of anger and without thinking, caregivers allowed themselves to splash out all

their fatigue and aggression upon children. Yet, often all these fleeting phrases and insults settled very deeply in children's minds. That is what I consider the greatest incompetence of the caregivers.

Life in a New Group

When I was transferred to the group four, I enrolled in an Art school and a dance club. In the orphanage, a woman who worked in the Art school led our arts classes. She was visiting us once a week. Once a year, she recruited three to four children to the Art school, in which she worked as a deputy director. At first, one of my classmates went to the Art school, but she often burst in anger as soon as something was wrong, she immediately scattered all things around her and shouted. Such behavior shocked children and teachers in the Art school and they reported that they were not ready to work with such a girl. My classmate herself did not really want to go there as well. Therefore, when her place was vacated, I applied and they took me.

Dancing was a big part of my life. Every year in St. Petersburg, a dance contest, called *Sozvezdie* (Constellation), was organized between orphanages and we always participated in it. Despite the fact that the level was not very professional, we all prepared in advance and were terribly worried. For me it was always a big event. Even now I remember this time with nostalgia.

As soon as I was taken to another group, my life began to improve. I had no major conflicts and problems with anyone. Life was going on smoothly until John came to our orphanage. He was engaged in charity work and he had partnership with another man with whom they had their own small charitable foundation. John was British and how he ended up in our orphanage, I do not know. He came and asked our principle to meet with five children of eleven years of age. They chose five children, including me: there was no competition, no selection

process at all.

It was then when our conversation took place in the principal's office, which in a year and a half ended up in an invitation to England for a year to study in a private school. Then, and now I still have questions, "How did they choose children? What have I done to deserve it? Why did they choose me?" I always thought that somebody could be chosen for his or her achievements... But we had no competition, we were not tested for English language or intellectual skills. Communicative skills too, were hardly a selection criterion - we were all so frightened that it was difficult to get a word out of us. Therefore, I still do not understand what criteria they were guided by and so far this event remains a kind of a mystery to me...

England

The first time I was rejected a visa to England, we had to re-submit the documents. The second attempt was successful and I went to England in winter, although I was originally scheduled to leave at the end of August. I remember the date when I had to fly - it was December 15. I had to fly alone, but I was accompanied by representatives from the airline. They had such a program to accompany minors. They appointed a person to me and I had a feeling that I was a child of diplomats, because I went through the airport without any queues, accompanied by guards. It was cool!

When I came to England, the first two weeks I was scared and sad, because I did not know the language. I understood very little and could hardly communicate. At first, I talked only with teachers who understood that my English was not so good. The teachers tried to explain everything to me. For foreign students in the school- for children like me - a special teacher was assigned, Miss Jones, who taught us English. When our group had lessons in literature and English, we went to her. But as soon as I felt a little more comfortable and not so scared, I asked

to be moved to a general group, because I wanted to be engaged with my classmates. Also, I believed that I would learn language faster that way. They happily transferred me and really I learned English much quicker, because I constantly was in a language environment.

The school I went to was a classical English private school with expensive education. Children from wealthy families studied in it. At school, we had divisions into faculties, just like in *Harry Potter* - I was in a red one. This school was of the boarding type: there were children who came to school every day, as well as those who stayed in the boarding school all the time. We had our own private boarding house for twenty-four girls. I lived in a room with two girls. For a while I could not talk with them because of the language barrier, but I was very pleased that they always tried to start a conversation, even on simple topics so that I had enough vocabulary.

In school everyone was very kind and friendly. I was very surprised that British people were very sensitive about personal space. If someone in this school spoke a bad word or showed an indecent gesture, then they got a remark, which they called reprimand. If a person received three such reprimands, then s/he had big problems. During my stay at school I received only one reprimand for being late for a lesson. Once I and another girl decided to take a little walk around the campus, but the campus was very big, beautiful and it had so many different green corners. We went for a walk and were late for half of the lesson.

When I got into this school my vision of the world and many things turned upside down. I found myself in a completely different reality. I was taken from one cultural environment and moved immediately to another. If I had been transferred to another school in Russia or in St. Petersburg, I do not think that that it would have had such a profound impact on me, but after the trip to England, something in my head has greatly expanded, and I began to look at many things

in a different way.

For example, when I first came to the dining room, I saw that children from the youngest age were eating with a fork and knife. I always thought that people eat that way only in restaurants. Earlier I could take a sausage in our orphanage cafeteria and eat it with a spoon and it was perfectly fine. So the first time in England, I was surprised at how children ate. But over time, I realized that the internal culture and respect to others and oneself have been instilled in England since childhood: in fact, such a minor thing as taking food was just as important as culture as a whole.

I was greatly impressed by the versatile education - the children had the opportunity to develop in any direction, be it sports, music or theater. Amazingly, they had a separate pool, sports grounds, and lots of physical education. Also, their physical education was not just to go to the gym and run around it, like it was in my school in Russia. Not at all, all facilities were created to develop a person. If someone liked to run, they could choose athletics, if they liked to swim, they could go to the pool, and if they liked badminton, then they could play badminton. There was even a special laboratory on biology, where we did not just sit and listen, but did many practical tasks.

In addition, it was possible to attend extracurricular activities and go to music events, sit in the library, or visit reading or cinema clubs. I was really impressed by such diversity and choice. It can be even said that the opportunity to choose dumbfounded me at first, because in the orphanage I was always told what, how and when to do: for breakfast I'd have that, then such and such lessons, and after that there would be such and such clubs. In the orphanage, the schedule was fixed every day. I realized that I practically had no choice, there was simply no opportunity. Therefore, while I was in England I thought that when I go back to my orphanage I

would be very spoiled, but in fact that did not happen.

When I returned back I had a reverse cultural shock, because seven months in England changed me and partly formed who I am today. During that time I got used to the fact that people treat each other politely. I returned to Russia and I could not stop saying “thank you” and “I’m sorry.” I still cannot. I developed a habit that even if I did not like a person I could not talk to him rudely. I understand that this part of my upbringing reflects the part of society in which I lived in England. Of course, some basic human values were in me before the trip, but I believe that in England everything has sprouted and blossomed.

When I came back the first thing I heard was a caregiver who was shouting at someone at the cafeteria and calling him unpleasant words. It was a kind of shock to me that people spoke so loudly, that they shouted through the entire cafeteria. It's not that some snobbery was brought up in me (for some time I thought that probably England made me a snob), but then I realized that it did not. Snobbery is an elevation over others, but here I did not think that I was better than someone else, I just had a personal shock of perception. During the seven months abroad I had lost the habit and even forgot that I grew up in all that chaos. I even thought, “How did I live in this bazaar all seven years?”

School

The format of the orphanage-school was created to integrate people from two different environments. In fact, it was often the case that children from the orphanage turned out to be on their own and were slightly outsiders. Much more often that happened when there were several children from the orphanage in the same class. In my class, there were originally three of us, but then other guys left and I stayed in my class alone. But there were situations when there were five children from the orphanage in one class and they formed their own circle, not interested to

communicate with their classmates.

Much of course, depended on children themselves. Some did not absolutely see any boundaries - a classmate and a classmate, they did not really see any difference where s/he was from. But there were situations when “family children” stood aside, and even were afraid of children from the orphanage. Also, at school there were children who liked to bully and joke about children from the orphanage, therefore often enough there were unpleasant situations between children from the orphanage and the family ones.

Previously, our school was considered prestigious. I think it was mostly due to our principal. When I was in the elementary school, the principal kept everything in an iron grip. Everything was clear and organized. She always came to all events in school and in our orphanage. But then something happened and everything changed a lot. Maybe after working for many years she lost her original drive; or, perhaps, this was due to the fact that she managed to find good sponsors and she got a mercantile attitude towards everything. I began to notice it while at the high school: before our principal dressed modestly, but now she walked in fur coats, wore expensive rings, precious stones, and very expensive shoes and suits. Even in the all-school photo, all teachers were dressed modestly, but the principal stood like a flower: all in stones and brooches with complex hairstyle, and in expensive shoes. In general, somehow the school eventually lost its prestigious status.

In each class we had a parents' committee and one of their responsibilities was to raise money for the needs of the class. From this money, children from the orphanage were bought tickets to the theaters, excursions and other events. In fact, parents paid for their own children and a little bit everyone paid for us. On the one hand, it was great, but on the other, nobody conducted any educational work on the fact that someone gave us something, presented or paid

for us. Many orphans took everything for granted.

The main trend was that children from the orphanage studied worse than family children. Partly, it was due to the fact that the program was rather complicated. Mathematics and English were especially difficult for everyone. In addition, we had children of different educational levels. There was a child who got into the orphanage at the age of nine and he had never studied anywhere before. Of course, it was difficult for him, everybody constantly attacked and laughed at him, because he was such a big boy, yet studied in the first grade.

Many were poorly educated, because they did not want to do anything, as they were confident that they would be dragged forward within the educational ladder anyway. If the family children stopped studying, teachers immediately called their parents to school, talked about the possibility to expel from a school, but to expel children from the orphanage was impossible. Therefore, everyone was not afraid of anything, everyone understood that they would be given satisfactory marks. Even if they would be left for the second year in the same class, so what? They did not care. For teachers it was very difficult as well to find an approach to both the family "decent" children and "disobedient" children from the orphanage. For example, what to do for a teacher if a seventeen years old guy, "a huge bear," who just smoked and drank beer, comes to the lesson? How to explain to him that he needs to do math for tomorrow? He will look and say, "Justwith your mathematics." He, after all, perfectly knew that in any case he would get satisfactory marks and a school diploma.

I believe that working with difficult teenagers should not be the responsibility of ordinary teachers, because professionally they are not prepared for that and do not always understand how to work with difficult children. There were teachers who knew how to establish human contact with children from the orphanage. My class teacher in a high school, for example, always tried to

talk with our guys. Even now she complains to me that she cannot reach some of orphans. But she is trying, while other teachers just closed their eyes and put satisfactory grades *dlya galochki* (as a formality, for the sake of appearance).

I also think that other two factors influenced the academic success and desire to learn: the family situation and the number of orphanages in which the child had lived. Many of the children came from very bad family situations, many had to endure violence in the family, and someone witnessed murder. Of course, it was hard to motivate them to learn. I also noticed that children who lived only in one orphanage were more stable, psychologically, emotionally, and academically. But children who changed three or even four orphanages were different. They generally did not appreciate anything what was happening around them. Many of them lived in orphanage X, which all orphans in St. Petersburg knew about. There were some horrors going on and a complete arbitrariness of children and caregivers. The caregivers did not know any limits and often used physical violence. Everyone knew about this, but no one did anything. I myself once visited this orphanage as they hosted a contest or a concert there. I remember how creepy I felt.

As for me, it has always been very interesting to study. I do not know why, but it seems that it's all related to my childhood. Despite the fact that my mother was constantly ill and I could not always see her, it somehow settled in my head that I had to study, that it was good, that it would help me in the future. I'm not even sure that I was told these things in my childhood, but in such simple children's formulations I had these ideas in my head.

Up to the seventh grade I was an excellent student, I studied well, but most likely my desire to learn was connected with an understanding that I needed to be in the system, I had to be right and good. I felt this especially vividly in contrast to a lot of children who started smoking

and using obscene vocabulary early. Also, when the age of puberty came, in general, they all suddenly became steep bad guys. This behavior has never been close to me and I do not know how this can be explained, because in general, children from an orphanage can get into a bad company very easy. I do not know what stopped me, but I somehow did not belong to their party. I have always tried to learn, to study well and not to create problems either for others or myself.

After England, I had a coup, which at first I did not realize. Only a little later I suddenly understood the full value of the opportunity that was given to me. I realized that I needed to grab this chance and do everything possible to continue to cultivate a favorable soil. I also had a great feeling of gratitude and duty to the principal and administration for giving me such an opportunity. I simply could not imagine that I would return and continue to study as if nothing had happened. I understood that with the experience I had to do something and I set myself a goal to be more active both in school and in the orphanage. In addition, a small self-centered moment arose - I realized that I should not lose English language, because without practice it was easy to forget. So as soon as I came back from England, I began to read a lot of books in English and watch movies. Actually, in general, I fell in love with reading. I had a feeling that until I was fourteen I did not read anything, I was such a fool and that I needed to catch up urgently. I was haunted by the thought that I missed a lot. Since then, I began to read extensively.

When I returned from England, teachers at school wanted to leave me for the second year in a junior grade, because I did not really study in their eyes. The curriculum in England and Russia were very different. But I insisted to transfer me, because I did not want to lose a year and move to another class. Finally, they agreed. The first two months in the eighth grade I had to work hard and pass all the tests for the seventh grade.

After the trip to England my classmates started to pay more attention to me. They were

interested to know about my trip, they asked me a lot of questions about everything. But I cannot say that I developed a friendly relationship with them. I always tried to be a little apart and liked to sit alone. It was not some sort of a cult of strangeness and isolation and not because I had conflicts with anyone. On the contrary, I never created conflicts, because I never loved them. Honestly, I did not really communicate with my classmates, because it was not interesting for me. All their conversations were around clothes, iPhones and about the need to lose weight. I was sick of these conversations. I just could not participate in their talks. I asked myself, why should I? Therefore, I tried to be a bit aloof and communicate with everyone as needed.

After the trip to England, I had a single conflict with my class teacher and it happened despite the fact that by this time my cult of politeness was so ingrained that I could not even imagine that I could make anyone angry, raise voice, or say something rude. But one day I forgot to bring an English textbook to class and the teacher, in front of the whole class, began to poke at me about my mother. I did not know, maybe she read my personal file and knew about my mother, but at that moment I just could not stand it. Wildness woke up in me, I became angry. I could not say anything. I started to shake wildly. I slammed the door and left the classroom. The door was old, a glass was inserted in the center, which, when the door was closed, fell down and broke. It was a super-epic moment. Since then, we have become very tense with this teacher, and although I did not enter into open controversy with her and did not say anything rude, I had an internal feeling that I yelled at her very badly. Maybe I had such a feeling, because at the time when everything happened there was a wild loud dialogue in my head.

New Horizons, New Victories

When I was in grade nine, I went to Germany. Our school cooperates with the Waldorf School in Bonn, which annually organizes exchange programs. Children from the orphanage

were very rarely taken to such trips: everything depended on children themselves. Was the child reliable or did he/she love to go somewhere off, to run away? Usually the latter did not work in the exchange programs, because teachers did not want to take responsibility, as caregivers from the orphanage did not go with them. I was in good standing, so I was taken on a trip. We were in Germany for ten days. In the mornings we learned English, and then we spent the rest of the time with our peers and families with whom we lived. After this trip, I got insanely enthusiastic to learn German.

We were taught German at school from grade five, but it was once a week. To learn the language, it was not enough, so we all treated German as a class that we needed simply to sit through. There was also no particularly good teaching, not because the teacher was bad, but because there was no interest from the class.

After the trip to Germany, I approached our teacher at school and told her that I would like to learn German very much. From conversations with her, I understood that in fact she was very fond of her subject and that she was happy that at least someone became interested in German. She gave me a lot of literature and for a while she was tutoring me in her spare time. I was very grateful to her, because she worked with me for free, although she had her own family, children and work.

Later I attended intensive German courses - they lasted for three months. I saved some of my money and sponsors helped with the rest. For several years in the high school we had steep sponsors "St. Petersburg Parents Organization," who gave us presents for the New Year. They asked us to write letters to Santa with our wishes. I wrote in my letter that I did not really need anything, but what I really wanted was German language course. I also wrote that I did not expect that someone would pay for it, because I realized it was too expensive and the request was

insolent. At the end sponsors helped me to realize my dream.

In tenth grade I had another opportunity: the Scots came to our school. They come every year and arrange days of Scotland in St. Petersburg. They organize competitions in different nominations. One of the most prestigious competitions is called "How Well Do You Know Scotland?" This competition included ten cultural and historical themes related to Scotland and it was necessary to choose one of the themes and prepare a five-minute and act it artistically. Since the director knew me in person, she came to me, and without asking informed that I had to participate in this contest.

At first, I got frightened, because I had a wild fear of talking on stage. I could communicate with people freely without problems, but when I had to go on stage and speak in public, I had a stupor. Anyway, I realized that I had no choice but to agree. I could not tell "No" to the principal.

I had prepared for the contest. I was terribly worried before the performance. When they began to announce the results, they first announced the third place and it was not me, I thought that if I was not even given the third place, that's the end. Then they announced the second place - again, not me. I thought to myself, "Well, Liubov Alexandrovna, forgive me, at least I tried." But finally they announced the first place and called my name. I almost lost my speech. I could not believe my victory in any way.

I went to Scotland for two weeks, where I again showed my performance. I cannot say that the trip somehow influenced me, but there was another turning point in my life, because for the first time, I had overcome my fear and spoke in front of five hundred people. I'm still afraid to speak publicly, but that experience has made me stronger.

Almost immediately after the event, I took part in another contest, organized by the

American Consulate and the House of Friendship in St. Petersburg. I had to make a speech on a pressing topic. During the performance, while on the stage, I suddenly realized that a huge number of people were watching me, so I stopped and could not continue. I almost burst into tears right on the stage. I left the stage, went to the jury, told them that I was worried and asked to speak at the end again. They allowed me. As a result, I took the third place. It still seems to me that they just had a pity towards me, because I almost cried. Anyway, these performances have become for me an eerie stress, but in a good way. These experiences have greatly enriched my life.

In tenth grade, I started to work as a tutor: two to three times a week I taught English to children. Also, in tenth and eleventh grades I took part in the Olympiads¹⁹ in literature, English and German. In literature and German language, I reached the regional stage. In English I did a little better. In grade ten, I needed only two points to get to the National level. In fact, I did not prepare well for the Olympiad, because I could not sit and systematically learn something. I find it easier to read a book or watch a movie in English.

In the eleventh grade, I set myself a goal to get to the National stage, and I made it. It was very cool, because we went to Volgograd, where students from different cities of Russia came. It so happened that out of the entire crowd there were five winners and I was among them. I hope it does not sound like I'm showing off my achievements... It seems to me that if I did not go to England in seventh grade, I would be much less likely to be at the National Olympiad, as well as visited Germany and Scotland. Therefore, I often think that I do not deserve many things in my life... Some of the children have never been abroad, sat and learned language themselves, but for

¹⁹ Olympiad – is an annual nation-wide competition among school-students in various subjects. The competition has various levels and only winners move to the next level: **(1) school level**, here students compete within a particular school; **(2) city level**, here students compete with students from other schools within the city; **(3) regional/state level**, students compete with students from other cities, towns and villages within a region/state; **(4) national level**, students compete with students from different regions.

me it was much easier to participate in all contests and Olympiads ...

Along with my active participation in international projects and Olympiads, I began to skip school very frequently. At the high school, I got a feeling that I was doing nonsense; I was terribly bored and not interested at all. I felt very cramped at school. Therefore, I constantly missed classes, using my status of the participant of National Olympiad. At school, they always treated such students with respect as everybody believed we presented the face of the school, so teachers did not scold us - if we did not go to school, then we were preparing for the Olympiad... Yeah, right [smiling].

Here, the trust of my caregivers also played a role, because it was very difficult for children from the orphanage to skip school. Where can I go if not to school? Outside? Then the guard will see me at the front door. My caregivers treated me very well and we got very attached to each other. We still continue to meet and communicate with them. They knew that I was skipping school, I was always honest with them. But considering that I had never had any cases that I went somewhere, was lost or contacted a bad company, went to the club or got drunk, they trusted me. They knew that I was a safe person and that I would not create problems for them. Because of their trust, I attended movie festivals during the tenth grade. Vika invited me to the festivals.

We got acquainted with Vika as part of another project. Some time ago, children from the orphanage were asked to draw large paintings. These paintings were eventually sent to Sochi and hung in one of the buildings that one famous company built. We went to Sochi for three days ourselves. There I met Vika who organized everything for us. She invited me to film festivals where I met good “movie” people and became friends with them.

When I was in the high school, I started to rethink my entire experience of being in the

orphanage. I began to see and understand the imperfection of the system. I opened my eyes to many things. I looked differently at adult caregivers; I noticed meanness and difficulties among them, although in my childhood I did not notice it at all. I realized that people who had been working for decades had become bored and they did not know how to make themselves busy and put down themselves to a low level and set a strange example for children. I saw that administrators were pretending to be wonderful child-loving people, but as soon as they found themselves in jeopardy of getting punished by authorities above, they became indifferent towards children and they were ready to betray them.

Here is an example. One day I asked caregivers to give me a leave as my friends invited me to visit their country house, and then to go by car to Finland. The social services allowed me to go, I made an official written request to leave. Soon after I left, they called me from the orphanage and told me that everyone was looking for me. I came back to find out what happened as I officially took time off, how could they suddenly lose me. The social services pretended that they did not hear anything about my request and in the end it was my fault. Maybe it's a trifle, but I felt very uncomfortable. I remembered the incident as an example of hypocrisy.

In grade eleven, I experienced one more difficult moment. When I came from the Olympiad and I had to get ready for the Unified State Exam (USE), my mother had a relapse. I saw it with my own eyes for the first time. When I was little, Katia and all our friends tried to protect me from things like that. Only over time I realized that I had never seen my mother's illness. As soon as something happened to her, friends immediately took me away and my mother went to hospital for treatment. In grade eleven, I saw everything with my own eyes for the first time in my life. Prior to that, Katia always told me that one day I would have to deal with it myself, but when time came, I felt terrified and scared, because no matter how morally I

was preparing myself, I certainly was not at all ready for the situation. I worried a lot. My mother left to the hospital and I moved to her apartment for a while because she had a cat to look after. I explained the situation in the social service and they let me go. Despite the fact that I was completely depressed at that moment, I was glad to live outside the orphanage for a while.

