



Claudia, Dallas, USA

I am a 38-year-old woman trying to live a creative life. I was born in Targu-Jiu, a small town in SW Romania, the same town that gave the world the father of modern sculpture, Constantin Brancusi (and I'm terribly proud of this). At the moment I live with my husband in Dallas, Texas, doing freelance photography.

Sharing all details of my life would be too long of a story. It is what happens when you reach almost 40, there is too much to tell!

I will start with the fact that I was a rather introvert child whose favorite activities were reading, drawing (I was never any good at it, but loved it), writing journals and love poems, doing all kind of crafts (making clothes, cooking, knitting etc), trying to play musical instruments (which never worked). Put this in perspective: it was about 25-30 years ago, in communist or post-Revolution Romania, with no internet, almost no TV.

I moved from my parents' home at 18 to study Sociology in Brasov, one of my favorite cities in the world, surrounded by mountains (it is quite famous for being close to Dracula's castle). These were four amazing years, and the first time I studied photography, visual sociology, creative thinking (if that can be studied!). My photography journey was cut short though because of a fire in the lab, and I only picked it up again much later.

After four years in Brasov I moved to the capital, Bucharest, to follow a Master in Communications and Public Relations, and started my work life. I had few jobs in Bucharest, but what really marked my life was working for the biggest (at that time) national newspaper, with some of the most impressive and inspirational writers, journalists and editors in the country. I had for instance the incredible chance to interview and publish an article about the Romanian (ex) royal family, which is to date the biggest honor and privilege I have been given.

I came in contact with the Eastern philosophy of life and spirituality a little later and a few more jobs. My boss' daughter and her husband were Buddhists and experts in Tibetan language and culture and I got to learn more about their spiritual journey.

About the same time, I started travelling more. Life brought me to the south of France where I lived for two years and to Central African Republic for about seven months.

And then came Dubai. I was not planning to stay had I not found the perfect job in a PR agency in my first month there. I ended up spending eight years there, and they were some of the most intense, challenging, difficult, transformational years of my life. When I turned 30 I felt awakened, and ready for the rest of my life.

These years in Dubai were those during which I felt the most connected, on both personal and professional levels. It is there, through my job and my personal journey, that I got more familiar with what it means to live my life in a more sustainable way. I discovered yoga. I resumed my creative search as well as my photography journey. I met so many amazing people, and it was the most humanly rich experience of my life so far.

I travelled a lot and I fell in love. I married a Danish man, we travelled some more, we changed jobs, we enjoyed life in Dubai until we decided to make a move.

Now I have been living in Dallas, Texas for the past 2.5 years, doing freelance photography (people, yoga, travel and food). Dallas gave me the chance to explore my creativity and my limits, and I started working as a photographer.

I also discovered Ashtanga yoga, which completely changed my life. I realized that my limits were nowhere I thought they were, and it helped me reveal things about myself that I was never aware of. Eight months into my yoga journey I had a revelation regarding my health and started a diet that completely changed my view about food and how much control we have on our bodies.

To me sustainability means living in harmony with nature and the Universe. Never forgetting that we share this planet with other living beings, and that

we humans have both the power to destroy or to save the planet. It means being respectful to our only home.

How does that translate to everyday life? My motto is "Create more, consume less." (I borrowed it from the package of the local roasted coffee my husband and I prepare at home) and this is the philosophy that helps me be more sustainable.

I said earlier that I was a maker when I was a child. It was not that special after all: my mom was a maker, my dad was a maker, my grandparents were makers. It was by necessity: we couldn't buy things, even if we wanted to. Nowadays, craft is a fashion, but for me it comes naturally.

Instead of going to a restaurant, I try to prepare as much food as I can at home. I try to make cooking a joy, not a chore. I prepare beautiful food and I photograph it. This takes time, creative energy, so it reduces boredom, time spent on Facebook or in front of the TV. It also makes us more aware of ingredients, of where they come from, or what their properties are. It makes us appreciate food more.

By using my spare time doing yoga, photography, cooking or any other crafts, I don't feel the need to go and buy unnecessary things. Also, when you do yoga and have a healthy lifestyle, things in our bodies and mind change. I don't use perfume anymore, I make my own cosmetic products from healthy oils like coconut, avocado or olive mixed with essential oils, I remove make-up with a reusable cloth, and I don't use home fragrances and candles etc.

Although I am not a vegetarian, I try to reduce my consumption of animal protein, and when I do buy I only get the ones that are produced in the most sustainable ways. I mostly buy organic products, and try to support local farms. I hope all these things add up to have a healthy lifestyle while caring about the planet.

There is so much more we could do and we are learning every day. For instance, I feel we are not educated enough about our waste: how much we produce, where it is going, how it is sorted, what we can change to do better... I feel this is a topic that should be on mainstream media and prime time

news every day, but unfortunately their agenda is different.

I know I am still way behind at recycling. I still use too much plastic, even though I'm trying to reduce it every day, and I need to find a system to reduce my consumption because I feel I have been failing here for too long. I trust my residential complex (claiming to follow a sustainable policy) for sorting our trash, we even pay extra \$30 / month for that. We still waste food, no matter how much I try not to, mainly because we have no way to separate organic waste and use it (we could for example if we had a garden). We still buy water in plastic containers. We are getting the biggest ones but I'm still in search of the best filter for tap water.

I think the next generation is already more aware and educated than us. At least this is my feeling, and probably my hope, too. I think I would tell them to not look too much for material things, but instead live a creative, adventurous life, read books, travel, be more in touch with nature...: "Create more, consume less."

Photo Credit: Maria Elena Sandovici

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Outside the Box

Sustainability With a Twist