

Zero: On the Road to Envision

Human Pillar: Core Strenght

Welcome to a powerful place. The level zero. Each of us starts at a sort of a level zero every day, because every day begins with a Zero Hour. It is the launch of a new stage in the course of life. It brings many possibilities to imagine and explore. We all have, within us, the resources to go much further than where we are now, expanding our vision exponentially. Starting from zero does not mean you are starting from scratch. Quite the opposite. Every day, even on the darkest days, we wake up with energy and capability, just like a rocket on the launch pad. It may appear to be rooted to the ground like a tower, without the wings to fly, when in fact it is loaded with fuel and tools that can carry it high into space. And like a rocket leaving the Earth behind, it's important that we leave something behind our limited preconceptions about what we think is possible. Too often we underestimate ourselves and settle for a limited view of what is possible for our lives, families, communities, and even humanity.

My level zero, as a young girl, was this: A remote small Italian town of few people. An uncertainty called home, filled with strife. Very limited means with which to make a living or build a life. Not far from my home, there was a place I used to go to take refuge in my imaginary world, the medieval Castle of Santa Severa. A solid fortress with a history of war, with the sea echoing, as if in a long corridor. In front of such strength, I could talk to my alter ego, Fedy, my heroine. With her, I would exercise our right to dream as a protester marching for change. Together we would make it, together we would laugh, and together we would overcome. There was always great comfort in knowing that Fedy had the superpower of being a visionary. It didn't matter that glimpses of the future were coming true just as we were playing. What mattered was that I continued to use my alter ego to stay creative and not leave anything to circumstance. No! I was going to use the muscles of life to let myself be pulled forward as if I had a powerful engine inside.

As a child, school was my saving grace. There I was highly valued for

my commitment and excellence. My local public school, the only one in our hamlet, was a tiny house with five rooms, one for each of the five elementary classes. There was a small backyard where during playtime at recess, we would pretend to make tomato sauce like our relatives in aprons bent over giant steaming cisterns, we would stir our giant imaginary pots with our giant imaginary spoons. During my fourth grade in school, I met the first of a long line of people who saw something promising in me. Someone who came inside my soul to help, guide, and inspire me. It was my teacher, Enrica. I had noticed her immediately for her radiant intensity. In our little village, Teacher Enrica was different: She was refined and intellectual, she had traveled, and she knew more. She was loving and conveyed the message to me that life was hard but could also be fun. She had the sophistication and coolness I craved and, like a person lost in the woods scanning a map for a path to safety, I studied her speech and dress for clues on how to be an evolved person. She took me under her wing and once she understood my struggles at home, often the topic of the gossip town for the loud fights among my parents and my father's violent abuse for which I was terrified. She asked my mom if I could spend a weekend at her house with her husband and her wonderful daughters. Teacher Enrica wanted to give me some joy I was not able to experience with my family. This kind of person, coming into our lives, especially at a young age, acts to confirm our dreams. She became the beacon, the uplifter, the fitness coach we need to stay strong. She is the kind of person we need to seek out, remember, and be grateful for throughout our lives. These types of people are like saints who have been mysteriously sent our way as we move between courage and doubt during our formative years and even beyond. I knew I had the inner strength and vision to guide myself along lines yet to be seen. I had the courage, the muscle, and the art of the invisible to endure and to wake up each day with hope and gratitude as fuel for my dreams. In every moment of despair, I could turn to the values rooted in my roots: faith, gratitude, and aspiration. Faith in a better future; aspiration to better oneself; gratitude for having health and food.

Some might say that my story is a fairy tale. If a fairy tale is full of magical beings and lands, then you can be sure I've pulled a few rabbits out of my hat over the years. But a good magician spends years honing her moves until they appear effortless in her acts, which is exactly what I did as I turned adversity into opportunity, loneliness into collaboration, and hunger into learning. Before I felt distressed by my poor economic condition, I was distressed by having a house without peace. In my small town, my parents' divorce—they finally separated when I was 10—was a real scandal. I was thankful that I hadn't been born in an underdeveloped country where even health and life are at risk and that I could eat a meal every day, but I must ad-

mit I often daydreamed of a distant family taking me away and transplanting me to an oasis of love and safety. It would give me encouragement, gifts, positive experiences, and the protection I craved. Yet, despite my desire for a happy family life away from my reality, I learned from misfortune. In my imagination, I would somehow escape the fate they had set for me. I learned to do more than run away in my imagination. I learned to sift through the mountains of my thoughts and wisely choose those with the most potential. I believe we all have this potential to think and act because we already embody the innate human trait of being able to imagine. It's like learning to walk by crawling until we reach our destination. Which means we will fall. Many times. We will be challenged to exercise skills we don't yet have. We will be called upon to build muscles we have not yet used. During the pursuit, it will take intense concentration, and it won't always be a fun ride. But over time, the muscle becomes stronger because we have trained it, hardened it, and pushed it to exhaustion.

You don't have to grow up in difficult circumstances to be determined to become a better human being, achieve goals, and fulfill dreams, you can build your focus and strength by choice. There are many, really many extraordinary people and great examples of humankind everywhere. Good people, maybe simple, who forge our species into the future remind us of our common thread, challenge us to be better, to express our light, which is available to each of us if only we choose to ignite it. These people are also close to us and in every corner of the planet, trying to make a difference in their lives, in their communities, and when possible, even in the world. Regardless of your background, you need to find your Core Strength as a key foundation of your being.

I have learned the nature of my core strength through experiences and long hours of self-examination and reflection—often, literally talking to myself, with Fedy. *Your Core Strength is the one within you that cannot be defeated or denied.* It is like an engine that propels the rocket up beyond the force of gravity. It is the force that refuses to let us be dragged down again, the one that saves us from crashing. When you find it, you too will rocket off to your unobvious mission to build your future. Have a good life and a safe journey!