Graduation

I had been waiting for the graduation for a very long time. Probably in the first place it was due to the fact that I no longer wanted to account to anyone about what time and where I went and write senseless official written requests for everything. Every time someone had to leave the orphanage, we had to write an official request to the principal saying that we were obligated to return at a certain time, that we knew the traffic rules, and so on.

In high school, many children no longer saw any support in the orphanage and almost all dreamed of leaving it as quickly as possible. Many of us thought in their heads, "They keep us here! When will it all end? I'm already fed up with everything." It is interesting that when children were released from the orphanage, though, many took their words back and wanted to return to the orphanage again ...

Before leaving the orphanage, everyone decided where to go to study. Despite the fact that I had a diploma from the National Olympiad, I still had doubts about the university, although in fact that issue was resolved. Prizewinners of the National Olympiads could enter any public university for free without any competition. My diploma solved many problems for sure, but with other children, the administration of the orphanage used to do a lot of work to chose an educational institution for them and prepare all the documents.

As a matter of fact the orphanage was obliged to enroll graduates in educational institutions, since they had to report to higher authorities and provide proper certificates from

educational institutions. I myself had to bring certificates to the orphanage until I am twenty-three about the fact that I'm studying, that I did not quit. But it was not easy to enroll everyone into educational institutions. Many children liked to show their rights and say that, "We are indebted, we are all indebted to, we are such unfortunate children." They liked to say that they do not want this, they do not want that, although according to their points in USE exam their choice of specialties and educational institutions was very limited.

Most of the children from the orphanage entered technical specialties, such as a mechanic, a builder, etc. Many got into very weak colleges, where usually children from other orphanages or children from disadvantaged families with low exam scores were able to enter. And that was very bad, because even if in our school a child with low motivation came to the class, he/she saw different people and somehow he/she tried to do better or equal to the class. But when graduates got into colleges, where majority of students were low motivated and had no intention to improve, it was sad. Actually, children with no motivation at all go to these low-prestigious colleges. In my opinion, this is the biggest problem and even though I would like to develop my own social project with children from orphanages (and I would like to take the most difficult age group), I still do not understand how to motivate these children.

As for me, I thought for a long time what to do in the future. During adolescence, I was very much uncertain about what I wanted. At first, I thought about acting, but I was convinced not to. Was it good or bad it's hard to say. But honestly, I did not hope to be able to do acting. Moreover, I had little idea what I would do after that. I was not crazy about my acting potential, and I was not inflated with ego about my creative abilities. Only if I were so confident that acting was my true passion, I would have worked very hard, but I was not sure at all.

I also wanted to go to a medical institute - I really wanted it, because as a child I dreamt

of becoming a surgeon: not just a surgeon who examines if something is wrong in the body, but a surgeon who performs surgeries with a scalpel. I had to reject this idea too because I decided that I was not smart enough and that I would not manage it. In fact, it's very bad because I still scold myself that I'm such a weak person.

Over time, participation in international projects, as well as my acquaintance with the movie guys pushed my interest towards art. Suddenly I became interested in the auction business. I understand that it may sound weird, but I wanted to become an expert in this field. Therefore, I decided to enroll in St. Petersburg State University (SPbSU) to a fairly new department of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

As for USE exam, I passed it and that's all. I think this is a foolish exam. People who pass the exam are divided into two types: there are people who can practice tasks and understand the logic of how questions work, and there are people like me who do not understand the logic of the exam. As a result, I got seventy-eight out of one hundred points on Russian language, in English I got ninety-six (they gave me one hundred anyway because of the Olympiad) and at History I got seventy-four. If I wanted to go to the budget (tuition-free) group, then I would not have been accepted with such scores. But since I had a diploma of the prizewinner of the National Olympiad in my hands, I was allowed to enter the university without entrance exams.

I started to study at SPbSU. The faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences is one of the richest departments. It was founded with the support of Bard College in New York. Every year Bard College recruits forty students from our department for an exchange program. Of course, the opportunity attracted a lot of students, because they might get two diplomas - one Russian and one from the U.S. When I thought why I went there, I most likely wanted to get these two diplomas and the opportunity to go to the U.S. But when I began to study, I quickly realized that

I could not go to the U.S., because plane tickets and accommodation in New York had to be paid by myself, and I did not have that opportunity.

The format of education at this department was also unusual, not like in Russian universities. Every year courses changed and we had to register for the courses ourselves. We got academic credits that we had to spend. We had eight different academic tracks within the program among which I chose the "History of Arts." At first, the system seemed interesting to me, but then I realized that it was still far from perfect and that all those who were studying at the time were still like guinea pigs. The idea itself was great but I did not like the courses that I had to choose, because we had a requirement to go through at least one course from each of the eight tracks. I was not interested in them at all. Moreover, this department was focused on interdisciplinary studies. I myself stand for interdisciplinarity but when I had to take an exam in physics at a humanitarian department and spent much more time on it than on other subjects, I was disappointed. I understood that I would not get the Art education I wanted and that I spent a lot of time on subjects that were not interesting for me. As a result, I decided to leave the department and now I do not regret it.

I moved to another department in SPbSU to the Faculty of History, to the department of Museumology. My specialty is called "Attribution and Examination of Artistic Values." To be honest, this is for right now just a beautiful name, because we have no special attribution and expertise. Now we are learning only one subject "Attribution and Examination of Jewelry Values," which is great and I'm interested in it very much. The rest of the time we spend on all kinds of humanitarian disciplines and museum research: we study the profile types of museums and how expositions fit within them. This direction is rather poorly developed in Russia, and compared to the U.S. education this is certainly like night and day.

The first year at the university I lived in the orphanage. I was waiting for the government to provide me with the housing. In theory, I could be accommodated in a university dormitory and that was often done, but at that time we had a sudden drop in the number of children and there were many vacant rooms. I decided to stay in the orphanage because I thought that it would be better for me to live where I knew everything rather than to live with someone I did not know. I was given an empty room and I lived there alone. It was the year of 2015.

At the same time, I prepared all the documents to be placed on a waiting list for an apartment. For the first time I failed because I was registered at my mother's apartment, although I did not live there and I did not possess any part of the property. I had to collect the documents again and reapply. The second time they included me on the waiting list. At the time, a law appeared, according to which the state was obliged to give graduates of orphanages a one-room apartment or a studio. Previously, everything was blurrier, as they could give you a room in a communal apartment and not an actual apartment. Nobody ever knew what to expect. But then it became more or less clear what to expect, although the number of square meters could still be at a discrepancy.

A year later I was given an apartment. Just closer to my birthday, they called me and asked to come for an observation sheet and go to see the apartment. In theory, graduates can reject an apartment if they do not like it and then get back on the waiting list, but no one could give a guarantee that another option would be better than the previous one. I know that many of the orphans refused their first apartments, as they thought they far from the city center or it was difficult for them to get to school. I thought that whatever the apartment would be, and in whatever place, it would still be great, because I knew that for many years people were saving to buy real estate, they were being stuck in loans and mortgages, but here the state was ready to

provide an apartment just for thanks.

When I came to look at the apartment, I did not know which one would be mine, because they opened one floor in a new building and we walked from one apartment to another and looked at the options. I immediately realized that I would not even think of rejecting the offer. I believed that I was very lucky with both the place and the apartment. In our residential building, part of the apartments was given to the commercial sector, and another part to the social one. Here lived children from orphanages and children with disabilities. Children with disabilities even had their own building, where everything was very well thought out for them and there were special lifts for wheelchairs.

Later, when I graduated from the orphanage, Vika called me again and told me that there was an international theater project in which I could participate. I came for an interview. They recruited teenagers with difficult social backgrounds to participate in a theater project called “Time for Your Performance.” It was a social theater with the participation of children from three countries - Russia, Germany and Serbia. The project consisted of three stages and each stage was held in one of the countries. When I started participating in the project, I was a first-year student, but when the project was over, I already moved to another academic year.

It was not quite easy to combine my studies and the project. I had a very busy, but a good life. Each stage of the project represented a new performance. We had been working for ten days over the play specially designed for the street performance. We worked together as part of a large international team and worked with the information we gathered and translated into an artistic language.

Right now I'm participating in another international project in the format of a social-documentary theater. It involves youth from three countries - Poland, Germany and Russia. Just

like the previous project, it consists of three stages that take place in one of the countries. Each of the stages is the process of creating presentation to its grand-finale. We do not have any readily available theatrical play or a scenario. The director surely has something on his mind, but the documentary theater works differently as we have to conduct interviews, go on excursions, watch documentaries and read books. All the information that we collect will be later expressed in other forms through our performance.

We had already been to Warsaw, where all ten days we worked on the performance in a new modern cultural center. In St. Petersburg, unfortunately, the number of days was reduced from ten to seven, because our meeting happened in August and everyone had to go back to school. But in Berlin we are going to spend seventeen days. In terms of the theater, this project is more serious, because in Berlin we will have a full-scale performance, which we will present to the audience at Deutsches Theater Berlin. We will have a premiere and three post-premiere shows.

Now and Future

Now I would like to continue to participate in similar temporary projects. They are very important. Until recently, I volunteered at a feminist festival and I really enjoyed it, because there were interesting people with different presentations from lectures to theatrical laboratories. I was invited to help as a simultaneous interpreter. It turned out to be a very difficult task as the consecutive translation is much easier. Anyway, I liked the sense of involvement in the team that really did something valuable. I saw how life changed for the better for people who had come there. Therefore, I like the idea and I would like to volunteer for such events.

I also would like to continue studying where I already study. After studying, I would like to go abroad for an internship or a Master degree, but I want to return to Russia. For some time,

after returning from England, I thought that I would like to leave Russia, but that was due to the fact that I naively believed that in England everyone lived so carelessly and richly and it seemed to me that it was such an amazing country where everything was superb. But then I realized that in England there were also poor people and gangsters, and many social, economic and political problems. Therefore, the desire to live abroad, which I had before, disappeared. It is much more interesting and necessary to change something in my native country (albeit locally) than to go where the level of development is higher and much more accessible to people. Who will then solve problems at home? I have not yet found another place where I would like to live except for Russia. This is not a mere patriotism. This has nothing to do with politics. This feeling is a reflection of inner belonging to a place where I was born. Yet, it would be interesting for me to go on an internship or to finish a Master program abroad and with this knowledge and experience to do something in Russia.

Now I'm interested in doing temporary exhibitions, because I like this format more than permanent expositions. In the framework of temporary exhibitions, an important idea must be conveyed to visitors in a limited time, and people will think that the exhibition is open until December 30, for example, and it is important to catch it. As for the permanent expositions, then people might think that they can go next weekend and then finally never go.

Living on my own, I began to communicate with my mother more often. We have good relationships with her. Anyway, while I was in the orphanage, we could not see each other often, because she had a restriction on parental rights. Restriction exists till now, but simply I am already an adult and in fact this restriction has no meaning.

Other Orphanage Graduates

As for other graduates, to be honest, I will not say that we are close friends. I had friends

during the time I was transferred to group four, but when I became older, we had more distance between us. I know that one brother and a sister went to college. The sister graduated from grade nine, and her brother finished the eleventh grade, so they left the orphanage together. The sister entered a college, and the brother entered the Forestry Academy. The brother was very capricious, with not a simple character and it was difficult to stick him to any institution, because he did not like anything. Yet, he had to consider that with his USE scores his options of educational institutions were limited.

As a result, they studied in their institution for about a year, and then dropped out. The last time I talked to them, they told me they worked and lived with their mother. Their mother appeared closer to their graduation just when they were given housing. For me, it caused suspicion, as it seemed strange that a woman appeared only when they were already ready to leave and when they were given housing. Perhaps this is only my suspiciousness, I do not know. They have not contacted me for a long time, and I am worried about them, as it is not clear for me what is going on. In addition, already during the high school, these brother and sister became very lazy. By the way not only them - many guys fell into laziness too. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems to me that this is due to the fact that as long as children are in the orphanage they can always get out of any situation. It never happened that their lives were put on fire while they were at the orphanage. It never happened that they could be expelled from the school or the orphanage.

While children are in the orphanage, they realize that there will always be food in the cafeteria, whether they want to eat or not. They can refuse to eat, but no one will tell them that they don't appreciate somebody's work. Cooks are just doing their job. Yes, they can be upset that children do not eat or, on the contrary, be glad that everyone eats, but in fact they have

nothing to do but cook. I want to say that when graduates leave the orphanage, they have a feeling that everybody owes them. They do not understand that as soon as they leave the orphanage, they become like everyone else and they need to settle down somewhere, study and work.

Children got used to being given everything ready and that they can show off and say, "I do not need this! I do not want that!" They do not understand that things are not lying on the street, that someone cannot even afford the same "*bator*" clothes at home. They do not understand that one day they will have to earn money on their own. This is very sad, because children quickly got used to what they were given.

For example, we were constantly visited by sponsors and organizations. One fund constantly organized birthdays: they covered a huge table in the dining room and arranged performances. Perhaps, because of that, children in the orphanage became terrible materialists. If sponsors came and did not bring any goodies, it was generally, "How? Why did they even come then?" It's both funny and sad. I do not think that this is the fault of the caregivers - the whole system is so foolish. There are no special teaching classes or sessions, I do not even know how it should be taught, that it's not tasty food and gifts that are important when visitors come. Therefore, it seems to me that these practices led to laziness and people got used to doing nothing yet getting everything and considering it a norm. I do not blame anyone or anything, it's just my observations.

Another thing is the idea, that we are "poor unhappy children," is cultivated very much on a subconscious level. If you say to children in the orphanages, "Oh, you are poor and unhappy," then they most likely will get angry, because they do not consider themselves as such. They will say that they are all right. But subconsciously, the idea still exists. If they openly do

not talk about it, psychology of a poor unhappy child still retains. When they eventually find themselves in a big world where one must learn, socialize and do something, there is still a constant expectation that the society has to take care of “poor orphans.” Therefore, I think many are following a shaky path, because there is no awareness and motivation to do something. Why should they try hard if they can get help? Why should they work if they can register with labor exchange and get an unemployment allowance? Why should they work if they can get a scholarship or social security benefits before the age of twenty-three?

Reliable state support is, on the one hand, good, but no educational work regarding material possessions is not done in any way. Yes, many people do not know their rights and do not apply for scholarships and benefits and that is bad. But if they do know about them, they often perceive that they have money and they don’t need to do anything. Lack of motivation, in my opinion, is the main reason for problems for children from the orphanages.

Therefore, if you look at the truth, then a lot of children who leave orphanages end up in troubles very fast. It's not like I put a label on, absolutely not. On the contrary, I hate it when people are labeled for being from an orphanage. I even try not to tell anyone about my past. In fact, only my close friends know about my life. But, in general, I want people not to know about it, because I still have a prejudice that I will be condemned or judged for any human error because of my orphanage past...

Chapter V.

The Researcher's Interpretation: Discussion, Analysis, and Implications

Dear reader, now that you have finished reading the stories, what reactions did they evoke in you? I personally realized that my mind went on a rollercoaster of different feelings and emotions throughout the whole research journey. At first, I was shocked, angry, ashamed, hurt, and heartbroken. However, after some time, I began to notice that my mind started to present these stories as simply stories, whether imagined or taken from some books or movies. I believe it was an attempt of my mind to protect me from a traumatic experience that emerged as a result of listening to the stories of orphans' lives and education. It was an interesting and surprising discovery. From now on, I have to constantly pull myself from this illusionary comforting space and remind myself that these stories are real and they do need attention. Thus, let the stories be a constant quiet reminder of the system of pain and suffering that exists as I write these words, and an invitation for all the stakeholders and empathetic readers to think and act upon changing the system of orphanhood in Russia.

Nevertheless, while the purpose of the research was to immerse the reader into the world of orphanhood in Russia, I felt it was beneficial, yet complementary to offer my own interpretation and discussion of the orphans' life accounts. My inspiration was based on following two reasons. First, I was interested to capture stories all together and reconcile the larger meaning of orphans' experiences of life and education. Second, I wanted to place the stories within the existing literature and research in an attempt to move from locality of the stories to broader discussion and analysis. Within the scope of the research, I did not set a goal of discussing every theme that emerged from the narratives. As a matter of fact, the stories yielded rich data that could potentially take readers and researchers in various directions, whether to the

role of punishments at the orphanages, pressing issues of disability in Russia, identity formation, or orphans' relationships.

It was my aspiration that researchers would continue to look at the stories and analyze emerging themes, opening up space for collaboration and co-creation of multi-disciplinary mosaic research that would contribute to a greater understanding of the nature of orphanhood in Russia, and perhaps even beyond. Therefore, while keeping certain themes open, I decided to focus my discussion on the four main parts that corresponded with universal milestones,²⁰ in my view, of orphans' lives, namely: (1) life experiences prior to the orphanage; (2) life and educational experiences while at the orphanage; (3) transition to adulthood; (4) and adult life.

Experiences Prior to Orphanages

The academic literature talked about the importance of early socialization, which became the foundation of a person's future growth and development. Early socialization experiences had a great impact on a number of life and educational outcomes, including physical and psychological development, behavior, motivation, as well as academic performance (Schwartz et al., 1997; Baumrind, 1975; Taylor et. al., 2004; Bourdieu, 1973, 1986, 2000; and others).

Therefore, it was important to look at the experiences of participants prior to the orphanages and understand overall background or their initial capital that children accumulated prior to entering the system of institutionalized orphan care.

In addition to this goal, I was puzzled by the question on how children end up under the institutional care and support. I knew from the literature that some of them were abandoned from their birth, but I also knew that certain children were forcefully taken from their families.

Therefore, I was inquisitive about *the moment* of taking a child from home and bringing him/her

²⁰ Certainly, each of the participants had their own milestones in life.

into the orphanage. How did adults explain to children why they were being taken from their parents? What did a child feel? How did s/he understand and interpret the events?

The stories offered some explanations into these very personal and sensitive matters. Evgeny, Olga and Kostia's parents abandoned them from their birth; thus, they did not have any prior family experiences before entering the orphanages. Evgeny's family left him at the hospital because they were not ready to take care of a child with disability. As a matter of fact, disability is a massive, yet largely silent topic in Russia. There are still an enormous amount of stigma, concern and misunderstanding within the public about people with disabilities. Families, as a result, often perceive disability as a burden or even a shame. Some lack knowledge and resources to provide essential care and support. All of these factors, in my view, contribute to fears and doubts in families that force them to abandon their own kin.

In Olga and Kostia's cases, it was not clear why their parents decided to leave them. However, from conversations with them, I got glimpses of information that their families had troubling histories, potentially involving alcohol and unemployment. While Kostia seemed not very concerned about his family background, Olga was quite hesitant to talk about it. It was a very painful topic for her and I solely respected her wish for privacy.

Dima's situation was a little different. While he has been institutionalized from the day he was born, his mother did not abandon him. At that time, she was in prison sentenced for ten years for committing a murder; therefore, Dima was eventually transferred into an infants' home. It remained unclear whether Dima would be in the orphanage if his mother did not commit that crime. Given the fact that she killed a person to obtain money to buy alcohol, it might be hypothesized that he would be at risk in any scenario.

Two other study participants – Anna and Maria lived with their mothers up to the ages of six and ten, accordingly. However, it is difficult to call it “living with.” For instance, Anna’s mother was suffering from an illness and Anna had to live with her mother’s friends and constantly change homes. Despite instability, Anna was feeling safe and secure. She was able to develop close ties with Katia, one of her mother’s friends. From her story, it might be inferred that some children from relatively stable family backgrounds sometimes end up at the orphanages due to unfortunate events, like parents’ sickness, disability or various accidents. Anna herself suggested that because her childhood was unfortunate, yet not *as troubling*, she was able to navigate through the system without hysterics, she valued the importance of education and was able to stay away from negative influences of the system.

Compared to Anna’s safe environment, Maria’s childhood was unforgivingly harsh and disturbing. Even listening to her story evoked so much shock and pain in me that it was hard to imagine how a young child could go through all of these challenges that can easily break even a strong and experienced adult. Her story throws light on the life of a small remote village, where residents sparked up their daily lives with alcohol and engaged in physical and psychological violence. Such dire circumstances may reflect the Russian reality of quite a large number of remote villages as they typically deal with unemployment and lack of opportunities, reproducing a cycle of poverty and alcohol/drug abuse, thus, placing children at risk.

Constant fear and insecurity were penetrating Maria’s own existence. At the age of five she took a role of a mother to take care of her own little sister, as their biological mother was frequently absent from their lives. The two little sisters experienced hunger, intense cold, sickness and became victims of as well as witnesses to various forms of violence and abuse.

Disturbingly, Maria's own cousin was regularly raping her and invited his friends for a gang-rape. No wonder that Maria described her own childhood life as hell.

What was interesting is that it was Maria's mother who at the end dragged her out of this hell. It was Maria's mother who went and asked the government social services to place her children into the orphanage. What could have happened if she did not do it herself? While the answer is unknown, this case certainly raises a question about the effectiveness of the government services to properly monitor and identify children at risk.

In addition, Maria's case demonstrated how government officials handled the process of taking her and her sister into the shelter. Strikingly, no one offered any explanations to the children. According to Maria, some unknown people entered the house, collected their belongings and drove them away into the shelter. Only at the shelter, Maria and her sister understood what happened. Administration lied to them once again the day they transferred the girls from the shelter into an orphanage. The sisters were told that they were going to a hospital for a checkup, yet they ended up at the orphanage.

This is exactly what happened with Evgeny, who reported that caregivers at the infants' home came and informed him that he would be taken into the hospital for a checkup. Instead, Evgeny was transferred into the orphanage. He felt betrayed, deceived and heartbroken. It remained unknown why administration preferred to lie over telling the truth. Were they trying to avoid potential hysterics? Was it painful for them to inform children or they did not really care?

