

The Survivor's Notebook *Volume I*

DEATH OF INNOCENCE

The Excavator as a Sanctuary:
A Journey of an ACOA and ACDF Survivor



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Free sample of Volume I

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THE SURVIVOR'S NOTEBOOK.
VOLUME I

DEATH OF INNOCENCE

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TO THE READER

This book is for those who grew up in a home where silence was louder than a scream.

For those who learned to listen to the key in the lock before they learned to trust.

I do not write to accuse. I write to name. To give a voice to that child who had to be an adult too soon.

And to remind you that innocence does not disappear suddenly—it fades piece by piece.

If you recognize yourself in this story: you are not alone.

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PROLOGUE: THE SOUND OF THE KEY



“Before the lock made its first sound”

There are sounds that never grow old. They don't fade like photographs. They don't lose focus like memories. **They don't live in your head—they live in your body.**

The sound of a key in the lock was one of them.

I didn't have to see who was behind the door. The rhythm was enough. First, a short pause, a hesitation, then metal against metal, a jerk—something like quiet anger or exhaustion that was not allowed to be named. And finally, that movement—the

turn—which decided everything: would home pretend to be home today, or would it turn into a minefield?

In the apartment block, it echoed like an alarm signal. An echo in the stairwell, the creak of a door on the ground floor, someone's footsteps behind a thin wall.

But inside me—a silence that could not be maintained. Silence always broke first.

I lay motionless and pretended to sleep, though my heart was already racing. I knew this reaction better than my own name. I tensed my muscles so I wouldn't be heard. So I wouldn't be there at all. In such moments, a person can become a shadow in their own bed—small, too light, too easy to overlook.

Sometimes I thought that if I were truly invisible, it would all be over. But invisibility is a luxury. Children from dysfunctional homes have something else instead: radar.

My radar picked up details no one named. The tone of the lock. The weight of a breath. The draft under the door. The tremor of silence.

Then I did what I always did.

I got out of bed noiselessly, as if the floor were ice. And I looked for a place where I could breathe. Not a room. Not a corner. **A place.**

I had my excavator. Yellow. Plastic, but to me, it was more real than anything happening around me. It had tracks that didn't betray emotion, an arm that followed orders, and a bucket that could dig a tunnel to another world. When I took it in my hands, time stopped being the enemy for a moment.

The excavator was my sanctuary.

Once, someone would have laughed. An excavator as a sanctuary? How can you hide in a toy? And yet. In my head, it wasn't a toy. It was a survival mechanism. An evacuation plan. A small machine that built boundaries where no one gave them to me.

I would lay it on the floor and move it slowly, inch by inch. I mapped out routes. I built roads that led from the kitchen to the hallway, from the hallway to the room, from the room to... anywhere. In my world, everything had to have a direction, because in the real world, direction depended on the mood of the adults.

Behind the door, the lock kept speaking.

There was always that moment when the key stopped working and the human started breathing. And then something else appeared in the air: a smell. Sometimes it was the heavy smell of alcohol, sometimes sweat, sometimes a shame that no one knew how to name. In those years, in the apartment blocks, there was a lot of shame. It entered apartments like dust and settled on everything.

And I, instead of crying, I counted. One. Two. Three. Not because I was brave. Because counting is like a handrail on stairs you cannot see. When the world trembles, a child grabs anything that pretends to be stable.

I held the excavator and imagined it had a small cabin inside, where someone braver than me lived. Someone who could say "no." Someone who could close the door not from the inside, but from the world.

In reality, the door always opened the same way.

The handle dropped. The hallway poured into the room. And with it—a tension that had its own name. My body knew it by

heart before I understood what it was. Today, it would be called hypervigilance. Back then, they only said: “Don't overreact. Don't make things up. Children don't have problems.”

And yet.

Every day I learned one thing: that innocence does not die suddenly. It dies piece by piece. By small deaths that no one writes in a calendar. One death when you have to pretend to smile. A second when you have to lie at school. A third when you have to defend someone who should be defending you.

And when the lock finally fell silent, I knew that nothing would ever be “normal” again. Because normalcy in my home was only a break between one turn of the key and the next.

The excavator stood on the floor like a yellow warning sign. I gripped it tighter in my hand.

If I am to say when my adult life began—it wasn't when I turned fifteen. It began when I learned to hear the lock. And I realized I had to have my sanctuary before the world broke me.

This is my Notebook.



THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY...

The full story of survival—from the dark corridors of a Polish housing estate, through trauma, to reclaiming freedom—is available in the full version of the book.

ENGLISH EDITION LAUNCH: December 31, 2025, on Amazon.com POLISH EDITION: Available now in print on Amazon.pl

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