

## My Moving Castle



*Chollada Phinitluang*



This story is told by Chollada Phinitduang.

## **Chollada's Story**

AGE WHEN INTERVIEWED: 30

BORN: Thailand

INTERVIEWED IN: Grunerløkka

Chollada Phinitduang is a Thai-Norwegian performance artist, dance artist, and choreographer based in Oslo. Her artistic journey is a desire to explore the potential of the body as a primary medium for artistic expression and its role in society. Personally and professionally, she is adventurous, curious, and explorative, continuously seeking inspiration and exploring new territories. This naturally translates into engaging in interdisciplinary collaborations and expanding my artistic autonomy.

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*"I have a van that I can park wherever I want or stay wherever I want. That's my home."*

## Moving to Norway

I had just turned 11, in 2001, when I moved to Norway with my mother Benjarat, older sister Eo, and stepdad Egil Arne. That was probably, I don't know, weird, but at the same time, very interesting because I've always been an adventurous person. I don't think that impacted me in a way that "Oh, this is super challenging" but more like, "Wow, it's an adventure. "When my parents asked where we wanted to live, if we wanted to stay in Thailand or move to Norway, I already knew at that age that I wanted to be in Norway because it would give me better opportunities in life and study-wise. That's why we decided to move from Thailand. Also, I always dreamed of seeing snow! And the first time when we came out of the airport in Tromsø, the North of Norway, I ran out and made a butterfly on the snow, like a snow angel. "This is real, you know, it falls from the sky." People were like, "Are you crazy?" My family from Norway was holding jackets waiting for me inside the arrivals terminal. I think they were in shock that I just ran out of the airport. I didn't feel the cold because I had too much adrenaline. "Oh my god, that was insane!" I had never seen snow before, and it was my first-time experiencing snow.

## First Day at School

But then suddenly my new life went so fast; my sister and I started school. My first day at school was quite funny; my mom tried to



pack everything in our school bags because she was not sure which class we were going to have. I had everything with me, all the gym clothes, books, and food. Everything. We came with this huge backpack to school, and the thing is, we were the first and only foreigners in that community. So, we got this huge welcome at our school.

As I remember, when I walked into the class, they had decorated the classroom with both Thai and Norwegian flags. The class made a circle, everyone was standing behind their desks, and I got the desk in the centre of the circle. There was a speech by the teacher (I guess it was a welcoming speech), but I didn't understand the language. Afterward, the whole class sang different songs. Even though I was shy on my first day and could only say my name the whole day, it was an amazing day. That day I also met one of my best friends, Andreas, whom I am still very close with today. Several years later, he told me that during the six years from first to sixth grade, they had never arranged a welcoming party before, especially not the singing part, but they sang the day I started the class. It was really, really cute. He said the grand gesture was very unusual. He experienced a new side of our teacher. So, it was a great start.

But, of course, that probably changed now, and not everyone had the same warm welcome. I've talked to people who came around the same age as me and my older sister; their experiences were a little bit different than ours. I think we were the first people from a

warm country. We were exotic, and the school wanted to include us and make sure we felt welcome.

## Life in Rossfjordstraumen

Moving to Rossfjordstraumen from a big city in Thailand was a huge change. The activities, community, and social gatherings were so different. I was not only separated from my whole family on my mother's side but also faced different after-school activities. Back in Thailand, I used to spend my free time at malls with my sister and friends. These malls were like mini-cities with game centres, swimming pools, amusement parks, and wellness centres. My favourite was the arcade dance machine. In Southeast Asia, malls are designed to be places where you want to stay all day, hang out, and have fun with family and friends. It's such a contrast to Norway, where malls are mostly just clothing stores and maybe a couple of small cafeterias or restaurants.

After school in Thailand, I'd either be at the mall or sitting on a magnolia tree at a temple doing my homework before heading home for dinner. But in Rossfjordstraumen, after-school activities were all about sports and nature. I joined the football team, played volleyball, and practiced taekwondo to burn off all my extra energy. I was always an active kid.

My dad loved nature, and he passed that love on to me. In this no man's land, Rossfjordstraumen, with nature all around, made me appreciate the outdoors even more. It was like nature became my new playground, offering endless adventures and experiences.

### Friendship with Ragna

Not long after moving to Rossfjordstraumen, my dad encouraged me to get to know a neighbour girl, Ragna. Her family had travelled around Asia and Australia and had even visited Thailand. My dad thought this would be a good common ground for us to connect. So, I knocked on her door and asked if she wanted to join me for a swim down by my house. I was eager, but she tried to explain she couldn't because of homework, and I didn't understand her due to the language barrier. We ended up using body language, and despite the confusion, she joined me. This was the beginning of our long-term friendship.