While the exact answers are unknown, these stories demonstrate poor, even inhumane handling of situations to explain life-turning events to children. Instead of constant help and support, children were thrown into the freezing water to figure out what was happening for themselves. Children who were once betrayed by their parents were once again betrayed by the

system that was supposed to protect them. In these circumstances, children were objectified and manipulated as adults knew what was happening, yet for some reason did not feel compelled to offer any explanations. The children, therefore, were treated like objects that could be easily taken away and relocated, with no warning and clarification. While these experiences cannot be generalized to the nation-wide practices, they do indicate the need to look at the matter more closely.

Overall, while four of the participants had no prior experiences of living with their families because they either came into the system of orphan care from the day they were born and the other two participants had a history of living with their mothers, children's family backgrounds and their parents' past, nevertheless, had a very strong presence in their lives. Throughout the stories, a great number of children were naturally curious to know about their parents even if they had no prior experience living with them. In most cases, parents' histories were written in orphans' portfolios and made known to children. These stories often haunted children as they attempted to recreate the past and find an answer to why their parents left them. Some children with less troubling backgrounds found refuge in these stories, like Anna, connecting to her family roots and drawing power from them. In other words, some family histories gave children strength and motivation to move forward, study, live and develop. For others, like Olga, they became a source of inner conflict and disappointment, creating chaos, anxiety and embarrassment to even talk about it.

Given the importance of family background, I may suggest that family histories represented, in fact, a form of an initial capital that children drew upon. This form of capital is rather different, in my view, from what scholars described before, whether it is financial, cultural, social or human capitals (Bourdieu's, 1973, 1986, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998;

Becker, 1962). All of them referred to something quite tangible, whether it was a possession of goods, social network, acquired taste, style, educational training and so forth. Here, some children did not really have any actual experiences living and engaging with their families. What they had was knowledge that was passed to them through caregivers in forms of notes and stories.

It is true that some children had a chance to later meet their biological families, yet for many that memo in their portfolio was *the only* glimpse of information they knew about who they were and where they came from. Could it be possible that *pure knowledge* about family background had the same profound effect on children as an *actual experience* of living in a family? Could it be that haunting and abstract presence of parents affected the mere existence and real life experiences of orphans? Could these fleeting icebergs of information *alone* situate children within the social order? While certain impact of family background on orphans cannot be fully measured within the scope of this research, there are glimpses of evidence that suggested that some caregivers and teachers were certainly influenced by children's family histories. Across the stories, there were examples when children heard that they would end up as their parents: alcohol or drug addicts, or prisoners in jail.

It was fascinating that parents, while not physically present in their children's lives, continued to invisibly influence caregivers and teachers' attitudes towards their children. While some family histories became shields for children and protected them from bullying, other histories made children more vulnerable in the face of humiliation and aggression. The knowledge about parents made adults set low-expectations for children and oriented their behavior towards them as someone who was not worthy of respect and decent future. The

children were presumed to be not better than their troubled parents, even though some children had never seen or interacted with their families.

Therefore, it is possible that there exists *an imagined form of family capital*, a capital that was passed to a child in the form of a memory, story, or memo about their parents. This form of capital existed merely in the form of knowledge, an imagined space within the mind that, on the one hand, guided and situated orphans in life. On the other hand, this imagined capital shaped the attitudes of people who projected limited life trajectories and reinforced orphans' social position and status similar to their "imagined" parents. This finding potentially blurs the line between the reality of experiences and one's imagination of these experiences.

By and large, a summary of orphans' experiences prior to entering the orphanages suggests that the paths to the orphanages varied. Insecure and troubling family backgrounds, child's disability, imprisonment, parent's sickness or accidents may become reasons to place a child within the system of orphanage care in Russia.²¹ Most of children who end up at the orphanages in Russia had experienced troubling events that varied in severity. The stories demonstrated cases of poor and inhumane handling of a delicate matter of placing children at the orphanage as adults did not explain what was happening to children or told lies over truth.

Whether a child was within the orphanage system from the day s/he was born or ended up at the institution later, the family background was very influential. Even if children did not have any experiences of living with their parents, children received *an imagined family capital* that guided not only children, but also caregivers and adults, thus, situating a child on a social ladder similar to their "imagined" parents. Perhaps, an *imagined family capital* played as important role

²¹ It should be briefly noted that this "face of orphanhood" in Russia is quite different from, for example, the nature of orphanhood in Sub-Saharan Africa, where wars, conflicts and HIV/AIDs constitute major causes of orphanhood.

in children's lives, similar to an actual cultural capital accumulated through real experiences living with a family. For some orphans, this imagined capital became the source of inspiration and motivation, while for others it led to frustration and anxiety.

Life and Educational Experiences at the Orphanages

To specify the boundaries of the analysis, I distinguished four *major* layers of reality that participants had to navigate during their lives at the orphanage, namely: society at large, orphanage system, children's world, and schooling system. Although the study participants often experienced all four layers simultaneously, the nature of research and writing does not allow for the simultaneous exploration of all four layers. Therefore, each of the layers of reality was analyzed individually; however, it is imperative that reader keeps in mind that most participants navigated these layers of reality at the same time.

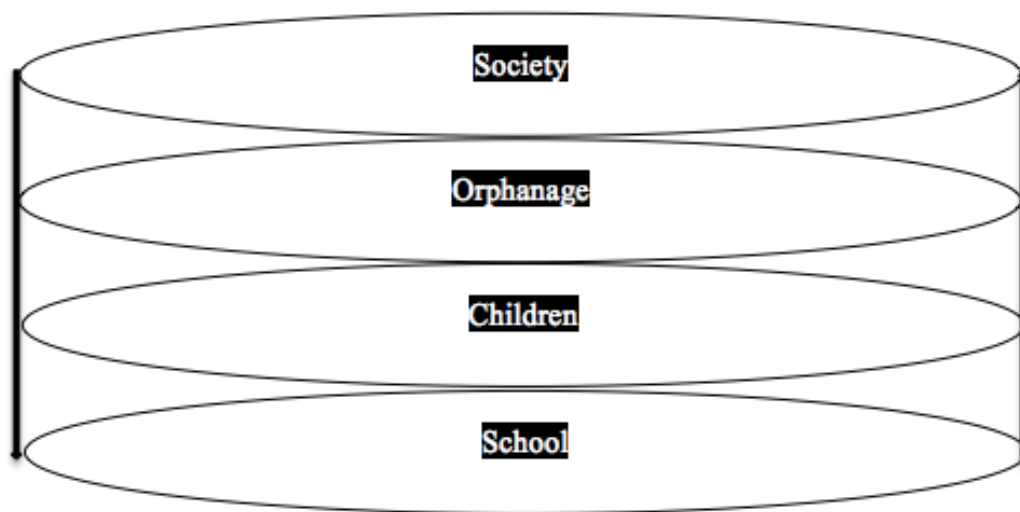


Figure 2. An example of multi-layered reality, which orphans navigated during their lives at orphanages.

The first layer, representing the *larger society*, included the processes that influenced orphans' lives and educational experiences on a local/national level. The second layer

represented all the factors related to the *orphanage* institutional setting, namely, orphanage policies, rules and regulations, caregivers, administration, and so forth. The third layer characterized the inner dynamics, relationships and laws that *children* established themselves. The last layer was related to orphans' *schooling experiences* and the ways orphans navigated through them.

Society at large. Participants reported that they rarely dealt with the larger society as most of the time they were closed at their respective institutions. There were some instances when orphans played or studied with children who lived in families. For example, Evgeny met a girl outside the orphanage and because of this seemingly childish encounter, he learned about the importance of reading and writing. This minor interaction eventually led to serious and grand-scale consequences for him. Also, Anna's experiences of living and studying in England opened up for her new perspectives and opportunities.

However, these interactions with the larger society were rather rare. The majority of the orphans had limited interactions with people outside the system. They communicated with sponsors and volunteers as main representatives of the society. While these interactions were perhaps important (e.g., in Dima's case these interactions helped to defend his rights and saved him from the psychiatric hospital), the fact that these interactions were so limited in nature was problematic as well. Sponsors and volunteers visited orphanages with a motivation to help, to give gifts, and entertain children. As Anna recalled, many orphans eventually began to expect sponsors to bring them presents each time they came to visit. According to Anna, whenever sponsors visited orphanages just to talk, children were sincerely frustrated as they did not understand why they came in a first place.

Therefore, it was likely that the nature of interactions between orphans, sponsors, and volunteers contributed to what participants described as the expectation that everyone [the society] owed orphans. The idea of a poor, unhappy child was cultivated partly through these interactions as some children eventually associated themselves with an object of help. Anna expressed an opinion that orphans did not openly admit that they felt poor and miserable, yet their psychology of wretched children remained. In other words, limited interactions with sponsors and volunteers, which often were the only interactions between orphans and society, created false and artificial impressions of life for children. Orphans, perhaps, began to associate themselves with objects of help and pity, while imagining a society outside of the orphanage as always being there to help, save, support, present gifts and make certain dreams come true. Possibly, it was one of the reasons why so many orphanage graduates naively fell into the hands of criminals. They simply did not expect that the society could treat them badly.

In addition to interactions with sponsors and volunteers, the stories revealed how the larger political, social, and economic forces of the country influenced the nature of living at the institutions. Perhaps, these forces were largely invisible to orphans; however, they had a direct influence on their life and educational experiences. From 1982 when Evgeny was born to 2015 when Anna left the orphanage, there was an immense shift in conditions of orphanages in Russia. Evgeny's story captured the major historical event, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union and the country's transition to modern day Russia. At this early time of transition, Evgeny's orphanage lacked necessities such as heating and food. More importantly, the country could not pay salaries to staff and that fact had a tremendous effect on the way caregivers treated children. First, the orphanage employed unprofessional staff, including high school students, just to get

someone to work. Here, one may recall Evgeny's story where a boy started to choke at the cafeteria and unprofessional caregiver failed to help him. The child died.

Second, those who were employed at the time of the country's transition felt anger and frustration, because they could not feed their own families. The caregivers were furious that the government fed orphans and not their children. As a result, orphans were often beaten, left without food, humiliated and, in fact, many children died or were hurt because of the negligence of their caregivers. For example, Evgeny lost his legs because of a drunken nurse, and he tragically recalled that he saw dead children more frequently than cartoons on TV.

None of the other five participants reported such dire conditions. The majority of them remembered that during their early ages they sometimes lacked a choice of food (for example, they only ate barley and porridge) and orphanages were poorly maintained. However, all the participants reported that the conditions were gradually improving and when they were about to graduate, they had almost everything: food, toys, furniture, and TVs.

Interestingly, however, Evgeny and Dima saw these seemingly pleasant changes in a negative way, thinking that children would become only spoiled and incapable of taking care after themselves. Dima also saw great dangers in having TVs. According to him, children stopped developing intellectually as they passively watched TV all day and fell into degradation. The situation seemed to be paradoxical. On the one hand, some orphans complained about the tough conditions they themselves had to experience, yet on the other hand, when these conditions improved for the next generations, they perceived these improvements as dangerous. It is, therefore, challenging to explain this paradox. Perhaps, it was one of the ways for the participants to give meaning to their own experiences and a way to cope with their childhood past.

The stories, in addition, gave us a glimpse of various reforms and policies affecting orphans in Russia. For example, policies regarding the type of the institution determined which educational programs children had access to. From the stories, we saw at least three different types: orphanages that offered standard public education curriculum, correctional curriculum, and no curriculum at all. It remained unclear exactly how the social services determined where to send a child. Most of the participants either could not recall being tested at all or reported that the commission was not rigorous enough (e.g., asked questions like, ‘What color was a swimming suit last year?’)

Anna and Maria were placed into regular orphanages, although it remained unclear how it was determined. If in Anna’s case, her mother’s friend Katia brought her specifically to a “good” orphanage, then was Maria just lucky to be assigned to an orphanage with a public school curriculum? Or did the fact that Maria studied in a public school play a positive role? The exact answers are unknown. Olga, Kostia and Dima all graduated from correctional orphanages. Olga and Kostia did not recall being tested at all. Therefore, it is possible that their family histories played a negative role and the social services sent them to correctional boarding schools based on that fact alone.

In comparison to Olga and Kostia, Dima was “tested” by a commission that, at first, sent him into a regular orphanage, which he described as a paradise. In this orphanage, Dima recalled receiving high quality education. Yet, Dima was not interested in learning at that time, because he did not understand the importance of education. The administration considered his lack of interest and motivation as inability to learn and transferred him into the correctional boarding school.

Evgeny's case was truly remarkable, because he lived in an orphanage that did not provide any educational programs at all. From his story, it was evident that children had various medical and psychiatric diagnoses, and some had serious health issues. Yet, it seems at the time, physical and intellectual disability was not distinguished. Evgeny was physically different, yet his intellectual abilities were strong. The fact that he was able to educate himself and finally get admission to the university clearly indicated the very problem of misplacing children into appropriate institutions. It can only be sadly projected how many orphans, who are currently institutionalized, are capable of learning, yet are not given proper opportunities to strive.

To conclude, the stories revealed limited if not rare interactions between orphans and the society at large. While in some cases such interactions were life changing and positive, in others they contributed to a quite unhealthy dynamic. Particularly, it was discussed that interactions with sponsors and volunteers contributed to an expectation by orphans that the society owed them. It contributed to the development of a mentality of a "poor, unhappy child" as some orphans started to associate themselves with objects of help and pity. In addition, the larger political, social, and economic context of the country had a direct influence on life and educational experiences of orphans. This constantly evolving landscape defined the quality of living conditions as well as determined the policies regarding educational experiences of orphans. By and large, the overall dynamic indicated a gradual improvement of living conditions at the institutions.

Orphanage. The deeper understanding of lived experiences of orphans lurks within the fabric of orphanhood apparatus: the physical setting of an orphanage, daily routine, observed practices, overall atmosphere, the competency of staff and so on. These various factors and details set the context within which orphans' lives unfolded and habits were shaped, thus,

creating a symphony of lived experiences. Using Bourdieu's terminology, these factors constituted *the field* and while looking and analyzing *the field*, we can begin to uncover and understand *the habitus*.

However, was it appropriate to talk about *the field* or *the fields*? The stories had clearly demonstrated the uniqueness of each of the context, and while one could evidently observe similarities across them, it seemed impossible to claim that the conditions were exactly the same in each of the orphanages. If the participants were placed in another institution their experiences might have been very different in nature. Therefore, it was vital to keep consistently in mind that orphanages represented distinctive environments or *the fields* with their unique combinations of factors at place. For the purpose of this discussion only, I attempted to analyze common themes across the different stories, thus, capturing the most prominent characteristics of *the fields*.

Rigid and controlled environment. I believe it would serve justice to start the discussion with describing the overall atmosphere at the orphanages. Throughout the stories it became evident that children lived, to a varying degree, in rigid and controlled environments. The control was put in place in three major structural forms: monotonous daily routine, official rules and regulations, as well as physical setting of the orphanages. These three factors were part of the official guide/curriculum on how to manage and structure the institution, both in terms of physical and living arrangements for children.

In fact, all of the orphanages in Russia are required to have official documents that outline the daily routine and rules of the organizations. While it was beyond the scope of the study to analyze official documents, out of the curiosity I looked at a number of them on orphanages' websites. The documents indeed reflected rigidity and control. The daily routine was predetermined and monotonous. The rules specified the "whats" and "hows" for children to

follow. In general, children were required to follow all the rules, regulations and daily routine, attend classes and activities, keep the territory clean, respect adults and children, and handle with care the property of the orphanage. Some rules were very specific about children's clothing and appearances and types of behavior to observe while in cafeteria, at school, and other spaces.

The rigidity and control were reflected in all of the stories presented in this dissertation as well. It became apparent that monotonous routine was setting the tone, dictating the pace of life. The majority of the participants observed similar practices: they had to wake up early, brush teeth, eat breakfast, go to school, have lunch, spend free-time or sleep during the quiet hour, do homework, have dinner, perform cleaning routines, and go to sleep. There was one main exception to this - Evgeny's orphanage did not provide any education, therefore, children spent most of their time in the playroom. Despite the differences in daily practices, children across the different institutional contexts were living in an environment with almost every hour and move being timed, prescribed, and predetermined. Any action beyond the routine required an approval from the authorities – whether caregivers or administrators.

On top of that, participants observed strict rules and regulations about inner arrangements of life that varied from making beds a certain way to walking to cafeteria in a row. Also, regulations specified what type of food and clothing children got and how often. The exit and entrance to/from the orphanage was regulated as well. Most of the time, children had to remain at the institution and only with a permission of a caregiver they could go out. No wonder that participants themselves compared life at the orphanage to military and even to a prison.

Similarly, orphanage policies regulated the way children were divided within the institutions. From the stories shared by the participants, it was typical to form groups of approximately ten children of similar age and attach several caregivers who were held

responsible for the safety and upbringing of that group. Only in Anna's story children of different ages were united together. According to her, it was done with an aspiration to create a more family-resembling atmosphere. However, this structural decision did not change the inner dynamic of the orphanage at all. The children did not naturally fall into the experience of having brothers and sisters of different ages living together. On the contrary, such a scheme allowed for easier ways for elder children to bully the younger ones.

Lastly, the physical setting of the orphanages played an important role in managing and controlling children. Typically, the orphanage building(s) were divided into spaces that served specific purposes: bedrooms, cafeteria, bathrooms, playrooms, classrooms, and administrative spaces. Each of the spaces had their own rules and procedures. Throughout the day children were redirected from one place to another. Therefore, children were most of the time in groups in one of the orphanage locations, monitored and controlled by caregivers. To recall Foucault's (1979) words, "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly" (p. 173). In the case of Russian orphanages, one could observe, in fact, the interplay between discipline, control and physical arrangement of the institutions. The differentiated spaces and organized daily routine made it convenient to maintain control with a single gaze over children as they were gathered in one space at one time.

Besides the official use of physical settings of orphanages, the stories revealed shadow areas of hidden control and manipulation. For example, Dima recalled that at his boarding school with larger territory he felt greater freedom, as he could spend time with his friends in the yard and tell caregivers they were somewhere else. Dima also discussed the convenience of having an isolator room for punishment on the first floor as from there the administration could take a child into a psychiatric hospital through a secret door. According to him, such physical arrangement

made it very easy for caregivers and administrators to manage children and effortlessly send them into the hospital.

In Evgeny's case, caregivers misused the physical arrangement of the orphanage in an unusual way. Children's cafeteria was in another building and because not all of the children were able to walk there, caregivers brought food in the containers from the cafeteria to their building. However, Evgeny reported that for a long period of time, the caregivers threw away food and left them hungry. Perhaps, if the cafeteria was in the same building this would not have happened.

These examples show how physical arrangement of the orphanages allowed for various hidden forms of control and manipulation over the children and by the children. However, implementing structural procedures, rules and regulations were not enough to maintain control as children misbehaved. The official documents of the orphanages, indeed, specified what to do in cases of misbehavior. In general, documents appealed to use oral or written warnings, and a complaint to an orphanage principle. The use of physical or psychological punishment *was strictly forbidden in the official documents*; in fact, children were *officially guaranteed respect and protection of any forms of violence and abuse*. In sharp contrast with official orphanage policies, throughout the stories one could observe that punishments and fear were at the front of maintaining order and control. Given that these practices were not written down in the official documents, I believe it was appropriate to talk about them within the framework of hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum is a term often discussed in relation to schools. It was introduced by Philip Jackson (1960) who distinguished a formal curriculum (i.e., curriculum that was reflected in official documents and statements), and hidden curriculum (i.e., curriculum which

was not reflected in official sources, yet played an important role in transmitting values, and set of disposition for children). While the term is often discussed within the framework of schools, I believe it was appropriate to talk about hidden curriculum within the framework of orphanages since it represented educational culture within which children socialized and learned. The analysis of the stories revealed two major components of hidden curriculum across the orphanages, namely the use of physical and psychological punishments.

Physical punishment. By and large, it became clear that use of physical punishment was at the forefront of maintaining the system of control. The adults policed and closely monitored children and publicly punished them for disobedience to prevent future cases of misbehavior. For example, Olga, who was not willing to keep silence, was severely beaten in front of others. According to her, caregivers wanted to *silence them* and spread fear so that children would blindly obey the adults.

The most shocking was the variety of punishments that were used across the different institutions: children were left with no food; they were closed in isolator boxes, sometimes for a long period of time; they were forced to do physical activities. Some forms of punishment were simply unimaginable like completely shaving boys and girls and coloring their head in green *zelenka*, keeping wet sheets (soaked in urine) on children until they dry out or keeping children naked in a freezing room. All of these punishments were, indeed, frightening. Yet, these horrific punishments did not stop there. The other two forms truly exceeded the limits of humanity, namely rape and psychiatric hospitals.

Dima and Kostia reported cases of rape by caregivers and orphanage employees. Both boys and girls became victims of sexual abuse. According to participants, administration and some of caregivers knew about the abuse, but silently supported it. In Dima's case, a pedophile

tortured children for his own pleasure, while in Kostia's case, rape was used as a way to punish children. Kostia himself became the target of such punishments. As he explained, rape had a great negative effect on his life, it broke him emotionally and also, according to him, influenced his sexual orientation.

In Dima's case pedophile was eventually fired and let free. It is difficult to imagine why administration did not call the police. Perhaps they were afraid of a potential scandal and the possibility of losing their jobs. It was hassle-free just to let go of this pedophile, to avoid "headache" of dealing with police and upcoming inspection that could threaten their jobs. Possibly that was the main explanation why administration decided to silence the case, let go of pedophile and sent a boy, the victim of pedophile, into the psychiatric hospital as if he was a psychopath and not his abuser.

