



EGS – Alumni Masters Spotlight – Alina Tomsa

Class of 2011

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1. Tell us about yourself. Where do you come from? Where are you living now?

I am 29 years old and I am Romanian. When I was 3, my country raised a wounded liberation flag after 4 decades of communism. To this day, Romania is struggling to find its rightful democratic identity in its long, meaningful history. Those my age are part of the revolutionary generation, trying to contribute to a positive re-set of culture, values, to our identity as nation and ultimately as humans.

For the last 9 years, Bucharest has been my home. It's where I did my B.A. studies in Psychology and my Master's in Experiential psychotherapy and counselling. But foremost, it is the place where I have mostly learned by trial and error. The biggest gift Bucharest gave for me was - and still is - the immersion it offers me into the world of talented, kind and elevated people whom I proudly call my friends nowadays. It's also where I met my courageous and inspiring husband.

2. How did you discover EGS and the Expressive Arts ?

Ordinarily as it may sound, I googled words like "therapy" and "arts" in the attempt to find some sort of educational program that could bring together these two realms that had already been a big part of my life. I had fallen in love with a young Swiss musician, who witnessed my singing performance of Janis Joplin's legendary "Mercedes Benz" at a students' congress. He was touched by the experience and in-

vited me to join him for a duet piano-voice the next year. So began an art-full love that basically inspired me to follow my interest in the arts. Then I found EGS. Reading the description of the Master in Expressive Arts therapy was a huge surprise. I had no idea working with the bouquet of arts was possible in such a coherent way, so I quickly wrote to the contact address. Margo Knill answered to me promptly and kindly. She guided me through the interviewing, registration process with much patience and sensitivity to my background, making it possible for me to join the program and continue it to completion.

3. What is your fondest memory of your experience in the Masters' program? Or maybe two or three memories?!

I keep my best memories of the Masters' in 3 full journals, one for each summer, so it's rather difficult to find the best ones. Right now, what stands out for me is an experience during my first summer school in 2009. After two weeks of intensive classes with all the openings of mind and heart that came with it, my two unforgettable friends from the U.S., Dev and Leah, and I felt a creative urge that resulted in a jam session that lasted into the late hours of the night. Given that we were encouraged to play and explore in our free time, we had access to the musical instruments. All three of us danced, sang and played instruments together, forming mysterious organic shadows made of movements, sounds and voices that intertwined. The beauty, the "third", the presence we invoked, probably changed each one of us individually. I must have developed a new level of confidence in humanity right then and there. I can still hear Dev's feet drumming on the floor and still see Leah's hair flying in waves as she was jumping as a grass hopper. Alive in all our senses, we were allowing each other into being with all the differences and similarities among us. To celebrate our creativity with the world, we went out of the classroom, found a telephone booth in Saas-Fee and sang together in the heart of the night, our foreheads touching. The vibration and the light inside the booth made us feel like stars in the dark of the night.

Another memory that comes to mind is Graduation Day, when, for the last Community Arts session, the whole international Expressive Arts gathering went out in the sun dancing, with colourful scarves, laughing, holding hands, hearts pulsing with joy and music. The quality of the sun light and the shadow of the tree on the terrace still lingers in my mind when I'm searching for harmony and beauty. We celebrated existence as a unique, perfect mandala that rarely appears with such clarity in life. The arts had created a resourceful, coherent, creative and pulsing community that feels, to this day, like family to me.

3. Since finishing the program, what Expressive Arts work have you been doing?

The Expressive Arts Master literally helped me design the job that I felt called to do at that time, and coming home to Romania, that exact job was proposed to me in a matter of weeks. That was true synchronicity! I worked for a year and a half representing a Romanian NGO in a paediatric hospital that treated children with cancer. It was there that I had the opportunity to bring the Expressive Arts to beautiful, courageous, talented and severely sick children. In turn, they taught me essential lessons of love, patience, courage and friendship. The arts were our language and the most loyal instruments of relief I knew.

After my work contract was over, my actor husband and I did a series of workshops for a telephone company, where we combined the Expressive Arts with theatre exercises to provide an empowering experience to the marketing agents we were working with.

Meanwhile, I opened my own private practice of counselling and psychotherapy in Bucharest and have been putting the arts to practice in individual work with adult clients. Some of the themes where I find the arts especially helpful are: mourning, divorce, separation, and existential crisis such as finding identity, transitions, and isolation.

For half a year now, I am proud to be part of the Romanian Children's Relief/ Inocenti Foundation, an American-Romanian organisation that supports families and children in need. We undergo Early Intervention programs in three cities of Romania, working in hospitals, schools, recuperation centres, and in the children's homes when needed. I rediscovered the deep satisfaction of team work and am focusing on developing my management skills, along with my wonderful passionate colleagues. In this new year, we're starting a series of Expressive Arts ateliers for expat women in Romania, as a fundraising opportunity and I am very excited about it.



4. If you had a crystal ball, how would you like to imagine yourself in five years time ?

This question takes me back to a clay installation that I did back in Saas-Fee, in the attempt to create and shape my future. Most of what was shaped there came true. In 5 years time, I see myself with a family that includes children, in our home that includes a terrace or a small garden. I will be continuing the work with children in need, developing the foundation's programs, making them accessible to more and more children across Romania. My mission in life is deeply linked to humanitarian causes. I can see myself doing Expressive Arts trainings and workshops with volunteers, with Child Life professionals, presenting in conferences, maybe conducting research projects also. I would love to be able to do the CAGS program in Saas-Fee by that time. One of my greatest wishes is to bring Margo, Paolo and other exceptional teachers I've had in Switzerland, to teach in Romania and to show them the beauties and gifts of my country. I am the only Romanian to have graduated from the Masters Program in Expressive Arts until now, and I deeply honour the support I got from the teaching staff. The crystal ball also says there's going to be a lot of travelling in my life in 5 years time, with most of the trips having with a professional purpose.

5. Anything else you want us to know?

Just that completing the Masters' Program at EGS was the most rewarding academic experience I ever had and the teachings I received rippled in my life both on a professional and personal level. Solid bricks have been laid at the foundation of my being in the world at EGS and I am forever grateful to the arts, to my teachers, my colleagues and to Saas Fee, a breathtaking space perfect to awaken the senses, the love, the self, the creativity.

I hope to be able to live up to all I received during those generous years. Briefly, I aim to "Make stuff, take risks, be awesome !"* for as long as I can.

* Professor Sandy Stone's piece of advice during a lecture at EGS