We ended up going down to the fjord. As kids, we found all sorts of things to do. I wanted to swim, but then I also wanted to row an inflatable boat so we could jump from it further out in the fjord. We tried to fill the boat using just our lungs because we didn't have any equipment. It took ages, and by the time we got it fully blown, the tide had gone down, so we had to walk far to get the boat out before we could start rowing.

What started as just swimming became a long and challenging activity. Even though we didn't understand each other half the time, she was polite enough to go along with my ideas. After this, our friendship grew into a family-like bond. I spent nearly half my time growing up at her place. Her parents became like my second parents, and her little brother felt like my own.

Her family had a typical Norwegian household, with strict routines: homework right after school, then dinner, and every Friday, they cleaned the entire house so they could enjoy a fresh weekend. Spending time with them helped me improve my Norwegian quickly. They introduced me to Western music—rock, punk, metal—and literature since they were all bookworms. In contrast, my house was filled with Motown, R&B, pop, Thai music, and a more relaxed routine due to my busy after-school schedule. I got the best of both worlds from her place and mine, integrating into her family culture while keeping my own.

One memorable day, they had a Greek barbecue, and I tried feta cheese for the first—and last—time. I ended up vomiting in half of her house, which is how I discovered I might be allergic to dairy products. Ragna cleaned up after me. That's true friendship. We were quite different; she was nerdy, dutiful, helpful, and caring, while I was rebellious, reckless, exuberant, and easy-going. Yet, we complemented each other, especially with our loud, talkative nature and good listening skills.

I remember a sleepover at my place when the lights went out. She was ready to sleep, but my brain started to buzz. I looked out the window at the frosty, crisp, and really, really cold night. The stars were shining bright, and the aurora borealis was dancing.

I asked her, “Hey, have you ever thought about what is beyond the sky, you know how far it stretches?” She replied, “Planets, galaxy, universe,” in a sleepy voice. I continued, “Yeah, but how big is the universe?” She then replied, “I don’t know, I’m just 11 and now I’m gonna sleep.”

I was wide awake, asking big and small questions while she did her best to answer. This dynamic shaped our relationship; she was not just my friend but also my guide in life, my teacher in language and homework, while I was her guide in social networking and partying.

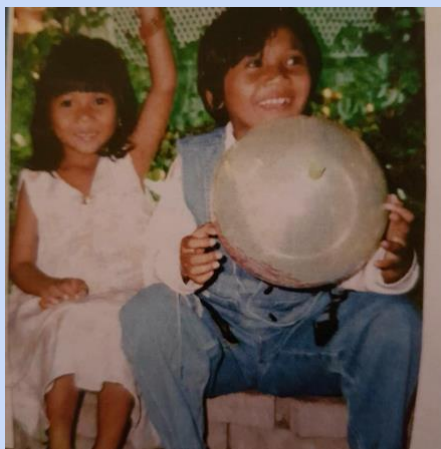
## Growing Up in Korat

I grew up in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, but we call it Korat. In Thailand, everyone has a nickname; mine is iO, used by family and friends. My official name, Chollada, was only for formal settings like school. When I moved to Norway, people knew me by my official name only.

Korat is a large city, with around 130,000 people in the city centre and about 2.6 million in the province. I grew up in a bustling

household with my mother, older sister, some of my mother's siblings, and their kids. It was a co-living situation where family members stuck together. Our house was never empty or quiet. Socializing wasn't a special occasion; it was everyday life. There were always people around, and we were never alone. Neighbours and adults often swapped babysitting duties or gathered to eat. This fostered a strong sense of community and collective caring. In Thailand, there's a mentality to help and care for each other, to be kind and compassionate regardless of the situation. This is partly because Thailand doesn't have the same welfare system as some other countries.

I still find joy in being around people, though sometimes I needed quiet moments for myself. I often found solace at the temple, sitting under magnolia or banyan trees to escape the busy, noisy city life.





### School and Early Challenges

My transportation to school was often a rickshaw, my mom arranged for a rickshaw driver to take us. It was faster and safer than overcrowded public transport, where people balanced on anything that supported their weight, inside and outside the vehicle.

My sister, cousins, and I attended the same primary school. As the youngest, I was always protected and never mocked. Somehow, I often found myself in arguments or even fights because I had a temper and little patience for nonsense.