Punishment by psychiatric hospital was very common as well. Across most of the stories, participants reported practices of sending misbehaving children into mental hospitals. From these places, children returned back as "zombies" or "vegetables." They were medicated to the point they could no longer talk and move. Dima recalled that many graduates who had been in psychiatric hospitals for three times were transferred to PNBI, which meant to be locked up for the rest of their lives in institutions where they no longer had any rights. In other words, such cruel practices had long-term profound effects on orphans' physical and psychological health, as well as on their overall lives and educational experiences. Such scenes of "zombies" and "vegetables" as well as the perspectives to be transferred to PNBI frightened children and, in fact, some were very afraid not to fall into the hands of psychiatrists. Various caregivers used this fear to manipulate and control children as they threatened orphans to be sent to mental

hospitals for slight disobedience. Indeed, their manipulation worked well as a number of orphans decided to conform to the rules and be silent just to avoid the severe punishment.

In some instances, caregivers were injecting Haloperidol and Chlorpromazine right in the orphanages, without the involvement of psychiatrists. The consequences were dire. Evgeny reported that one girl died after she was continuously injected with sedatives. Since she was constantly drugged and stayed in bed, all her muscles atrophied. Evgeny himself got almost addicted to these medications.

Personally for me, it was agonizing to listen to such stories, let alone to fully comprehend them. The early initial response was, of course, to question the humanity of caregivers and all adults that used such methods. However, I was aware of dangers of looking at the phenomenon from black and white perspective. I believe Anna's view complicated my initial simplistic understanding of what was happening. According to her, caregivers and administrators were sending children into mental hospitals to save their own positions. The administration was afraid to take responsibility for aggressive or misbehaving child who could potential hurt someone or do damage to the institution. If that happened, they could be punished and in serious cases even fired from their jobs. To protect their jobs and reputation, it was easier for them to send a child into the psychiatric hospital (similar to how they let go of the pedophile). In addition to the imagined fear of being punished by authorities, the fear of aggressive children might have been quite real for adults as aggression raised concerns over their own safety. Therefore, sending children into the mental hospital was their survival technique – the one with an ugly face and malodor aftertaste, yet rationalized within their own reality.

This perspective shifted my understanding of a simplistic view of administrators as monsters and heartless people to a more sophisticated vision of people who were navigating the

system in their own way. In lieu of this view, administrators and caregivers appeared before my eyes as vulnerable, even weak human beings who wanted to avoid punishments from authorities above and protect their jobs. Therefore, if one were to attempt to change the system of orphan care in Russia these ‘adult fears’ have to be taken into consideration.

Psychological violence. In addition to physical punishment, caregivers often resorted to psychological and emotional manipulations through the use of strong and offensive language. Across all of the stories, there were caregivers who humiliated children, calling them idiots, mentally retarded, trash, waste of time and so on. They appealed to children’s family histories and foretold their gloomy and meaningless futures. Children were told that they had only one path – down the hill, that they would end up like their parents in jail or simply that they would not achieve anything in their lives. I believe such statements had certain negative effect on orphans and impacted their motivation to study and strive for something better in their lives.

Yet, if we try to look one step ahead and attempt to understand why caregivers were foretelling gloomy futures for the children, it is possible that some of them did not mean to humiliate but rather wanted to give “objective” feedback to children. Given that some orphans did not study at all and were engaged in delinquent behavior, caregivers may have thought that if these trends continued then orphans would have less chances to get quality education and decent jobs. This understanding came to me during my own experience working in a public school in Russia. To my surprise, many teachers produced the discourses of failure and repeatedly tried to predict students’ gloomy futures of becoming a janitor (similar to the discourse at the orphanages) and called children idiots and failures. What was interesting though is the fact that many teachers were, in fact, trying to “wake up” children and motivate them to study in this way. They believed that if they scared students with a fate of janitors, perhaps they would come to

their senses and start to study well. Unfortunately, negative motivation hardly worked and children were losing the last glimpses of hope and desire to learn at my school.

Even though my own experience and experiences of orphans might be different, I believe that some caregivers were not necessarily trying to humiliate children, but were rather attempting to “wake them up” and motivate them to study hard and behave well. As my own experience showed and what participants reported themselves, such negative motivation did not help in any way. Instead, it only deepened the problem as children were getting angrier at caregivers and were more likely to reject the orphanage/schooling culture and misbehave.

Therefore, one of the problems might be that caregivers sincerely believed that their gloomy prediction, severe punishments were, in fact, for the betterment of children. They hoped that in this way, orphans would “wake up,” correct their behavior and study well. Unfortunately, this approach made orphans angrier and more rebellious, which, in turn, called for more severe punishments and harsher words of caregivers – perpetuating the cycle of violence and aggression.

By and large, not only physical and psychological punishments were wide spread across orphanages, but the ability to have control over children was praised by the administration. Reportedly, authorities were often aware of cruel methods that caregivers used, and silently supported them. Dima mentioned that his principle especially respected employees – tough former orphanage graduates, for their ability to have control over children. Also, he recalled that the strictest caregiver, of whom children were afraid to the point that they followed all of her orders, was considered a role model for the whole orphanage: her “pedagogical style” was praised because children in her group did not smoke, they walked in rows and followed all the

orders. As Dima concluded, her “miracles of pedagogy” resulted in disaster. The majority of all the graduates from that group became alcohol or drug addicts, subleased their apartments or died.

As a matter of fact, I realized that the fine line between punishment, humiliation, and pedagogy became blurred throughout stories. Were caregivers punishing children or teaching them a lesson, whether it was to obey, to follow rules, or to blindly listen to adults? If so, then how to capture this dynamic interplay between pedagogy and punishment? Bourdieu (1986) talked about symbolic violence present in schools as schools anticipated children with low cultural capital to fail. However, in Russian orphanages the violence was far from symbolic, it was real. It was literally translated into *pedagogy of violence* where both the mind and bodies of orphans were used as pedagogical terrains. After countless hours of thinking about the phenomenon, I came to a conclusion that pedagogy of violence was not a simple pedagogical tool that favored violence to educate orphans. In my view, pedagogy of violence was indicative of a much larger and deeper national tragedy that transcended the system of orphanhood, encompassing the larger population and a wider national context of the Russian society. Thus, I felt it was appropriate to elaborate in a greater detail on the concept of the pedagogy of violence at the end of the analysis of the orphanage apparatus as further discussion would greatly enrich the overall understanding of the concept (refer to p. 354).

Now, that I outlined the major features of *the fields* – namely, rigid and controlled environment, and hidden curriculum based on fear and punishment - can we begin to uncover larger meanings on what it meant to live in such environment? On one hand, the structural norms and regulations did potentially teach discipline and order, providing some sort of structure and foundation of life. Through these norms, one could have become accustomed to maintaining cleanness of the place, developing hygiene habits, or doing physical exercises. Yet, on the other

hand, these regulations and norms were introduced and delivered to children in authoritarian and top-down approach, leaving no opportunity for children to negotiate or contribute to the development of common rules and regulations. Such an approach contained hidden messages such as, “We are here to decide, and you are here to follow,” “We do not really care about your individual needs and preferences,” “You are no one here.” Certainly, such an approach did not educate children to engage in a democratic way and be co-creators of their lives, as children were objectified in the process, they were perceived as objects that were expected to follow and obey.

Such subject vs. object approach is not new for humanity. It has been well described by Freire (2000) who outlined the struggle between colonizers/oppressors and colonized/oppressed. While the contexts of Freire’s writing and the world of orphanhood in Russia are very different and distinct, I believe the discussion of the nature of the relationship between *the subject* and *the object* is quite telling. When people with power position themselves as subjects and single out “others” as objects, this creates unhealthy power dynamics, often leading to manipulation, objectification and dehumanization of a person. Some participants themselves recalled that caregivers perceived and treated children as if they were just materials. All of this contributed to the development of all types of inner dynamics, one of which is a development of different divisions: us (children) vs. them (adults – caregivers, administration). In the majority of the stories, participants clearly juxtaposed themselves to caregivers, with an exception of Anna’s case who sought refuge in adults. This opposition created tension, and it became a point of conflicts and struggle.

Next, the rigid and controlled environment, as well as the hidden curriculum based on fear and punishment generated two other themes, namely a lack of choice and a struggle for the identity. It became evident from the stories that on a structural level there was little to no liberty

for children to choose something for themselves. Most of the living arrangements were predetermined and set in stone for children to follow. There was a small degree of freedom to choose from in the area of extra-curricular activities (clubs) and at times the type or color of clothing. Also, children were paid a small stipend, which they could use to buy something they wanted. The rest was for the most part predetermined.

A lack of choice was not something that children were able to realize immediately as they perceived the reality around them as a norm, especially at a younger age. Only with age and experience they began to reflect upon their past and better understand the conditions they lived in. One of the bright examples is Anna's story. Only when she lived in a private school in London she realized that the orphanage did not provide any choice for her. Therefore, the freedom and choice was something shocking for her at the beginning of her life in England.

Other research studies, which looked at the importance of giving people a choice demonstrated that whenever participants were offered options it lead to positive results in the majority of cases. In a study of Dyer, Dunlap and Winterling (1990), students with severe autism demonstrated reduced level of aggression and other type of "problematic" behavior when they had a possibility to choose certain activities as a part of their studies. In another study, Patall, Cooper and Robinson (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of forty-one studies examining the relationship between choice and life/educational outcomes among children and adults. They came to a conclusion that whenever participants had an opportunity to choose their levels of intrinsic motivation, performance and competence greatly increased.

In our case, it might be suggested that because children did not have almost any choice it led to problematic behavior, aggression, low motivation, and partial or even complete denial of the system. I believe that choice is essential for humans as it has a profound liberating effect: it

makes people feel as if they are creators of their lives, they are the subjects. Yet, within the system of orphanages such an opportunity was rare if not extinct. Perhaps, that was one of the reasons why many participants recalled that orphanage graduates often made ill-informed, situational, and risky decisions in their adult lives, because they were not given opportunity to master an essential skill of making choices while at the orphanage.

A lack of choice further contributed to a struggle of developing, articulating, and maintaining personal identities. For instance, Maria reported that she felt sick to her stomach that they had to wear similar clothes or make beds a certain way. Whenever she put things her way, the caregivers immediately returned everything as it was supposed to be. She remembered how painful it was to be like everyone else. She said that the orphanage wiped out her unique identity very quickly and it was hard for her even to feel herself in her own body.

Also, Anna recalled that in Saint Petersburg, orphans referred to orphanages as “bators” – from the word “incubators” meaning that they were all the same. They were given similar clothes and it was a struggle for children to be unique. They had to search for ways not to wear clothes from the orphanage. Olga did not comment much on how similar policies affected their identities, yet she highlighted that frequently they were beaten, silenced and called “no one” by the caregivers. As a result, she felt as if she did not have any identity while at the orphanage. Only after leaving the institution she began to develop her unique personality.

We can also recall a case in Dima’s story, when a girl was severely beaten for keeping a make-up on her face after the performance. That was something special for her, but a caregiver interpreted it as a vulgar act and equated her with a prostitute. Thus, the orphanages were not only complicating the development of unique children’s identities, but they also condemned children’s attempts to stand out.

To conclude, the orphanages or *the fields* represented rigid and controlled environments that set in place a number of structural norms and regulations. Children were subject to monotonous daily routine and practices. They lived in environment where every hour was predetermined and every move was timed, with an exit from the orphanage strictly regulated. Orphanage policies controlled the division of children into groups, the amount of food they received, as well as their clothing and other provisions. The daily routine specified what and hows for children to follow. Physical setting and division into separate spaces within the orphanage allowed for easier control over children as most of the time orphans were in groups in one place at the same time. Overall, the physical setting of the orphanages allowed for the hidden forms of control and manipulation over and by the children.

These strict rules and regulations contributed to a choice-free environment that severely limited children in exercising their own will and agency. The lack of choice further contributed to low motivation among orphans and increased levels of delinquency and disobedience. In addition, the rigid environment created an atmosphere of threat and fear, inhibiting children to express their unique identities. Because they had no choice and because they had to wear similar clothing, eat the same food, and participate in the same activities, children struggled to find and express their unique personalities.

On top of rigid and strict environment, the hidden curriculum of orphanages was penetrated with fear and punishments that ranged in severity. From push-ups and beatings to rape and psychiatric hospitals, children had to navigate rough and challenging system of adult world of caregivers and administrators. The widespread practices of using physical and psychological punishments translated into pedagogy of violence where the minds and bodies of orphans were used as pedagogical terrains to teach obedience, conformity and silence. Moreover, orphanage

authorities silently supported the pedagogy of violence and caregivers' ability to control children was highly praised.

Meanwhile, caregivers and administrators had to navigate the system in their own ways to protect their own jobs and positions. They often engaged in appalling practices like sending children to mental hospitals or letting go of a pedophile and silencing the victims just to prevent potential investigations and scandals. Furthermore, some of caregivers believed that foretelling gloomy futures or using various forms of punishments were for a betterment of children. They wanted to “wake up” children so that they start to study well and behave. Despite their hopes and aspirations, the pedagogy of violence led to an increased level of disobedience and rejection of the system which, in turn, called caregivers to use harsher punishments and words to “wake orphans up,” reinforcing the cycle of violence and aggression. Overall, children had to navigate a rather difficult and violent system of adult world. Yet, that was not the only system that orphans had to go through. In the next section, I will look at the world that children created for themselves.

Children's world. Across all the stories, children developed their own sophisticated inner cultures and systems of navigation. While these systems were unique in many ways, there have been some common features. First, the majority of the participants reported *dedovshina* (hazing, bullying) in their institutions where the elder children were bullying the younger ones. Bullying took various forms, including beating, calling names, humiliating, taking possessions, forcing to clean or follow the commands from leaders. Evgeny, Olga, Anna, Dima, and Maria were all to a varying degree victims of *dedovshina*. Only Kostia reported that they did not have *dedovshina* in his orphanage. While it might be true, it might be also possible that because Kostia was a leader he did not really experience bullying himself. Since he recalled the cases when

children approached him for protection, it may be an indication that there were some unhealthy dynamics present at his orphanage as well. Similarly, Evgeny and Dima reported that when they became older they felt as if *dedovshina* disappeared. Did it really disappear or did the participants stop experiencing its presence because they became older themselves?

Nevertheless, *dedovshina* constituted a large part of children's culture of communicating with each other. Within this system, older children had more power and bossed around the younger ones. They taught the younger ones all the rules and regulations, thus, passing the cultural code from generation to generation. They taught how to behave, whom to respect, what to value and specified consequences if someone did not conform to their rules. Besides, children developed their own system of division and segregation: they had strong and weak ones, winners and losers, those who had possessions and those who did not. They established their own rules and regulations of punishment and rewards. To be respected, children had to have something that made them stand apart, whether it was physical strength, attractive appearance, charisma, or material possessions like a mobile phone. To gain the status of a leader, children often had to fight and demonstrate their physical abilities. Whoever won was immediately recognized and respected, while the opponent became the outcast. Perhaps, within this reality a child who wanted to be recognized as a human, or as a subject, had to be violent, had to fight. Was this fight for power or was this fight to be recognized as a human?

Indeed, this nature of a relationship might be similar to what Freire (2000) explained that for the oppressed to be a human meant to be an oppressor, "Their [the oppressed] ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity" (p. 45). For children to be respected meant to be in a position of strength and power, similar to a position that caregivers had over children. Such reality reminded the laws of natural selection, where the

fittest and the strongest survived and led. The physical power was such a strong factor that in Maria's orphanage all children were divided into strong and weak ones. All girls were immediately recognized as weak and required a strong boy to become a protection for them. For the protection, a girl was supposed to pay back in favors, namely sleep with him. Whoever rejected this cultural code, like Maria did, was hazed and harassed.

Indeed, children developed their own sub-systems of subordination and favors. Younger ones were by default expected to respect, obey and listen to the elders. Also, for some favors, children expected favors in return. One of the greatest examples was Evgeny's story about his path to reading and writing. When he became determined to learn how to read and write, he could not simply approach the younger boy and ask him to teach. Evgeny had to make sure that his plans conformed to the children's laws first. He approached his friends, who were leaders at the time, and informed about his decision. His friends felt as if it was the deepest humiliation to ask "the young" one for a favor. They perceived it as a sign of weakness and inappropriate behavior, because subordination was supposed to be preserved. Perhaps it was difficult for children to imagine such a scenario, similar to a case where a caregiver would approach an orphan and ask him/her for a favor or advice. It was something unthinkable within their reality. Caregivers would never "humiliate" themselves by consulting with children, thus, older children could not imagine that they would "humiliate" themselves by asking younger children for a favor. Nevertheless, Evgeny persisted and his friends agreed. Only after that, he approached the boy who taught him the alphabet in exchange for favors and protection.

In addition to a culture of *dedovshina* across all the contexts, children condemned snitching. It was a taboo for orphans. The snitch was considered a traitor and an ultimate enemy. Children were punishing snitches very hard and did not respect them. One of the extreme

examples was in Evgeny's story, where children did not tolerate snitching against caregivers who beat children or left them without food: even when a caregiver broke Evgeny's leg, he did not say a word.

Why was it so important for children to prosecute snitches and have a taboo on snitching? Was it to avoid punishments from caregivers or to maintain the status quo within their own children's establishments? Indeed, strong prohibition to snitch can be viewed as one mechanism to maintain the status quo. A child who was harassed by other children had no other choice but to rely on him/herself or to search support among other children. Given that they could not ask caregivers for help as it would ultimately lead to increased levels of bullying, navigating children's world was even more difficult than the adult world. If an orphan had a conflict with a caregiver, s/he could seek support among children and at times from higher authorities. Yet, within children's world a child had limited options to where s/he could turn for help.

Another question to consider with regard to children's inner culture was how they developed such a relatively sophisticated and robust model of relationships? Can it be that they translated and partly copied the model from caregivers and implemented it among themselves? Adult's subject vs. object approach, perhaps, translated into the system of strong vs. weak, into the system where the younger children had to obey the older ones. The elements of punishments, physical and psychological violence of caregivers became a part of children's world.

The participants themselves commented on the relationship between adults' attitudes towards children and children's attitudes towards their peers. Some of the participants recalled that because they were surrounded by violence, they became violent themselves. Also, in the orphanage, which Dima described as a paradise, where caregivers were kind and gentle, children were kind and gentle as well. Therefore, it is likely that children internalized, reinterpreted, and

translated into their own language the adult model that they experienced first-hand living at their orphanages. Certainly, on a larger scale, one may describe the relationship between adults and children at orphanages as *dedovshina*. Similarly, children (the younger ones) were expected to obey and blindly follow caregivers (the elder ones). Thus, it seems likely that children internalized the way of communication that divided people into the subject/object and strong/weak, letting the adult model of relationships to guide their everyday practices.

By and large, the stories suggested that children developed and maintained their own cultures and systems of navigating the reality. The culture of *dedovshina* with its system of ranks, favors, corporate punishments, taboos on snitching and so forth made it quite a difficult environment to live in. Children had to navigate not only the challenging adult world but also constantly negotiate their status among their peers.

Now that I reviewed three major layers of reality that orphans had to navigate -society at large, orphanage/adult world, children's world – I will shift to a discussion on the systems of school and orphans' educational experiences.

School. The schooling system was another layer of reality that children had to learn to navigate. In fact, educational experiences greatly varied across the orphanages. The first structural factor that had a great influence on the quality of education and educational experiences was found in the type of institution that children lived in. Four of our participants resided in orphanages for children with various physical and psychological needs. All of them had carried in the past and some continue to carry the status of being “mentally retarded.” Their institutions were providing education *seemingly* suitable for their level of development. It is important to highlight *seemingly* because this research showed that many children were very capable, smart and talented and were able to un/officially prove otherwise. Two other

participants lived in an orphanage for children with “normal cognitive and physical development.” Unlike the first group, they attended regular public schools.

How did children’s educational experiences and the quality of education vary depending on a type of an institution? Evgeny’s case was truly outstanding in this regard. At his institution, children were not provided any education. They were growing up without an understanding that reading and writing constituted basic literacy skills. All their daily routine was focused around sleep, play, and food. Only when Evgeny’s world collided with a world of his first love, a daughter of the caregiver, who asked him whether he could read and write, Evgeny for the first time began to question his experiences at the orphanages. Needless to say, when his first love rejected him, he became furious. He was deeply offended and hurt, yet at that moment he made a commitment to learn how to read and write. His anger became a motivational force for Evgeny to learn.

His teacher became a younger boy who prior to the orphanage lived in a family and finished the first grade at a public school. This boy’s major expertise and knowledge was the alphabet. He taught Evgeny the ABCs and Evgeny himself intuitively began to connect letters into syllabi and words. That was a life-changing and overwhelming experience for Evgeny. In his words, he could not even imagine that from a number of letters the whole new world may open up. He started to read everything he could find and immersed himself into the world of reading. When the principle heard that Evgeny learned to read, he could not believe it and signed up Evgeny for attending a public school. A teacher visited Evgeny at the orphanage and taught him various school subjects. However, Evgeny was not fond of that type of learning. While he enjoyed reading, he thought that lessons with a teacher were useless, as if she was wasting his time. He wanted to play and spend time with his friends rather than learning.

Nevertheless, as time passed not only Evgeny but also his friends began to notice changes in him as a result of reading and learning. He adopted new words and phrases, and shared his knowledge with his peers. Eventually, Evgeny wanted everyone to know how to read and write. His story about selling a Bible and buying pens and notebooks for children to start his own classroom was truly inspirational. He established his own classroom and started teaching children. It was not an easy task because children were very different and had special needs. However, Evgeny did not give up, he searched for methods to teach and work with them. For example, he discovered that some children lived by their instincts and they learned best when something was shown to them rather than spoken. In fact, one can say that Evgeny was intuitively training himself in areas of special education.

It was challenging to simply find proper words to fully comprehend his story and experience. In an institution that did not offer *any* educational opportunities, a thirteen-year-old boy learned to read and began to teach others. It looked like a story from a book, or a movie, yet it was the reality Evgeny lived. I view his whole journey to education as magical and inspirational. Evgeny created a space for learning in a place that was hostile to any type of learning and development.

Kostia, Dima and Olga studied at the orphanages where they were offered a “correctional educational program,” a program with simpler curriculum and tasks. Kostia started to miss school very early; therefore, he did not really comment extensively on his educational experiences. From what he recalled they were offered classes, yet learning was not interesting for him. He initially liked some lessons, but after an argument with a teacher in physical education he started to miss school even more and spent his time in the kitchen helping cooks. As a result of his educational experiences, Kostia can barely read and write at the age of thirty.

By rejecting the orphanage culture and being rebellious, Kostia himself contributed to low-quality educational experiences. As he told in the story, caregivers were attempting to return him back to school, yet he did not listen and even urged other children to give up on schooling. He described himself as a leader who was not afraid of anyone and who was ready to fight with caregivers, if needed. I believe that at some point the adults truly gave up on Kostia. Perhaps, he was perceived as a burden and to get rid of him faster, they pushed him through the educational system: they let him jump one grade so that he could graduate from the orphanage earlier. It was fascinating that caregivers and administrators used official instruments to manipulate the system to their own advantage to eliminate the presence of a problematic teenager.

Olga, who in general was always reserved, summarized her educational experiences in the following terms. She had an impression that teachers simply had to show up *dlya galochki* (for the sake of appearance), shout at them and the lessons were over. She also remembered that they were given simplified and unchallenging tasks. As a result, learning for her was not interesting at all, it was boring. To reflect the dire quality of education they were given, she concluded that most likely the graduates of correctional orphanages would barely be able to read and write at the age of nineteen. Given that Kostia, for example, was a graduate of a similar school, it might be concluded that Olga's statement was not exaggerated.

Overall, when it came to describing educational experiences, many participants, including Olga, referred to the concept of education "*dlya galochki*." In the subsection below, I will look in more detail at this concept, well illustrated by Dima who described (1) a simplified and unchallenging curriculum, (2) teachers' low expectations, (3) fictitious learning, and (4) surrogate results that, in fact, gave orphans very low-quality of education or no education at all.

Simplified curriculum. At Dima’s correctional orphanage, they were often given one grammatical rule or one poem, or text to read for six lessons straight. Dima recalled that many children learned everything during the first lesson, yet their teacher did not move on to something else. At first, according to Dima, children tried to help each other so that they could move along more quickly. However, it did not help. The teachers strictly followed their correctional program and allocated as much time as it was prescribed by the curriculum. When Dima and other children realized what was going on and that no one was really interested in teaching them, they gave up on learning, and started to miss classes or not engage during lessons’ activities. The learning materials seemed very irrelevant and simplistic. Dima himself did not understand how this knowledge could help in their lives, thus, he and his friends began to fully or partly reject the school curriculum. As a result, they were behind even in their correctional academic program.

Low-expectations. In addition to oversimplified curriculum, Dima recalled how teachers used offensive language and downgraded children’s abilities during the classes. All Dima’s Russian lessons started with words, “You are all retards! You are idiots and waste of time!” It was clear that teachers across various contexts were setting very low-expectations for orphans and did not expect much of them. As academic literature repeatedly showed, teachers’ expectations had a great impact on students’ academic performance (Rist, 1970; Brophy & Good, 1970; Jussim, 1989; Sobkin & Fomichenko, 2015; and others). In particular, teachers’ high expectations for students learning and success led to students’ increased levels of motivation and better educational outcomes. On the contrary, low-teachers expectations were associated with poor academic performance and low-motivation to study.

Fictitious education. At Dima's orphanage lessons were often faked. When some of the teachers were on a sick leave some of the orphanage staff were taking on their duties. As such, even some of janitors or security personnel substituted teachers – they engaged children in conversations about life or allowed them to watch TV during the lessons. Sometimes orphans' actual teachers let them watch TV during the class time. At the end of the semester or academic year, students took tests where they randomly marked multiple-choice responses without really knowing the answers just to imitate the learning activity. Teachers gave them satisfactory grades and seemingly everyone was happy: teachers had a free time and children were given opportunity for entertainment. In reality, very little or no academic learning really took place.

Surrogate results. The fictitious education often resulted in surrogate results. Many teachers closed their eyes and gave satisfactory grades to children just to push them through the system and, presumably, avoid dealing with them for a long time. Also, Dima's school statistics showed better and better results each year, despite fabricated and surrogate education. According to Dima, no one really cared. Teachers and administrators were more interested in showing off their own professionalism, and not in children's real knowledge.

Through Dima's narration of his educational experiences it became evident how teachers and administrators were navigating the system in their own way. All of them were required to write reports, develop lessons-plans and engage in other bureaucratic activities. To fulfill their tasks, for example, the principle was not teaching music lessons, because she was busy writing reports. Other teachers were doing paperwork during the lessons, while children were learning one grammatical rule for six hours or watching TV.

Despite the situation where teachers were seemingly more focused on fulfilling bureaucratic requirements rather than engaging in actual teaching, teachers and administrators

were interested in demonstrating excellent results – high academic performance. I believe the reputation of an orphanage dependent on it. Yet, how to demonstrate great academic results in a reality where, on the one hand, teachers were loaded with paperwork, and, on the other, students had low motivation to study?

Within this reality teachers found a way of surviving and navigating the system by faking the results and the whole learning process. Teachers as well as administrators built a beautiful deceptive façade where on the surface everything seemed pretty; yet, on the inside, the system was not only rotten, it was also poisonous. Children did not receive proper education and, as Dima recalled, many graduates ended up in PNBI just because they did not know some things.

Listening to Dima’s story, I could not ignore the resemblance of his educational experiences with the writings of Freire (2000) about the “banking concept of education”:

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he-justifies his own existence. (p. 72)

In fact, many teachers perceived orphans as empty and good-for-nothing containers and were not even eager to fill them with knowledge. Many teachers considered children’s low motivation and resentment towards education as their inability to learn. Possibly, teachers developed a strong belief that “these containers” were simply impossible to fill, and, perhaps, this idea contributed to teachers’ practices of imitating learning activities and producing

surrogate results on a larger scale. If children were incapable of learning, why should teachers try hard?

This led to the emergence of a self-perpetuating cycle. Teachers were giving children simplistic and unchallenging curriculum, which children did not like or were not interested in. As a result, they started to partly or completely reject the surrogate curriculum. In return, teachers simplified the curriculum even further, so that children would “learn at least something;” yet, children’s motivation decreased as well. Over time, teachers gave up or came to a conclusion that children were uneducable and started to fake learning activities and produce surrogate results, thus, corresponding to the concept of education *dlya galochki*.

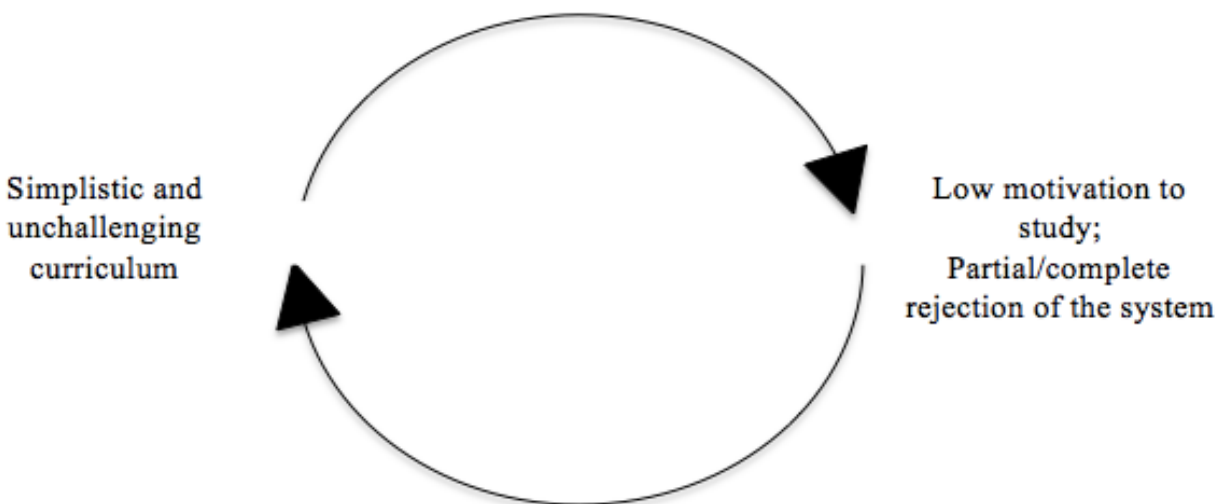


Figure 3. The self-perpetuating cycle of low-motivation and unchallenging curriculum.

Anna and Maria went to regular public schools, which enrolled both children from the orphanages and children living in families. For Maria school was a place to socialize. At the time, she did not like learning, it was boring for her. But she enjoyed the company of her friends. In her own words, orphanage life was monotonous and gray but at school she had a chance to meet children outside the system. It was a place to enrich and brighten up her life.

She recalled a number of good and understanding teachers, yet the majority of educators were singling out orphans as “others” and treating them badly. Orphans were equated with someone delinquent and dirty, and attitudes towards them were not positive. Maria told that if something was stolen at their school orphans were immediately to blame. Nobody cared to find out the truth. Therefore, Maria as well as other orphans navigated a system where school environment was hostile to them and set low-expectations.

But was the school capable of boosting social and cultural capitals of orphans? Of all study participants, only two attended public schools. While Maria liked to hang out with her friends at the school, she did not establish long-term and trustworthy relationships. She had one best friend who at the end betrayed her. Therefore, Maria felt that the school did not give her anything substantial, neither social connections (social capital) nor quality of education (cultural capital).

Anna’s case was extraordinary within the landscape of educational experiences of the study participants. She was studying at a quite prestigious school in Saint Petersburg. From an early age, she was motivated to study. She could not explain exactly where this motivation came from, but she assumed that it was somehow related to her experiences living with her mother and her friends before coming to the orphanage. Somehow the ideas that education was important and that it could help her in the future were in Anna’s mind. Besides, she had a strong belief that she had to be a good person and belong to the system.

For Anna, the orphanage opened up extraordinary opportunities that she most likely would not have had if she lived with her mother. She was selected to participate in an exchange program to study for seven months in a private school in England. That was an immense transformational experience for her. Her worldview collapsed and was broken into pieces – and

then reassembled in new ways – when she experienced high standards of living and high quality of education. She was able to learn the English language and adopt British mannerism and etiquette. After returning from England she became incredibly polite and respectful to others. She fell in love with reading and became committed to getting quality education. The full impact of this life-changing trip is still unfolding before Anna’s eyes and her gratitude towards this experience grows year by year.

Furthermore, she became a participant in international exchange programs and visited Scotland and Germany. She won the National Olympics in English language – a very prestigious and extraordinary achievement and was able to be admitted to the prestigious university in Saint Petersburg on full scholarship. Thus, Anna’s orphanage and school provided her with opportunities that greatly enriched her life, and developed social as well as cultural capitals.

Now, let’s look at Anna’s school more closely and discuss experiences of her peers. Her school was special in at least two ways. First, it attempted to combine orphanage and school into one experience with an aspiration to close gap between two social groups and provide them a common space for socialization. Second, it was not a low-achieving public school - it was a prestigious school with challenging curriculum and well-established international contacts.

Anna described that in general children from the orphanage stood out within the school landscape. First, they tended to study worse and second, they united in groups and were not eager to immerse themselves in a dominant schooling culture. One of the reasons why orphans studied poorer, according to Anna, was challenging curriculum and a lack of motivation. As Anna suggested, orphans were not interested to learn because of troubling experiences prior to their lives at the orphanage. She noted that children who had traumatizing experiences prior to the orphanages were less stable as they exhibited delinquent behavior and were prone to

aggressive and violent conduct. Yet, some children had low motivation because caregivers and teachers often downgraded children's abilities, set low-expectations and eventually children internalized these beliefs and began to reject the dominant schooling culture.

Also, some orphans tended to stay in groups, especially if there were five or more orphans in one class. As Anna described, orphans created their own circles and were not interested in communicating with their classmates. Thus, they were often separated from the rest of the children and the school culture. In addition, some children and teachers singled orphans out, and there were occasional conflicts between orphans and children from families.

Similarly to what other participants described, Anna mentioned that many teachers closed their eyes on orphans' low-achievement and lack of motivation, and gave fake satisfactory grades just to move them along. One of the reasons might be because teachers gave up on orphans and sincerely did not know what to do with them. In fact, Anna problematized the situation by demonstrating that it was, indeed, difficult for teachers to work with unmotivated and delinquent students who could show up to class after drinking and smoking. In Anna's view, teachers were not professionally prepared to work with these children. As a matter of fact, Anna continuously raised a question of teacher competencies and discussed that many teachers were not professionally prepared to work with difficult teenagers, even though they had pedagogical degrees. Perhaps it is one of the areas of research that could be developed further.

Another explanation for why teachers gave fake grades might be because teachers did not want to take extra burden on themselves and deal with the same underperforming students for a long time. If teachers failed students, then they had to retain them in the same grade and see them again. Relating to my own experience of working in a Russian public school, I often heard teachers dreaming about the day when "difficult" students would finally graduate from the

school and leave. Teachers were eager to give such “difficult” students satisfactory grades just to get rid of them faster. This is similar to how the orphanage administration pushed Kostia through the system and let him jump one grade.

Thus, a practice of “moving students along” has not been restricted to children from the orphanages, but is also characteristic of a wider education system in Russia. In my own experience of teaching in the public school, the principle unofficially forbade teachers to fail students, because it negatively affected school rankings and prestige. Whenever teachers wanted to fail students, our principle was eager to punish teachers and ordered them to solve the situation quickly and pass students anyway. Within this reality, many teachers did not want to deal with the principle and face extra hassle. Instead, they closed their eyes and passed under-performing students with minimum grades.

To complicate the picture even further, it is important to briefly outline a broader context of teaching at a public school in Russia. The majority of teachers in public schools take a lot of hours and extra responsibilities to get higher salary. In my school, my *monthly* salary was (\$120) for eighteen lessons a week. In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, salaries might be higher, but still low compared to living expenses (similar situation can be applied to caregivers at the orphanages, as their salaries remain low and require them to take many working hours and even multiple positions to receive higher salary). Thus, to survive, teachers take at times thirty and more lessons a week, teaching hundreds of students at a time. No wonder that very quickly teachers (as well as caregivers) become overwhelmed with their workload, exhausted and professionally burned out.

Within this challenging reality, where teachers had to navigate their profession and provide for their families, it was unrealistic for many of them to find individual approach. They

simply did not have time and energy to allocate attention to individual cases, let alone the “problematic” ones. To survive the heavy workload, teachers closed their eyes and gave students satisfactory passing grades. Of course, many students soon became aware of this practice and stopped studying. Like Anna said, why would they bother if teachers pass them anyway?

Therefore, the whole complex of factors contributed to a phenomenon where some orphans (and according to Anna’s story, the majority of them) did not study at all and developed a habit of doing nothing, yet getting results. Coupled with orphanage practices, where orphans were provided with everything they needed as they were fed, given clothes, and money, such treatment contributed to an issue where orphanage graduates were expecting privileges while doing nothing in return: neither working, nor studying. Perhaps, this habit was formed as a result of the rejection of orphanage and schooling cultures, it was the sign of rebellion; or it reflected the expectation that everybody, including teachers “owed” the orphans.

To conclude, the study participants had to navigate different educational systems, largely defined by the type of institutions they lived in. Some orphans were not exposed to any type of learning and had to create opportunities for themselves to learn and develop. Others were subject to “correctional school curriculum,” which was largely described as education *dlya galochki*. This concept included simplified and unchallenging curriculum, low teacher expectations, fictitious and surrogate education that all together negatively affected orphans’ motivation to study. The results of this type of education were in general very poor. Graduates were barely able to read and write after their educational experiences at the orphanages.

The participants who attended general public schools were exposed to a regular school curriculum. Yet, many were not interested to study for a number of reasons: past troubling experiences to the orphanage, low teacher expectations, uninteresting curriculum and overall the

rejection of the orphanage/school system. It was also reported that orphans were often pushed through the system with fake minimum passing grades because teachers were either disinterested or did not have enough time and energy to work with underachieving and low-motivated students. Orphans knew about it and abused the system to their own advantage - sometimes by stopping to study all together and knowing that teachers would give them satisfactory grades in any case.

Also, participants reported that in their public schools both children and teachers generally singled out orphans to various degrees. In Maria's case, the attitude was very ruthless and rude and in Anna's case it was not as straightforward: some teachers tried hard to help orphans succeed, while others closed their eyes or gave up on children. Nevertheless, Anna's story showed that children living in the same orphanage and going to the same school may, in fact, be exposed to substantially different experiences. While Anna was able to significantly draw advantages for her personal growth and development, many others did not advance in their education. Follow-up studies could potentially clarify why some orphans succeeded and others failed within presumably the same orphanage and educational system.

Alternative agendas and subversive agents. Following the discussion of four major levels of reality, which orphans had to navigate while living at the orphanage, and having outlined some of the dominant factors and actors, it is essential to discuss alternative agendas and "subversive agents" which reflect a more kind and humane way of working with orphaned children. In fact, the study participants tended to remember these "different" adults – teachers and caregivers - with a degree of warmth, gratitude and respect. In other words, there were caregivers and teachers who represented different views and alternatives agendas within the systems of orphan care. Across all the stories, children recalled a few adults who treated them

well, with kindness and respect. Children largely sympathized with these subversive agents, yet for the most part other caregivers and administrators detested them and eventually a great number of these individuals were fired or forced to leave.

One of the brightest examples was a teacher at Dima's orphanage who told children that they were not idiots, that they were just "pedagogically abandoned." She taught a more stimulating curriculum, despite the official requirement to follow a correctional program. This teacher engaged children outside the classroom and taught them essential life skills. She organized all the events and activities on her own, without conforming to the official curriculum and documents. These activities were part of her personal hidden curriculum. Despite her useful initiatives, Dima recalled that the principal often forbade her to held educational activities that did not comply with their correctional program. Also, other teachers believed that she was soliciting "wrong" things from children, and, therefore, considered her insane. This teacher was very attentive to orphans' needs and whenever they asked her to lend them money, she helped. Yet, some orphans misused her kindness and bought alcohol or cigarettes with the money she gave them. As a result, she was forced to resign three times and finally she left the orphanage.

Evgeny depicted a very emotional and bright portrait of Doctor who was fighting against injustice, who stood up for children's rights and was trying to make changes for the better. He was openly confronting caregivers who treated children poorly. As a matter of fact, his responses to injustice were very strong (and perhaps excessive) and after he brought a revolver into the orphanage, the system had a strong reason to fire him.

Similarly, Maria and Anna talked about teachers and caregivers who were sincerely invested in taking care of children or teaching them real knowledge. As Anna described, one of her favorite caregivers finally resigned because it was difficult for her to work at the orphanage:

both because she was upset with the relationship among caregivers and administration, and also because children often used her kind attitude to their own advantage. Anna described cases when this caregiver let children go outside the orphanage, yet many got drunk, smoked, went to a night club or escaped from the institution. Of course, the authorities punished her for such cases. Eventually, she became disappointed with her work, as she partly felt betrayed by children, but also because a feeling of hopelessness started to develop in her. As Anna described, many caregivers who came with good intentions eventually got disappointed because they did not know how to work with and help difficult teenagers who lacked motivation and engaged in delinquent activities. Such caregivers felt increasingly hopeless and eventually left the orphanage.

While acknowledging the power and inspiration of some individual teachers and caregivers who defied the system – by producing positive experiences for children that contested the dominant discourses of failure – there were only a few such subversive agents and in most of the cases they had to leave the system. Such phenomenon truly intrigued me. Why did people who truly cared for children have to leave the system? While follow-up studies could seek answers to this question, I can propose some possible explanations.

First, the stories of the subversive agents showed how challenging it was to survive within their own system of caregivers and administrators. Because subversive practices were in sharp contrast with the dominant ones, the individuals who acted differently automatically were perceived as “the other” as they did not fit into a dominant culture of orphan care. To some degree, these subversive individuals became the black sheep of the system. Their mere existence created a conflict within the system that unintentionally urged all the caregivers to question either their own practices or the subversive ones. In other words, caregivers were faced with a

question, “If an individual diverging from the system is doing it right, then does it mean that I am doing something wrong?” I believe it is always burdensome to challenge one’s own practices, especially when the majority of other caregivers were supportive of punishment and strict discipline. Thus, by witnessing respectful attitude towards orphans, some caregivers might have felt a cognitive dissonance that urged them to constantly justify their aggression towards children and rationalize subversive practices as insane and erroneous.

It might be also suggested that all the new caregivers were expected to conform to the overall culture of orphan care, namely a culture based on fear, punishment and discipline. Once again, I may recall my own experience working in a public school in Russia, a school context that also idealized a culture of obedience and discipline. From the very first day, experienced teachers encouraged me and other young teachers to shout at children, to keep everyone in an “iron grip,” and establish strict discipline from day one, “Otherwise, students will walk all over you.” While I knew the consequences of such an approach and did not adopt it, I observed many young teachers after a week or so already shouting at children and using instruments of fear to control their classrooms. To my greatest surprise, by adopting such an approach, these young teachers were accepted not only by teaching-staff, but also by children. While I, a somehow “subversive” teacher, who entered a classroom with the ideas of mutual respect and children-centered learning, was questioned by both teachers and tested by children. Similar to how Dima and his friends were bullying young teachers, my students challenged me from day one. In their views, my kindness was a sign of weakness, a sign that they no longer need to study. Why? Because from an early age, students in most public schools were accustomed to study under the imagined or a quite real “whip.” The fear of being punished, prosecuted, called to the principal’s office were the “motivations” for many to study. Within this reality, they viewed subversive

teachers like me, as well as the subversive agents in orphans' stories, as weak and often abused their kindness for their own advantage.

It took me almost a year to explain and stick to my agenda before children began to see my subversive approach not as weakness but as strength. While children eventually understood me, many teachers continued to be suspicious of my teaching as for them I was not teaching students, but having fun. Nevertheless, drawing from my experiences and from the stories of the study participants, one may conclude that new caregivers who entered the system of orphan care were expected to confirm to the practices of experienced caregivers. If they did not, they were singled-out and prosecuted. Of course, within such a hostile work environment it was challenging to work and maintain subversive agendas. Not only there was a constant pressure from caregivers to become like everyone else, also children tended to disvalue subversive approaches and abuse them to their own advantage. As was previously witnessed from the orphans' stories, children valued strength – both physical and psychological. Therefore, it is quite understandable why subversive caregivers sometimes faced betrayal and misunderstanding from children: children were raised in a reality where strength, punishment, fear, and discipline were hated, yet tolerated and perhaps even respected. Thus, one may say that there was a pressure from both caregivers and children to adopt strict policies and tolerate harassment.

In this context, subversive actors had three major options: (1) continue their way by potentially facing hatred from staff, and, perhaps eventually gaining the trust of children; (2) give up their values and become like other caregivers; and (3) preserve their values and leave the system.

Following the first path, like Doctor or a teacher from Dima's story who were forced to resign multiple times, required the strength and bravery to work in intimidating environment and

carry their mission despite the overall hostility. The second path seemed to be quite “typical,” as Anna recalled many caregivers at the end became like everyone else. In fact, some caregivers became victims of the system themselves: not only caregivers influenced the system, but the system influenced the caregivers. The relationship was dialectical and should be analyzed as such. It was not as straightforward to say that all the caregivers were monsters and creators of violence and abuse, the system made them adopt abusive practices.

The last path was also prevalent in the orphans’ stories and many caregivers left because they could not cope with the injustice and pain that prevailed in the system. Indeed, Anna, who developed a theory of an evolution of a caregiver, nicely described the complexity of a “caregiver phenomenon.” According to her, the majority of caregivers accepted job offers at the orphanage with good intentions and many of them did try hard to make a positive difference in children’s life. However, children who have previously been accustomed to aggression and violence often perceived this attempt as weakness, took everything for granted or caused problems to caregivers, betraying their trust. In response, caregivers, who got into the system with the desire to help and change the system, were overwhelmed by the amount of violence, pain, and betrayal. This massive agony surrounded subversive caregivers in its totality, leaving them powerless to fight the system alone and forcing them to either accept the pain and become a part of this seemingly endless suffering or run away from the system before it destroyed them.

To conclude, the stories revealed subversive agents that attempted to work with children in a kinder and more humane way and produced alternative uplifting and motivational experiences. Their subversive approaches were often misunderstood and challenged by caregivers and administrators who praised punishment, discipline and obedience. Yet, not only adults, but also children did not value and often misused kind approaches to their own advantage,

thus forcing caregivers to adopt stricter policies or leave the system of orphan care. Indeed, caregivers were expected to follow the established culture within the institution and they faced pressure to be like everyone else. Not only caregivers were influencing the system, but the system had a strong influence on them as well.

Overall, the narratives of subversive agents demonstrated the challenges and obstacles for possible change within the system of orphan care. The stories revealed how the system resisted and attempted to eliminate agents and agendas that did not comply with established law and order. Within this reality, one may ask a question on how can subversive agents succeed to achieve a long-lasting positive change so that the dominant culture of violence turns into humane and harmonious living?

By and large, not only did alternative agents attempted to challenge the status quo within the system, children themselves exhibit resistance to the system to varying degrees. The orphans' resistance, in fact, was one of the most significant findings of the study. Previous research on orphanhood in Russia documented various cases of abuse within the system of orphan care, yet the discussion on how children engaged with the abuse was merely absent. Orphans were depicted as passive victims of the system, as objects of abuse. The stories, on the contrary, demonstrated constant acts of resistance and activism.

Resistance. Acts of resistance took place everywhere, but the heart of resistance was mainly found on the levels of orphanage, children's world and school. Given that children did not fully engage with the society at large while living at the orphanage, the stories did not yield enough data to discuss orphans' resistance at that particular level. Therefore, I directly turn to a discussion of orphans' resistance at other levels.

Resistance at an orphanage level. We saw that across all the orphanages there were rigid regulations put in place and pedagogy of violence prevailed. Yet, how did children respond to such practices? Did they take them for granted? Did they challenge or redefine them? In other words, were children passive recipients or active agents?

The stories showed that there was no one clear answer. Children employed different strategies whether to conform to the rules, negotiate or fully reject them. Anna was perhaps one of the most conforming participants. She respected the rules and always attempted to follow them in order to avoid causing any troubles for herself or others. Yet, her conformity was not equal to passivity. As the matter of fact, from an early age she took matters into her own hands and was able to directly influence her life and reality. For instance, she asked to be transferred into another group, she asked to be signed up for the art school, she insisted that the school transfers her to grade eight after she returned from England. All these examples showed that while conforming to the rules she was able to navigate within the existing structure and have her personal stance.

Maria reported that at the beginning she also conformed to the rules, but later she began to live on her own terms. She was challenging the system by placing clothes her way, running away from the orphanage or speaking up, yet her acts of resistance mostly fell within certain acceptable limits. In other words, she was challenging the system, but not to the point of intensified and open confrontation with the caregivers. Maria found a space where she could still exercise her own will and agency, without serious consequences of being punished by caregivers.

Olga did not share examples when she intentionally rejected the rules, but she often felt the need to express her opinion about rules, practices and regulations. She was attempting to

challenge the status quo and speak up, yet the system was trying to silence her over and over again. Caregivers were publicly punishing and beating her in front of other children. Despite it, Olga continued to be resistant to orphanage practices and be punished for her resistance. As she recalled, she often had bruises, bumps and her hair was frequently pulled while she lived at the orphanage.

In Evgeny's case, caregivers were remotely involved with children. Given poor funding and support from the government, orphans had to deal with caregivers' aggression, frustration, ignorance and lack of care and support. In this reality, children did not blindly submerge themselves to circumstances. In fact, they demonstrated numerous acts of resistance and active involvement. To address the issue of caregivers' ignorance, orphans themselves decided to take care of younger children: they woke them up, fed and dressed them, spent time at the playroom - they performed everything caregivers were supposed to do. From the story, orphans' motivation to care for younger children was twofold. First, they felt it was unjust to leave younger children alone, because they could not take care of themselves. Older orphans felt obliged to intervene and help them. On the other hand, caregivers promised partial freedom in exchange for doing their work. Thus, children negotiated the terms of existence with caregivers and found a way on how to co-exist together in their common reality.

Dima's story showed the complexity of resistance as well. He demonstrated one bright case of public resistance and activism. When they were tired of injustice caused by one of their caregivers, they decided to call her for justice themselves. They collected evidence, invited witnesses, backed their arguments with Convention on the Rights of the Child and federal law. They also sought support among orphanage staff and among volunteers who visited orphanage. They demonstrated a very organized and well-thought act of resistance. Their action was met

with anger by the system, but at the end children won. This victory had a wow-factor, and perhaps at that moment Dima realized that he can be an active participant of his life and the lives of people around him.

While all five previous participants either did not challenge the system at all or challenged it to a smaller degree, Kostia seemed to be on a complete rejection spectrum. He was rebellious and constantly fought at the orphanage with caregivers as well as children. In his understanding, he always fought for justice, he never fought just for the sake of fighting. His resistance took a provocative tone as he was dating adults and caregivers, smoked, drank alcohol, and experimented once with drugs. He said that “he ran the orphanage” and despite constant conflicts with caregivers he was not afraid of anything. He often demonstrated his resistance, even though caregivers were sending him to psychiatric hospital for his acts of disobedience.

Overall, the stories demonstrated great tensions between children and adults, between orphans and the system of orphanhood. Children were not passive recipients of the orphanage culture, they constantly fought for their own stance, they attempted to redefine and challenge certain practices and have their voices heard. The forms of resistance took numerous shapes and forms, whether it was a conflict with a caregiver, escape from the orphanage, cases of children’s revenge, well-thought and planned acts of resistance, or cases of orphans doing things their own ways. Orphans found ways to exercise their own will and agency, challenge the status quo and go against the rules and regulations. In most of the cases, resistance was met with anger by the system, and the acts of resistance were viewed as cases of misbehavior and misconduct. They were met with harsher punishments, which in turn, evoked stronger resistance, escalated tensions and aggression from both sides: children and adults.

Resistance at a children level. Given that children had to navigate not only the harsh world of adults, but also the ruthless world of their peers, it is not surprising that there were a lot of tensions at this level as well. Orphans had to employ different strategies to survive and navigate through the world of their peers. For example, Maria did not confirm to orphans' rules to seek protection from a boy and sleep with him. She was resistant to such a tradition. In response, children were beating and punishing her, but she never gave up. She fought for her own dignity and safety. She also developed creative survival strategies, like wearing two or more bras and using malodorous pads to be protected from sexual harassment.

Dima and Evgeny both reported that they had some issues with older peers due to *dedovshina*, but at the same time they had a stable circle of friends with whom they felt comfortable. While we observed great tensions and resistance between adults and children, it was interesting that in most cases children were less resilient against their older peers. In most cases, they had to obey and conform to them (for example, when elders asked to clean floors, or placed girls on top of boys, etc.), even though internally orphans hated and condemned *dedovshina*, they did little about it. They believed that any acts of resistance (whether it was to snitch and complain to caregivers, or start a confrontation themselves) would result in an increased level of aggression and punishment from elders. Thus, orphans had less tools to address violence infused by *dedovshina*. Once again, it showed that navigating the world of their peers was, perhaps, even more challenging.

Olga did not have any friends while she lived at the orphanage. She described that she often fought with children, mainly with girls. According to her, the fight could begin for any reason, whether it was due to some "improper" words or actions that triggered a conflict. Olga's main survival strategy of resistance was to fight for herself.

From Kostia's story we learned that he lived in his own world. He was a leader, where both children and caregivers were seemingly afraid of him. From his narratives, he navigated the children's world at times as a king, as a fighter, or as a protector of children. He was running the orphanage and organizing children around him. Therefore, Kostia did not really resist children's world, he was the creator and maintainer of it.

Anna was able to somehow find a niche where she could be independent from her peers. She preferred to be apart from them. She mentioned that when she was very young, two older girls in her group used to harass her, or some other elder children were taking her mother's and Katia's presents for themselves. In the majority of cases, she had to conform to the system of abuse and swallow the harassment. Only once she reported that she confronted her bullies and told them how she felt about their actions. Nevertheless, when she grew up, she developed close ties with caregivers and their protection allowed her to live on her own and not really engage with the culture of her peers, which Anna herself described as being rude, cold, and misbehaving guys.

To conclude, children did demonstrate resistance within their own established cultures. In most of the cases, their resistance was in a form of fighting, yet, I also observed some elaborative techniques like the way Maria protected herself from sexual abuse. The stories revealed that in many cases children had to conform to the rules and orders of the elder children. Conformity was often their survival strategy, as non-conformity might have led to the increased levels of harassment. Indeed, in this situation children could not turn to caregivers for help as they would be recognized as snitches and prosecuted even further. Therefore, at times children had to conform and swallow the insults just to avoid more punishments.

Resistance at a school level. The resistance took place on a school level as well. All of the participants to a varying degree resisted a schooling culture. While Anna was once again one of the most conforming to a dominant school culture, she also reported that during the tenth and eleventh grades she missed school a lot and attended movie festivals. At that time, she realized that school was not enriching her with new knowledge and she preferred to attend more stimulating and interesting activities. Contrary to Anna, Kostia completely rejected the school and he even urged others to give up on learning.

Between these two extremes of accepting and rejecting the schooling culture, we could place Olga, Maria, Dima and Evgeny. All of them were not interested in official learning; they considered lessons to be boring and teachers non-stimulating. Maria considered school as a place to have fun, to laugh and hang-out with her friends. It was for her an opportunity to break through the system of orphanhood, at least for a short time. She developed a “goofy” culture as a way to resist the dominant schooling agenda.

Dima reported that often they challenged teachers during lessons, especially the young ones. They often called names and swore during the lessons and laughed at educators. Thus, it might be suggested that they were looking for opportunities to be in charge, to redefine the nature of lessons, to establish their own rules and practices that allowed them to tease and bully new teachers. In addition to this open act of resistance, they exercised their resistance by partly or even fully rejecting the surrogate curriculum as it was described above. Similarly, Olga was not motivated to study since lessons seemed boring for her, so she withdrew herself from the educational activities. Evgeny reported that he did not like when a public school teacher taught him, he was eager to finish everything quickly and play with his friends as well.

Given, that the majority of participants sabotaged their schooling culture, it might be suggested that many orphans themselves contributed to their low-quality educational experiences, which had a negative effect on their overall lives, especially after the graduation. Theoretically orphans were offered education, yet the system with its array of factors – abuse, violence, low-expectations, humiliation, surrogate curriculum – encouraged orphans to partly or completely reject schooling, thus, minimizing quality of educational experiences even further.

To conclude, the stories revealed that the majority of children did exercise their power and resilience on all levels. Children exhibited different strategies of conforming or resisting the system. In some cases, even within the conformity there was a space for personal reinterpretation and influence. The majority of children exhibited some forms of resistance that took different shapes and forms: aggression, rejection of the rules, conflicts with caregivers, escapes from the orphanages, revenge, fights, rejection of school curriculum and cultural code. The levels of resistance were much higher at the orphanage and schooling levels, and lower at children's level. Indeed, children had to conform to their older peers most of the time, since open resistance might have led to increased levels of harassment and punishment. Also, resistance was often met by caregivers and adults with aggression, and the acts of resistance were treated as cases of misbehavior. Lastly, participants' rejection of the school curriculum further contributed to low-quality of education that they received.

Now that I looked at four major layers of reality that participants had to navigate - society at large, orphanage life, children's world, schooling system - and also reviewed the subversive agents and alternative discourses, it might be suggested that since these four layers were experienced simultaneously, they had influenced one another and partly shaped children's experiences in each of the areas. While this research does not necessarily establish the

relationship between these four layers, it is possible that difficult relationships with caregivers and children might have had a negative influence on orphan's educational experiences. It is challenging to focus on learning, while being bullied and harassed by adults or children. Similarly, it is almost impossible to play a role of an excellent student if at the orphanage a child belonged to a group that positioned themselves as cool and delinquent guys. Therefore, one of the strengths of the current research is that the reader has a chance to view educational experiences of orphans within the broader context of their lives. Each layer of the reality cannot be viewed separately from other layers and looking at only one of the spheres might be misleading and incomplete.

Pedagogy of Violence

Now that the analysis of orphans' experiences at their orphanages has been presented above, I believe it is time to return to a discussion of the pedagogy of violence and look at the phenomenon from a broader perspective. So, how can the pedagogy of violence be conceptualized and understood? As I mentioned earlier, on the surface, the pedagogy of violence can be observed as an established practice within the system of orphan care to teach children discipline, order, and obedience, through the use of physical and psychological violence. Within the framework of this pedagogy, orphans' bodies and minds were used as the terrains for educators to exercise their influence and power over children.

I believe the pedagogy of violence is a reflection of a far deeper Russian national tragedy. It is a by-product of the Russian history of authoritarian regimes that praised discipline and obedience, and which used fear as an instrument to control the masses. It is an echo from a long lasting history of subject vs. object philosophy (that encompasses the sufferings of people in

Gulag and the political prisoners), with authorities having a right to dictate, and masses obliged to follow. It is a reflection of pain, humiliation, and countless number of broken lives.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, *perestroika* (the time of change) brought about a narrative that such a terror will have no place in a post-Soviet society. It proclaimed that post-socialist society would be built on different principles. Indeed, such a discourse continues to thrive on an official level, making its way to the official documents and policies highlighting the importance of subject-subject approach in the orphanages as well as in public schools. Accordingly, children are guaranteed full respect and protection from any forms of violence. Also, the most recent reform in education reflected in FSES (Federal State Educational Standard, second edition) specifically focused on subject-subject approach, highlighting the importance of teachers and children being equal partners in a learning process. The educational reform explicitly banned subject vs. object approach, and any type of violence directed towards children. However, as this research revealed and my own experience working in the public school confirmed, there is a great gap between government policies and practice. While policies reflect current global trends of minimizing the power dynamic between teachers and students (adults and children); the real practice is still reflective of Russian past where mainly authoritarian positions are sought and respected.

Also, the orphans' stories represent vivid evidence suggesting that historical authoritarian practices continue to live and thrive within the context of orphanhood. As such, caregivers and orphanage administrators live in a capsule of reality with intense fear of authorities, punishments, and a possibility of losing their jobs. These fears largely dictate, shape, and define the nature of relationships between adults and children. Facing the fears, adults use all

instruments, including physical and psychological punishments to protect themselves from undesirable consequences and avoid the anger of authorities.

Working in a public school in Russia, I was shocked by the nature of such relationships. For a slightest mistake, the administrators were literally shouting at teachers, at professionals with higher education and years of experience. Some teachers who eventually got into a black list for various reasons, were at times given additional work with no extra pay, or were given a minimum amount of paid hours, thus, leaving a teacher with mediocre salary. I also observed other manipulative tools used to punish teachers in a public school setting, including assigning inconvenient schedules and the least equipped classrooms, or at times denying teachers day offs. The possibility of open conversation was merely absent as the opinion of authorities mattered the most and obedience of teachers was not only expected, but strongly encouraged. At the same time, school administrators themselves were constantly referring to evils of authorities above them and expressed fears and concerns of being punished.

Within such reality, any teachers' achievement was often taken for granted, while the mistakes were immediately picked up and made publicly known. The teachers were shouted at, humiliated, and prosecuted; on top of that, they were not well paid, making the whole work environment toxic to function in. While my experience, as well as the experiences of orphans cannot be generalized to the whole nation, it would not be an exaggeration to say that these historical, social, and cultural contexts, which have been penetrated with fear and authoritarianism, are still present and affect institutions and people to a varying degree. Perhaps, as closed institutions orphanages were able to preserve this historical "heritage" in its original forms, passing the historical cultural code from generation to generation. Can anyone be happy working within such a well establish historical-socio-economic-cultural scheme?

Surprisingly, most of the study participants themselves shared through their stories that many caregivers, teachers, as well as administrators lived unhappy and unfulfilling lives, and, therefore, behaved poorly with children. They faced humiliation, lack of financial resources, and intense workload with all its emotional difficulties and paper work. In lieu of this view, pedagogy of violence can be discussed as a historical inertia to salute discipline and order; deeply internalized model of subject vs. object approach, subordination and fear of authorities; coupled with low salaries, heavy workload, professional, and emotional burnt-out. Pedagogy of violence is a by-product of a powerful machinery where traumatized adults continue to traumatize traumatized children, thus, recreating a stable cycle of suffering and pain. At the core of the pedagogy of violence there is an unfulfilled right of both adults and children to be respected, to be loved, to be well-paid, to be heard, and to be considered a human being. Pedagogy of violence is a reflection of a national tragedy, where for a very long time people's lives and opinions did not matter, unless they were authorities.

In other words, the pedagogy of violence can be viewed as a symptom of a chronic illness of subject vs. object experience of authoritarianism, a deeply integrated scheme that goes often unnoticed by the people involved. Similar to patients who became so accustomed to their pain, people affected by the pedagogy of violence no longer feel it and no longer remember how to live a pain-free life. A great number of people in Russia have socialized for such a long time in a subject vs. object philosophy, that many could no longer envision alternatives and continue to operate along the old and painful practice of human oppression.

I believe the pedagogy of violence is an answer to a question to why does the system of orphan care in Russia, while having all the necessary financial resources, produces traumatic experiences and results for orphaned children and youth on a large scale. It is also an answer to

the question of why the majority of participants believed that the system of orphanhood is stronger, that it is not possible to radically change it. I believe, they intuitively felt that the core of the problem lied not within the system, but far beyond it, encompassing a larger society.

The pedagogy of violence answers the question about why new furniture, better food options, a variety of clothing did not and would not bring the desired changes within the system. It is because this approach does not take into account the emotional needs of both adults and children. Therefore, to achieve a long lasting and transformative change of orphanage system, I believe adults' fears and concerns should be taken into consideration and addressed. The power dynamics between orphanage staff, administration, and higher authorities, like the Ministry of Education, has to be transformed on the basis of subject - subject (rather than the current subject vs. object) approach, where there will no longer be the need to fear authorities, but where all stakeholders would be united by shared goals and objectives of taking good and effective care of orphans and of each other. Of course, such change will not be as easy as just buying new furniture for the institutions. As a matter of fact, it would require constant and gradual work with adults and children at all levels.

Transition to Adulthood

For the purposes of research, I defined a transition period rather symbolically as a period of a time when orphanage graduates continued to receive substantial financial help from the state or were supported by the orphanage, thus, they did not truly lived on their own. Given that the majority of the participants reported that they could get stipends from the state until the age of twenty-three under the condition they are enrolled in educational institutions, the transition period could potentially last up to that age.

Personally, it was immensely interesting for me to clarify orphans' experiences during their transition period as little was known about it from the academic literature. For example, Glazkova (2006) reported that since the state did not provide housing to all orphans, many graduates found themselves homeless the next day after the graduation. I pictured a very saddening case of a young adult leaving the orphanage and not knowing where to go. However, the stories greatly cleared the clouds of uncertainty and showed that the process of transition into the adult life was not as straightforward. In many cases, children had a chance to remain at the orphanage for another year or so while they received their housing. Participants had time to process and gradually shift to their new reality. At some orphanages, the administrators opened up post-graduate groups, allowing orphans to live, cook, and move in and out of the institution freely.

With regard to orphans' housing, the stories revealed different trajectories. Dima, Anna, and Olga received their apartments right away, while Maria had to fight in court and received her housing many years after she left the orphanage. Notably, Evgeny and Kostia still did not receive any housing. Nevertheless, right after the orphanage none of them stepped into nothingness – they had either their own housing, lived with friends or relatives (e.g., Evgeny began to live with his mother) or moved into dormitories upon their admission into the college/university.

The stories demonstrated that many orphanages assisted graduates in getting admitted into the educational institutions. Anna recalled that orphanages were required to do so. I could not locate any law or a document that talked about this requirement, thus, it remained unclear what guided orphanages to assist graduates in their post-orphanage education. Another surprising finding was in government's attempts to create educational paths for orphans who graduated from correctional orphanages. As a matter of fact, the completion of a correctional orphanage

program does not qualify a student to receive a diploma of complete secondary education in Russia. With a “correctional diploma,” orphans could not pursue education in colleges or universities because they all officially had (and some continue to carry now) the status of “mental retards in various degree of debility.” Their correctional diploma was not a sufficient prerequisite to enroll them in prestigious colleges or universities. Graduates of correctional orphanages who had an aspiration to get higher education had to study and finish evening school first, receive diploma of completed secondary education and only after that they could apply for educational institutions of their choice.

To tackle this issue, the government opened special “correctional programs” within low-prestigious colleges, which offered very limited academic tracks: a painter, a cook, a seamstress, a carpenter, a constructor, a shoe repairer and a packer (to assemble and glue boxes). However, only participants in the Moscow region reported knowing about such educational “opportunities.” It is still unknown if these correctional programs are offered nation-wide or only in certain regions. Thus, on the one hand, the state provided some educational opportunities for the graduates of correctional schools to study and get a profession, yet, on the other, the choices were very limited, if not humiliating.

While all five participants enrolled in colleges and universities right after their graduation from their orphanages, their motivation to study was quite different. Maria wanted to gain freedom and independence from the orphanage system (motivation to be free). She applied to a university to become a primary school teacher and her choice of the program was random. She was not pursuing university for the sake of knowledge per say, rather to be finally free from the shackles of the system and live a life different from her mother. Maria reported that she always knew she would get higher education. As she told, this desire came within her, the orphanage did

not encourage her to pursue higher education. On the contrary, the principal repeatedly told her that she would go downhill very quickly after the graduation.

Olga, Dima, and Kostia all went to low-prestigious colleges with correctional programs and studied cooking. Partly, they felt that knowing how to cook would be beneficial to them, but as Dima described, the majority of graduates were going to colleges for the sake of a stipend (financial motivation), while others picked a college and a program based on where the most fun company gathered (social motivation).

Anna was the only participant who pursued university with a clear motivation to study (educational motivation). She had high hopes and aspirations for her education. She carefully chose her profession, after debating for a long time what to pursue. Since she had a diploma of a National Olympiad winner in English language, she was accepted on a full scholarship to study Liberal Arts in a prestigious university in Saint Petersburg.

Evgeny was the only one who did not go to any educational institutions after leaving the orphanage. He left the orphanage to live with his mother's family. He reunited with her, her new husband, and their children. During this time of transition, Evgeny faced all the scrutiny that his status of mentally retarded and incompetent meant. He knew at the orphanage that he had this status, yet he did not know what it meant. After living with a family, he finally realized that with his status he was not entitled to anything: neither education nor housing or job opportunities. In the eyes of the law, he was incapable of living independently, working or studying. For Evgeny, it was an immensely shocking and humiliating discovery.

As a matter of fact, many orphans had to face the consequences of having a status of mentally retarded and being graduates of correctional orphanages during their transition period. Olga, Dima and Kostia, for example, all had and continue to have this status. Olga, for example,

angrily shared how devastating it was for her to know that with her status as well as a diploma of a correctional orphanage, any paths to education and higher degree were closed. With her orphanage degree, she could only study at low-prestigious colleges with correctional programs. She emotionally told me that at that moment she realized the agenda of the system:

They wanted to make idiots out of us, destroy our personality, so that we could not think. They wanted us to live till the rest of our lives with education of a cook, seamstress, builder or gardener without a murmur... In fact, the system put on our forehead a sign "garbage," thus, putting a person in a dead end and complicating any steps to move forward. (Olga)

Dima shared similar disappointment and shock from such discovery. Therefore, the transition period can be marked by some of the first disappointments and orphans' reflection on their experiences living in correctional orphanages, having a correctional diploma and a status of mentally retarded. Also, the transition period urged orphans to engage more with the society. They had to attend colleges, universities, use public transport, and navigate through the city. While Maria, Anna, and Olga did not necessarily report any difficulties navigating the larger society, many graduates at that time felt ashamed and embarrassed. They felt different and were afraid of doing something the wrong way. They were scared to talk, to communicate or ask someone for help. In other words, many graduates tended to withdraw themselves from any contacts with the society and rather sought support from other graduates. Using Lamont and Lareau (2010) terminology, some graduates utilized self-elimination strategy to withdraw themselves from the settings they culturally were unfamiliar with.

Indeed, many graduates united together right after leaving the system of orphan care and preferred to stay together. It is not surprising given that from an early age orphans socialized in a

collective way – they had to remain with the group most of the time, share the same food and activities throughout the day. Furthermore, they developed their own rules, culture, and modes of behavior. In other words, they developed over time a group identity and a social network that was difficult to abandon for some of them after the graduation. Paradoxically, their collective identity with all its harsh rules and inner laws became for many a comfort zone, which was difficult to leave in order to start building a new social network with the society at large. In many cases, such attachment to a group became a barrier to expand their social network further and ended up in a disaster similarly to what Coleman (1988) described as membership in prevented its members from pursuing better educational and life opportunities.

For example, Dima, Olga, and Kostia recalled that they gathered together in big companies of orphans and because they were getting very well paid (they received allowance from the orphanage and also a stipend), they experienced freedom and did activities that were prohibited at the orphanage. Namely, they began to drink alcohol, organize parties, attend night clubs, spend money, and some tried and eventually got hooked up on drugs. Many described this period as carefree time of enjoyment. They no longer had to report to anyone, they had money, housing, circle of friends, and freedom. They did not think about the future; moreover, participants reported that many graduates believed that the society “owed” orphans and no matter what the government or the society would always support them.

As Olga recalled, she had all chances to become trapped in a company of orphans and become an alcoholic – only a lucky chance pulled her out of her company and placed her on a different life trajectory. Yet, she and Dima recalled that many continued to be in groups and live a certain lifestyle involving alcohol, drugs, and unemployment. On the contrary, Maria and Anna almost completely dissociated themselves from the system of orphanhood and sought contacts

and communication with the larger society. Perhaps, since they did not feel a sense of belonging to the group of orphans already at the orphanage and, after graduation, they continued their unique paths apart from other graduates. In other words, they appealed to overselection strategy and attempted to compete on an equal basis with those who might have been more privileged (Lamont & Lareau, 2010). They both got admitted into universities and were actively involved in shaping their life trajectories.

To conclude, the transition period can be mainly summarized by one of the first major contacts with the society: first disappointments with finding out what it meant to have the status of a “mentally retarded person,” a diploma from a correctional school, or overall what it meant to live in an orphanage. Graduates getting enrolled in educational institution with various motivations, whether financial, social, educational or a motivation to be free from the system largely defined this period. Many described this period as care-free: they had sufficient financial support and often spent money on parties, night clubs, alcohol, drugs, and other fun activities. This period brought concerns about receiving housing and finding their social network with orphans often uniting together in groups.

Adulthood

Analyzing and developing a common framework to capture participants’ adulthood experiences was rather challenging as their trajectories started to take their unique and distinctive paths, the further away they moved from graduation. An attempt to fit all their experiences into certain categories seemed not only possible but also inappropriate. Therefore, I felt the importance of discussing some of the key points of interests, namely orphans’ survival and navigation strategies, educational experiences, and major factors that shaped their adult life trajectories.

Maria and Anna undertook a socially acceptable path from the very beginning as, in their minds, the ideas of getting education and work were foundational. They both embraced education and professional career as essential elements of their lives. Importantly, this life vision was with Maria and Anna from the very beginning and they had clear understanding that after the orphanage they would pursue this path. In other words, they both transitioned from the orphanage knowing that they would get education and eventually look for jobs and other career opportunities. Was it just a coincidence that only Anna and Maria had lived with their families before entering the system of orphan care? Did their childhood experiences allow them to have a better understanding of what life might look like beyond the walls of the institutions? I believe the answer is affirmative. Anna seemed to explain her love for education thanks to her childhood experiences living with her mother. Certainly, participation in the exchange programs in England, Germany, and other countries strengthened this love and sharpened her vision of an adult life. In Anna's case, it might be argued that her educational experiences have led, and currently are leading her on a path to success. In this journey, she was able to tremendously grow both personally and professionally; she expanded her circle of friends (social capital) and gained skills, knowledge, and diplomas (cultural capital) - all of which served as a strong foundation for Anna's life and career. Anna was able to strongly rely on her education as the vital resource in her life.

Maria, on the other hand, as a child witnessed the horrible consequences of her mother and relatives' lack of education, unemployment, and alcohol addiction. She knew very well what this lifestyle felt like, thus, early in her life she became committed to live a different life, better than her mother's. Her negative childhood experiences helped her to shape an alternative vision where getting education and making a career were foundational. Along this path, Maria stumbled

upon her first husband who certainly challenged not only her aspirations for education but also Maria's self-esteem. She left him when she realized that her life was not developing in a direction she envisioned. It might be argued that her traumatic childhood experiences became a strong indicator of how not to live, and which direction not to go. Perhaps, this indicator dragged her out from the abusive relationships; it rang the alarm bell when Maria found herself in an emotionally and psychically difficult environment. Thus, no matter which challenges Maria faced in her adult life, she was always able to return to the path she was committed to pursue.

The greatest motivator in shaping Maria's life trajectory became her desire not to be like her mother. That was the turning point that she compared all her experiences to. Along this path, Maria was able to get quality higher education, build a successful career, and expand her social network - all thanks to her strong desire to live a quality life. In her story, education was more as a formal attribute of changes Maria wanted. According to her own words, all her major developments in life were as a result of her personal aspirations and her social network. Formal education did not play a major role, according to her.

All other four participants, who lived in the system of orphan care from the day they were born, seemed to a varying degree uncertain at first what to do and how to live their adult lives. Perhaps, a lack of experience living with their families created a blank – an empty space that participants had to fill in themselves after leaving the system of orphan care. Some participants described this period as being lost and not knowing what to do. To fill the void, it seemed popular for orphanage graduates to unite in groups with other graduates. For example, Olga, Kostia, and Dima all were fully immersed in orphanage youth culture that led a care-free life, supported by the state money: they had fun, drank alcohol, organized parties, and did not think much about future.

In many cases, some external events eventually forced them to reconsider their lifestyles and adopt rather different strategies to live their adult lives. From the stories, we learned that one of the major “wake-up” calls was when graduates were no longer eligible to receive financial support from their colleges and were left with no money. In such cases, a great number of graduates seemed to pursue passive and even manipulative strategies, such as to seek unemployment allowance from the labor exchange office, deliberately asking employers to write them refusals. Another popular passive strategy was to rent out their apartments as the easiest way to get money and continue to live their carefree lifestyle.

However, other events could become turning points for the graduates, prompting them to re-envision their adult life trajectories. For example, in Olga’s case, by a lucky chance she was reunited with an orphan girl who introduced her to Step Up, an organization that provided education for orphanage graduates. Her love for Step Up teachers and friendly atmosphere turned eventually into love for education. This experience had a profound impact on Olga as she realized the importance of learning. She confessed that she had all the chances of becoming an alcoholic; yet, thanks to Step Up, she was able to get quality education at a college, expanding her aspirations for life and career. While Olga was able to drastically change her life trajectory, it seemed that a lot of major developments in Olga’s life were coming purely by chance: by chance she got into Step Up and fell in love with education; by chance she got a one-way ticket to India, where she met families and started to baby-sit their children; by chance she found a volunteering opportunity in Israel, and so on. This “by chance” philosophy partly reflects uncertainty, as well as lack of Olga’s clear vision for her life. For instance, I was shocked by her bravery to travel to India with a one-way ticket while not even having enough money to come back. Fortunately, she met good people and earned money for a return ticket; however, this huge risk might have led to

some unpleasant results. It is, perhaps, Olga's greatest luck that so far coincidences led to positive and enriching experiences and brought major developments. Will Olga's future life trajectories be further shaped by random opportunities that would come her way? The exact answer is unknown; yet, I do believe that eventually, little by little, all these experiences would turn into a platform that Olga would be able to rely on. Despite the degree of unpredictability and surprise in Olga's life, it might be argued that her experiences would gradually expand her social and cultural capitals, shaping a clearer vision of life.

Compared to Olga, Dima was pulled into a direction of public activism when one of his classmates was placed into a nursing home. He felt compelled to help her and when he succeeded, the victory brought him a sense of importance and power. Ever since, he pursues a path of public activism, attempting to help orphans and orphanage graduates. The devotion to public activism allowed him to have clarity and some sort of stability in life.

The success in public activism inspired Dima to pursue quality education and shaped his aspirations for higher education and career. He enrolled in an evening school, simultaneously working on his social projects. Yet, the situation with his brother's abuse broke down Dima emotionally and psychologically. Feeling powerless in the face of injustice surrounding his brother, and partly influenced by alcohol, he made a decision to commit suicide and jump from the fifth floor of a building. He survived. His injury shackled him to the wheelchair and forced Dima to seriously reconsider his dreams of getting education and making a career. His aspirations to become an actor, lawyer, or a journalist were put into jeopardy. During this difficult time, he found a sanctuary in public activism, once again. However, his coming out as a gay pushed most of his friends and acquaintances away. The sponsors also refused to fund and work on his social projects. Thus, eventually, Dima was left almost alone. Currently, his health is

in a very poor condition. He is fighting for life. He is tired and thoughts of suicide are once again crossing his mind. All his future plans are up in the air because of his injury. Public activism was a bridge for Dima for his successful life and career, yet the injury seriously damaged the path. I sincerely hope that Dima would find the strength to fight the illness and pursue the life he once envisioned.

Regarding Kostia, his path seemed to be the most troubled and not as straightforward. After he was expelled from the college, he was reunited with his family and his mother taught him to beg for money near the church. Eventually, Kostia got used to this habit and felt comfortable getting donations from people. He also started to get involved with the church and work there for food, money, and clothing. These skills of begging and working for church became an essential survival strategy in his life. At the age of twenty, according to him, he got arrested for the crimes he did not commit. He spent five years of his adulthood in a psychiatric hospital. When he was released he continued to work in a church, live on donations, and from time to time perform physical labor. Pursuing education or getting a full-time job did not seem to be on his radar at all. He felt satisfied with skills and life strategies that he developed and he did not seem eager to change his life trajectories. Currently, Kostia is also dragged into a vast feeling of disappointment and hopelessness regarding getting his own housing. The thoughts of being on a verge of homelessness and not knowing what would happen to him in the future turned him into the state of increasing pessimism and despair. Would he eventually get his housing or no? It remains unknown.

Evgeny left orphanage without having a clear vision for his future either. He lived with the aspirations of reuniting with his mother and experiencing family life. He sincerely desired with all his heart to get everything he was deprived as a child, yet his dreams turned into

immense regret as his family at the end suggested him to leave for the institutionalized care again. Evgeny was devastated by this betrayal, yet at the same time it gave him strength to pull himself together. He went to court to defend his rights to be independent and capable adult. His story showed how challenging and humiliating it might be for orphans labeled as “mentally retarded” and “incapable” to dispute their status in court and gain their rights to education and life back. He was placed into a psychiatric hospital, where he lived with criminals and drug addicts, and where staff treated him as criminal as well. He was lucky to have good doctors who gave their honest and objective opinion regarding Evgeny’s capability to function as an independent adult. Nevertheless, as Evgeny showed, the court did not admit that they made a mistake in the first place, i.e. their legal decision to place Evgeny into an institution with no education and by labeling him as mentally underdeveloped and incapable individual. The court decided that his term of “debility” had expired and there was no longer any need to consider Evgeny as such.

I applauded Evgeny’s strength and spirit to go through this painful and humiliating procedure; yet will everyone have the same courage? As stories showed, Dima, Olga, and Kostia, for example, did not appeal to court yet and are still living with their status of being mentally underdeveloped. While Evgeny found his courage and eventually pursued higher education and got a full-time job, it might be anticipated that for many graduates such status might become a serious structural obstacle to pursue education and career.

While on the surface Evgeny’s life seems stable – he has his job and is studying at the university - the thoughts of starting a family, having children, and owning his own apartment captivate him from time to time. One of his biggest fears is not to have children, a continuation of his family clan. I still remember the day, when he suddenly told me, “What if I have already

broken down? What if I just show a mask that I am fine?" I believe these phrases were little glimpses into Evgeny's inner world, where the feelings of loneliness grow year by year. Evgeny is a fighter, he finds strength and resources to move forward each time, because he still has a hope that he would meet a love of his life, pursue a career, and perhaps even get housing. However, I am afraid that this hope may be lost one day due to the corroding feeling of loneliness, this vast and encompassing feeling of being rejected by his family and not being able to find a partner in his life. Then, Evgeny might be at risk of giving up. It breaks my heart to think about it and I sincerely wish Evgeny all the best in his life. He truly deserves it.

The study participants also shared life trajectories of other graduates. Unfortunately, they confirmed that a large number of graduates continued to lead a rather dangerous life-style: drink alcohol, use drugs, engage in criminal activities or became victims of criminals. Some died. We may recall a girl whom Olga found with homeless people in a subway; or Dima's acquaintances who became homeless or got into big troubles from the hands of criminals; or Maria's story about how most of the male graduates she knew became addicts or criminals. It was reported that many graduates married among themselves and sent their own children into the system of orphan care. Some returned to the orphanages to work. Not many were interested in finding jobs. For example, among Dima's orphanage friends many used to complain to Dima that no one was interested in hiring them since they did not have any work experience and had a diploma of a correctional school. Dima attempted to address this issue by asking a public fund for help in providing a list of companies that were ready to hire graduates. Shockingly, as Dima said, none of his friends called the companies. Were they afraid to make a call or not truly interested in work? As Dima explained it was the latter. Graduates engaged in a discourse and behavioral

pattern of complaining about their unlucky fate, expecting the society to address their needs, while not really committing to put their own efforts.

Despite this disappointing experience, Dima persisted and later established a project *Trudenok* to help orphanage graduates with employment. He sincerely believed in the power of the project to change orphans' lives; however, after some time, the idea turned into an enormous frustration as graduates started to betray Dima by not showing up for work, or even stealing money. He had to stop the project, because he severely burned all of his health and energy.

In other words, the stories showed that gloomy predictions of caregivers and orphanage administration came true and many orphanage graduates ended up in trouble. As Anna and Maria recalled, they saw the main problem in a lack of motivation to strive for better future and life. Dima considered it to be the result of a habit to get everything easily from the orphanage and the expectation that everybody "owed" orphans. Olga explained it as a result of being lost after the orphanage and not knowing what to do in life. Kostia named the absence of housing and employment as the main reasons of graduates' downfall.

While I do believe that all their perspectives are very valuable and true, I also started to realize that any single reason could not explain such a complex and sophisticated phenomenon as orphans' transition into adulthood. I believe that the more holistic way should be adopted, where all the experiences that orphans had to go through prior to the orphanage, while living at the orphanage, and beyond should be taken into account. Specifically, orphans' actual experiences of living with the family or an imagined family capital, orphanage environment, hidden curriculum, pedagogy of violence, education *dlya galochki* (or absence of education), children's culture of *dedovshina*, subversive agents and importantly, orphans' resistance should be viewed as part of the equation that led to various life trajectories.

Also, I suggest that early transition period should be given special attention in analyzing and explaining orphans' adult life trajectories. During the transition period, many graduates went through experiences that allowed them to fill in the initial blank and form a vision for living their adult lives. From stories, it was during the early time of transition when Olga got involved with Step Up; Dima chose a public activism trajectory; Kostia developed begging skills and working for a church; Evgeny became committed to get education and pursue a career after his mother betrayed him. Also, it seems very likely that many graduates who united in groups that led care-free lifestyle early in their independent lives got trapped in it and accepted this lifestyle as a way to live their adulthood.

To conclude, orphans' adulthood experiences took their unique and distinctive paths. Orphanage graduates developed various life strategies to navigate through adulthood. These strategies varied from passive tactics of getting government allowance and renting out their apartments, to proactive ways of pursuing education, making a career or engaging in social change. Orphans' developed different motives and beliefs that guided them in shaping their visions of adult lives.

Chapter VI.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to understand the life and educational experiences of orphans in Russia from their childhood to adulthood. Using tools of narrative inquiry research, the study presented stories of six orphanage graduates from Moscow, Moscow region, Saint Petersburg, Tomsk, and Krasnoyarsk between the ages of 21 to 35. Given that prior research yielded largely generalized accounts of orphans' lives, this study provided a unique opportunity for the reader not only to immerse into the midst of orphans' life stories, but also generate independent conclusions. In fact, stories represented both the data and the findings, which were treated as independent and valuable discoveries on their own. In addition to the life stories, the researcher offered personal interpretations of life and educational experiences of the participants to tap into the larger meaning of narratives told all together and to connect the stories to the broader academic literature. This conclusion section largely represents the synopsis of researcher's interpretation of findings, leaving the right for the stories to speak for themselves.

As such, participants' life and educational experiences were analyzed through the framework of orphans' major life milestones: (1) orphans experiences prior to the orphanage; (2) life and educational experiences while at the orphanage; (3) transition period from orphanage to independent life; and (4) adult life. Within each of the sections, major themes and key issues were analyzed.

Analysis of the orphans' experiences prior to the orphanages revealed that insecure and troubling family backgrounds (alcoholism, drug addiction, imprisonment, or unemployment), child's disability, or parents' sickness may place a child within the system of orphan care in Russia. Compared to Sub-Saharan African region, where children end up at the institutional care

due to wars, conflicts, and HIV/AIDS epidemics, the nature of orphanhood in Russia is quite distinct. It is largely a reflection of socio-economic context of the country where, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the wide-ranging processes of decentralization and privatization divided the society and placed the majority of the population at or below the poverty line. The economic struggle was especially intensified in remote villages, where geographical isolation coupled with lack of work opportunities produced a stable cycle of poverty, alcoholism, violence, and abuse. Maria's story demonstrated the reality of living in such a place, where she as a child had to go through physical and psychological abuse, rape, hunger, and humiliation.

Indeed, most of the orphans experienced some traumatic events prior to entering the system of orphan care; however, the degree of severity varied. At the same time, a large number of children did not have any experience of living with their families prior to the orphanage, as their parents left them from the day they were born. Regardless how and when children were placed within the system of orphan care, their family background was found to be very powerful and influential. In lieu of this importance, I proposed a theoretical concept of an *imagined family capital*, a capital that was passed to a child in the form of factual knowledge, memory, or simply a story about their parents. This form of imagined capital existed merely in children's minds as no actual living experiences took place. This imagined capital both situated orphans in life as children attempted to discover their family roots and relate to them; and guided adults within the system of orphan care - caregivers, teachers and administrators - who often projected and reinforced orphans' social position and status based on their "imagined" parents. The stories recalled a number of cases when adults equated children's destinies to their troubled mothers and fathers, even though many children had never had any actual experience of living or knowing them. Thus, family histories represented a form of an initial capital, which shaped children's

lives. For some orphans, this capital inspired and protected them from bullying, while for others it created pain and frustration, making them vulnerable in the face of humiliation and abuse. Importantly, the notion of an *imagined family capital* expanded previous understanding of financial, cultural, social, or human capitals as it did not refer to something tangible, but rather reflected abstract and constructed ideas about parents (Bourdieu's, 1973, 1986, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Becker, 1962).

In addition to identifying the role of an imagined family capital in children's life, this study carefully analyzed orphanhood apparatus and looked at a number of factors that influenced orphans' life and educational experiences, namely (1) the society at large/ the broader policies; (2) orphanages' routine, caregivers, and administrators; (3) children's established law and order; (4) schooling experiences; (5) alternatives agendas and subversive agents; and (6) children's resistance. Overall, this study revealed that the system of orphan care was largely influenced by country's broader social, economic, and political contexts, determining funding of the institutions and dictating policies around orphanhood. The stories confirmed a gradual improvement of the conditions of the orphanages as buildings were repaired and equipped with furniture, food, clothing and other supplies as the time passed by.

While the influence of a broader national context on the lives of orphans was very significant, the narratives yield limited interactions between orphans and the society. In some cases, even minor interactions led to major developments: Evgeny learned to read and write, and in Dima's case it saved him from a psychiatric hospital. Overall, orphanage sponsors and volunteers were the primary representatives of the society for orphans. However, this research revealed that a limited nature of interactions between sponsors and children was problematic as it contributed to a construction of a "poor orphan" mentality, where children associated themselves

with objects of rescue and help (rather than subjects of their own lives), forming an expectation that sponsors and eventually everybody else (the society) “owed” them. Therefore, the nature of charity and volunteering work should be critically reexamined to better suit the needs and realities of the system of orphan care.

Next, the orphanages or the fields were found to be largely defined by rigid and controlled environments with a number of structural norms and regulations put in place, and every hour being predetermined. Physical settings of the orphanages allowed for easier control over children, as they were often gathered in one place at one time. However, both children and adults used physical space to their own advantage, whether searching for an opportunity to hide from caregivers; or sending a misbehaving child effortlessly to a mental hospital. Overall, rigidity, control, and firmness of institutions contributed to a choice-free environment that limited children’s ability to legitimately exercise their will and agency. The lack of choice nurtured higher levels of delinquency and disobedience, severely decreasing orphans’ motivation to study and strive for better life. Also, because children were not given choices, most of their aspirations to stand out or have an individual opinion were met with adults’ anger and prohibition. Within this reality, it was not only challenging for orphans to maintain their unique identities and personalities, but also any attempt to stand out and express themselves was inhibited with threats of being punished or abused.

Despite the threat, children did demonstrate active resilience towards ruthless adult world and institutional culture. This resilience took various shapes and forms, whether translating into aggression, rejection of the rules, conflicts with caregivers, escapes from the orphanages, fights, speaking up, as well as deliberate and planned attempts to challenge the status quo. Children continuously tried to negotiate and redefine rules with caregivers and administrators, and sought

ways to do things their own way. Such resistance turned into boiling tensions between adults and children, and forced both groups to use harsher and more aggressive methods to either resist or suppress the resistance.

Adults, in order to have absolute control over “disobedient” children, developed a whole array of instruments to employ fear as punishment and a control strategy. These practices were discussed as part of the orphanages’ hidden curriculum, which was penetrated with physical and psychological violence. From push-ups and beatings to rape and psychiatric hospitals, children had to navigate rough and challenging system of adult world of caregivers and administrators. Orphans’ bodies and minds were used as pedagogical terrains to teach discipline, obedience, and silence. Such practices were not only supported by administration – either explicitly or implicitly - but the ability to have control over children was highly praised and encouraged.

Such a pervasive practice across orphanages was translated into the concept of *pedagogy of violence*, another theoretical concepts emerging from this study. Compared to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of a symbolic violence, violence in Russian orphanages was real, frequent, and widespread. The pedagogy of violence was not simply caregivers and teachers’ favorite pedagogical tool. Pedagogy of violence was viewed as a historical inertia to salute obedience and discipline; it was a by-product of a long-lasting history of experienced authoritarianism and deeply internalized subject vs. object model of relationships, where the opinion of authorities mattered the most. This scheme developed a strong tendency to maintain hierarchy, with increased levels of subordination and fear in relationship to authorities. It instilled in people an immense terror of being punished and prosecuted for a slightest mistake. In case of Russian orphanages, such an internalized scheme nurtured the reality where adults used any instruments, including physical and psychological violence, just to avoid punishments from authorities and

secure their jobs. Pedagogy of violence was thus a reflection of a deep national tragedy that suppressed countless lives and forced people to blindly obey authorities or else be punished. At the core of the pedagogy of violence was found an unfulfilled right to be respected, to be loved, to be heard, to be considered a human being. Coupled with low salaries, heavy workload, emotional and psychological stress, the pedagogy of violence turned into a powerful machinery where traumatized adults continued to traumatize traumatized children.

The pedagogy of violence is an answer to a question of why Russian orphanages, while having enough financial resources, produced such frightening results. Since the pedagogy of violence is a reflection of a far deeper problem, it cannot be simply solved by renovating orphanages, buying furniture or having powerful sponsors. The pedagogy of violence urges to take into account emotional and psychological needs of adults and children, as well as their right to be respected, loved, and heard. It calls for transformation of the relationships among all the stakeholders involved with orphanhood from subject vs. object to a relational subject-subject connection, a transformation from pedagogy of violence to pedagogy of love and respect. It requires cooperation, partnership, and mutual respect to replace hierarchy, subordination, and fear of authorities. It calls for a completely different institutional culture with decent work conditions and salaries. I strongly believe that eventually such an approach would change the nature of institutions of orphan care, producing positive experiences and creating friendly and nurturing environment on all levels.

Nevertheless, the study showed that children had to navigate not only a rather difficult world of adults, but also to constantly negotiate their status among their peers. In fact, the research showed that children across orphanages developed their own cultures, establishing rules and regulations. Specifically, the culture of *dedovshina* (hazing, bullying) with its system of

ranks, favors, corporal punishments, and taboo on snitching was highly prevalent across institutional contexts. Physical power was often equated with leadership and respect, while weaker children were targeted and humiliated. Within these established cultures, children had fewer possibilities to resist. The narratives showed that in the majority of cases, younger children had to conform to the orders of the older ones, as resistance would have led to increased levels of harassment. Similarly, children could not ask adults for help as snitching was one of the most serious violations of children's conduct, the violation that could result in severe and merciless punishments. Thus, if a child had a problem with peers, then in most of the cases s/he had to fight alone or swallow the assaults. Within such a paradigm, it was more challenging for children to navigate the world of their peers than the world of adults.

With regard to orphans' education, this research revealed that participants were subjected to a variety of educational experiences. As such, the fraud system of placing children into "appropriate" institutions exposed the reality where children were offered either no education at all, correctional curriculum with simpler tasks and curriculum, or general public school curriculum. Given that some orphans who studied in correctional orphanages or in orphanages with no educational opportunities were able to independently get admitted into good colleges and universities, the study described the serious implications of the problem with diagnosing children as mentally retarded - a politically and economically infused measure that severely limited orphans' abilities to learn and develop.

From the stories, orphans who were not exposed to any type of learning initially were not even aware that reading and writing constituted basic literacy skills. Their daily routine was centered around play, food, and sleep. Only by a childish encounter with a girl outside the system did one of the participants, Evgeny, realized that it was important for a person to read and

write. His story was a remarkable example on how one individual was able to defeat the non-stimulating environment, as well as educate himself and people around him. However, it is likely that Evgeny's story was rather an exception and it can only be sadly projected how many talented orphans are currently placed in orphanages with no educational opportunities.

Participants who were subjected to correctional school curriculum experienced all the “perks” of education *dlya galochki*. This concept included simplified and unchallenging curriculum, low teacher expectations, fictitious and surrogate education that all together negatively affected orphans' motivation to study. As a result, many orphans rejected the school curriculum as they did not understand how this basic knowledge could help them in their lives. Therefore, the results of this type of education were in general very poor. Graduates were barely able to read and write after their educational experiences at the correctional orphanages. Furthermore, it equipped graduates with correctional school diplomas that did not qualify as a certificate of a complete secondary education. This diploma implied that graduates were not eligible to apply for prestigious colleges and institutions of higher education. Their educational choices were limited to about six professions offered at correctional colleges, namely, a carpenter, a constructor, a painter, a cook, a seamstress, a shoe repairer, and a packer of boxes.

The orphans who attended general public schools were exposed to a regular public school curriculum. However, many were not interested to study for a number of reasons: past troubling experiences at the orphanage, low teachers' expectations, uninteresting curriculum, and the overall rejection of the orphanage/school system. The study revealed that orphans were often pushed through the system with fake minimum passing grades because teachers were either disinterested or did not have enough time and energy to work with underachieving and low-motivated students. Orphans knew about it and abused the system to their own advantage -

sometimes by stopping to study all together and knowing that teachers would pass them in any case. The study participants also noted the tendency to single out orphans in public schools, although to varying degrees. In one school, for example, the attitude towards orphans was explicitly negative and rude, while in another school it depended more on specific teachers and children.

Overall, orphans' educational experiences showed a deeply embedded inequality within the system of orphan care. Orphans were not subjected to equal opportunities not only compared to children growing in families, but also within the system of orphan care. Some orphans were not provided any education at all, others experienced education *dlya galochki*, and only a few were able to gain sufficient educational experiences to expand their social and cultural capitals. Many participants argued that orphanages were deliberately making idiots out of them by suppressing any desire to learn, by understating their abilities, and by providing low-quality education. Within this system, children's low motivation to learn was equated with their inability to learn. Consequently, many teachers formed a belief that orphans were simply uneducable, they were a waste of teachers' time. On the other hand, Anna's story showed that in very rare cases, orphanages could provide unique opportunities, not often available for children growing up in families. As a result of one such opportunity, Anna was able to study for seven months in England in a private school, as well as to participate in exchange programs in other countries. Such cases are rare, but they do exist.

Looking at the overall challenging environment that orphaned children had to navigate, an analysis of the stories revealed the existence of alternative agendas and subversive teachers and caregivers who attempted to challenge the status quo within the system. They attempted to work with children in a kinder and more humane way and produced alternative uplifting and

motivational experiences. Surprisingly, such subversive approaches were often misunderstood and challenged by caregivers and administrators who praised punishment, discipline, and obedience. Within this reality, subversive agendas were rationalized as ridiculous, and nonsensical. They were usually rejected by the system: the subversive caregivers were expected to follow the established culture within the institution and were pressured to be like everyone else.

In addition to adults who questioned the subversives, children often misused their kind approach to their own advantage. In response, many subversives became stricter or left the system. Thus, the study suggested that not only caregivers influenced the system, but the system had a strong influence on caregivers. Overall, the narratives of subversive adults demonstrated the challenges and obstacles for possible change within the system of orphan care; the challenges that would need to be overcome in order to replace the pedagogy of violence with pedagogy of love and mutual respect. In fact, the stories showed how the system resisted and attempted to eradicate agendas that did not conform to an already established order, thus forcing many subversives to resign or leave orphanages voluntarily.

By and large, the analysis of the orphanage apparatus showed complex processes, multiple actors, and different agendas that were shaping orphans' lives and educational experiences on various levels. While children had to navigate a rather difficult environment, they actively fought, resisted, and redefined the existing rules and practices, thus, vigorously shaping their life and educational experiences themselves.

With regard to orphans' transition period from childhood to adulthood, the analysis clarified what was happening when orphanage graduates left the system of orphan care. In most cases, the participants were offered to live at the orphanage for another year or so until they

received their own housing or an apartment; or they were allowed to live in dormitories. Two study participants, who had prior experiences of living with their families had a clear vision for what they would do after leaving the orphanage. Their early childhood experiences living with their parents helped them to envision and formulate their life trajectories early on. As such, both of the participants knew that they would pursue education and career opportunities. All other four participants, who did not have prior family experiences to the orphanage, seemed to lack this clarity. They were graduating the orphanage with a blank space in their minds, not fully envisioning how to live their adult lives. They had to fill in this blank by themselves.

This research discovered that the orphanages attempted to help graduates during the transition period by enrolling them into various educational institutions. The majority of orphans seemed to enroll into low-prestigious colleges to pursue technical professions, and only a few went directly to pursue higher education. However, the graduates held diverse motivations for continuing education. Given that the Russian government provided financial support for graduates under the condition of continuing education (until the age of 23), many pursued education to secure financial stability during the transition period from the orphanage. They did not seriously consider implications for their chosen professions, but were rather driven by financial motives and an opportunity to continue to socialize with a known group of people. Others were guided to pursue higher education with a motivation to be independent and free from the system. Only one participant pursued higher education with a clear motivation to study and an understanding that her future and the social status largely depended on the level and quality of education. Given that not many orphans valued the importance of education, one may draw parallels with the study by Korzh (2013) who identified that the majority of orphanage graduates in Ukraine, while similarly not interested to study at school, were enthusiastic to

pursue education after leaving the orphanage. Ukrainian orphans seemed to have an understanding that education was, indeed, important for their future lives and careers. Within the Russian context, the stories suggested that only a small portion of graduates shared the same perspective, while the majority did not view education as important. Perhaps, future research could elaborate on why orphans in Russia and Ukraine formed different views on education in their lives, while living in relatively similar environments.

During the transition period, some orphans faced their first disappointments by finding out what it meant to have a status of a “mentally retarded person,” or understanding the real-life implications of a diploma from a correctional school. Many graduates had a chance to reflect on their overall experiences living and studying at the orphanages, and critically look at the quality of education they received. Importantly, the transition period was the first time when orphans had to face the larger society. They had to navigate the city, communicate, and deal with the larger world. While for some orphans such encounters were pleasant, for others they created a degree of discomfort and anxiety. Many preferred to self-eliminate themselves from the settings they were culturally unfamiliar with, and only a few pursued overselection strategy to compete on equal basis with people from more privileged backgrounds. Some participants reported feeling different from the rest of the society, and shared their fears of doing things the wrong way and being judged by the public. The feelings of shame and embarrassment followed them. Therefore, it was quite popular for orphanage graduates to gather in large groups of orphans and stay together. However, these experiences varied, since some graduates decided to depart from their orphanage network right away. United together, the graduates often led carefree and joyful lifestyle as they spent their state-provided money on parties, nightclubs, alcohol, drugs, and other activities. As stories showed, some orphans were trapped in this lifestyle and continued to live

their adult lives drinking alcohol or using drugs. Some participants reported that during this time they did not think about their future as they believed that no matter what, they would always have support from the state and the society. Therefore, when financial support from the state abruptly ended, many graduates fell into an unfamiliar reality of living on their own.

For many, this event became “a wake-up” call and forced graduates to re-envision their adult life strategies. Here, we observed a great number of approaches that orphans developed to shape their trajectories. As Dima reported, many of his friends decided to pursue passive and even manipulative strategies by getting unemployment allowance from labor exchange and deliberately asking employers to write them refusals. Others began to rent out their apartments and continued to lead carefree lifestyles. From Dima’s personal experiences and his two projects to help graduates with employment, he came to a conclusion that many orphanage graduates did not wish to pursue work and career. They searched for easier and more passive ways to survive.

Others decided to take on different trajectories. By the time when government financial support stopped, most of the graduates formed a better vision about what to do in life. In other words, graduates filled in the blank space that initially existed after the graduation from the orphanage. As the stories showed, orphans’ early independent experiences during their transition period became quite influential for many of them. These early experiences filled in the blank and pulled graduates into various directions. Unfortunately, the study confirmed some of the insights from official statistics, revealing that orphanage graduates may end up as alcohol or drug addicts, commit crimes, be sentenced to jail, or die. While the study participants tended to explain this trend differently – for example, as a lack of motivation, or as a lack of housing or a job, or as a result of a feeling of being lost in life - I believed all orphans’ experiences of life and education should be taken into consideration in explaining such a dire result.

Importantly, the narratives yield rich data that transcended the general framework that I developed to analyze, compare, and discuss orphans' experiences. In fact, I acknowledge that many topics remained open for further analysis and discussion. I invite scholars from the fields of education, psychology, and sociology to look at the stories and continue the analysis of these narratives from multi-disciplinary perspectives, thus, bringing deeper and more enhanced understanding of the phenomenon. I also hope that this research would attract broad attention of practitioners, government officials, NGOs and other stakeholders to unite the efforts and make a meaningful and long-lasting change within the system of Russian orphan care.

Now that I have met all the participants, heard and shared their stories, offered an analysis, I ask myself, what now? I am left with a disturbing sensation inside me. I hear an inner monotonous sound, similar to the sound on TV during technical breaks when there is a still image and a dull repetitive sound, signaling the same frequency. I was left with the same feeling as if I have watched the movies of orphans, the movie ended, but this painful sound remained. From time to time, I would see images of Dima being shackled to the wheelchair, being in pain, but still smiling and fighting for life. I would see a sad expression of Evgeny thinking about his family, yet bravely living his life and serving others. I would envision scenes of cruelty that took place at the orphanages and see Maria's strength and human spirit to rise above all the challenges. I applaud strength, courage, and bravery of all the participants who continue to fight, to live, and to laugh.

These stories made me believe that people are capable of overcoming any obstacle in their lives. However, it deeply moves me to think that as I write these words, there are children at the orphanages who are being beaten for speaking up; there are pedophiles in the system waiting for their dirty chance to abuse those in their care; there are tired and exhausted caregivers who

express their anger and frustration on children; there are graduates who are being lost; there are criminals who manipulate orphans. These thoughts are traumatic to me. These thoughts recreate this monotonous sound, the frequency of pain that is being transmitted over and over again. Who is ready to answer the call? Similarly to subversive caregivers, I often find myself hopeless to fight the system on my own. I feel hopeless in the face of the massive scope of the problem that goes far beyond the system of orphan care. Nevertheless, I still hope. I do hope that if humans created the system, they can change it as well. I find comfort in seeing that positive changes are taking place on a government official level, and, at least, the documents reflect humanity and respect. I hope that over time the practice would match the policies. I hope that one day the pedagogy of violence would be replaced with pedagogy of love and respect.

But before this day will come, let the stories of orphans be powerful reminders of pain that often goes unnoticed by the larger society. Let the stories be a gateway to the reality of thousands of children, and millions of traumatized adults who suffer from their own fears. Let the stories be an invitation for practitioners, researchers, and empathetic readers to think, to act, and to change the system of orphan care in Russia.

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Author Biography

Marina Kudasova was born in Turkmenistan, USSR and at the age of fourteen she moved with her family to Russia. In 2009 she graduated from Immanuel Kant's State University of Russia, department of Foreign Language and Literature. Already during her undergraduate studies she got involved in social projects and volunteered to work with orphans in Russia, drug addicted children and youth in Poland, street children in India, and low-income school students in Cambodia. In 2011, Marina received Fulbright Fellowship Award and continued her Master program in Comparative and International Education department at Lehigh University. In 2013, she decided to pursue a doctorate degree in the field of international education. She is interested in ways education can help and foster marginalized children to succeed in their lives.