In Thailand, students must cut their hair short before first grade to show their earlobes, as part of the uniform. I loved my long hair and refused to cut it. The school allowed me to keep it for the first year, but by second grade, I had to follow the rules. I remember crying and yelling at my teacher when she told me I had to cut my hair. I was so angry that I bit her, making her bleed. The school paged my mom to come and pick me up. I was in trouble I guessed. I didn't understand why I had to cut my hair. All I knew and felt was that I didn't want to fit into the system. I didn't want to look like the others, my sense of freedom and just being oneself was being forced and that corner me so I lashed out.

Of course, they punished me with a long thin cane made of bamboo wood. This was the most common tool used for punishment, both at school and at home. I've got caned backside, legs, and hands countless times. So quite a liberty to live in Norway whereas this type of punishment wasn't allowed or accepted both at home and at school.





I'm also quite a clumsy person. Once, I was balancing on a brick in the playground and fell, breaking my elbow. It never fully recovered, which became an obstacle for some activities I wanted to pursue.

The school system in Thailand is similar to the US in that sense that students can participate in school activities as part of their schedule. I wanted, of course, to join the Thai dance team, but my misshapen arm disqualified me. Thai dance is about form, shape, and system, like ballet but focusing on arm and finger movements, to articulate and express. I was sad that I didn't get to do Thai dance. The rejection felt like a personal failure. However, I found solace in language, when I was living with my mother's parents, Lam plai mat, countryside. I joined the English language competition team. The experience gave me a new sense of purpose and a different way to challenge myself.

I wanted to be in a creative field, but I wasn't good at painting, so fine art didn't come naturally to me. Language did. We reached the national competition level, but I couldn't participate because I had a near-death experience with malaria. I was hospitalized for weeks, and the doctor told my family that if I had been half an hour later, they might not have been able to save me. This was during a period when malaria mosquitoes were spreading, and adventurous kids like me were at risk.

The experience was blurry due to high fever and drugged out. I remember waking up one morning to find that a kid in my shared room had passed away. My grandmother and great-grandparents, deeply spiritual and religious, believed I had luck on my side. They chanted, sang, and even brought a monk to cleanse the bad energy and perform protective rituals.

I was sad about missing the competition, but my team and school sent me cards and flowers. Looking back, it's a bit embarrassing to say I was on the English competition team because when I moved to Norway, kids my age were more advanced in English. However, my quick improvement in Norwegian can be attributed to my excitement about languages and my desire to master them.

### Moving to Norway and Leaving My Dog Behind

I also had my own dog. I remember that I got it from my neighbour boy (my kindergarten “boyfriend”) in Korat when I was around 6 or 7. I had my dog until I was 11. I called him ‘Duck Tdic’ because, as a kid, it sounded very funny to me. Then circumstances changed and things needed to be organized before moving to Norway. My mom had to live in Norway first, before my elder sister Eo and I could reunite with her. I left my dog with my grandparents when I moved to Norway, but he was a city dog.

I lived with my grandparents for one and a half years in Banyan, in the countryside. I left my dog with my grandparents when I moved to Norway, so I thought. The last house we stayed in Korat was a bit suburban and he could run around in the nature nearby and return back to our house that he loved. He didn't enjoy being at my grandparents' place because it was unfamiliar to him. So it turned out he ran away. Eo was keeping this information till I was an adult before she shared it with me.

I was devastated to leave him because he was my pet. I had a responsibility for him. I didn't know how his life would be without me. The feeling of losing the connection and the bond I had with him hit me later in life. This is probably why I don't want to commit too much to either pets or people. It's not a commitment issue, just a defensive mechanism that came from seeing the patterns of my own life, a life of constant moving or traveling around. Mostly, it's not fear of losing them but the guilt of not being able to maintain the relationships and connections I collect along the way.





## Adjusting to Norwegian Life

We lived in Rossfjordstraumen, outside in the countryside, with around 400 people. There was a small Thai community, in nearby city of Finnsnes, about a 20–30-minute drive away. My mom did have some friends, and we met up with them. We had a Thai community, but I think I changed very quickly and lost interest in the community. I behaved more like a Norwegian. That's weird to say, but I never have been the typical Thai girl that they wanted me to be because I was extroverted. I liked to play like guys. I was not like a proper "good stereotypical Thai girl," you know, who sits, sews, knits, or does handcrafts. IN other words, always be polite and smile, respect the elders. I've never been like that. I always wanted to play, climb on trees, and do all sorts of things other than sitting and doing concentration work. So, maybe especially when I came to Norway, they saw this side of me very clearly that, "Oh my God, she's not going to be able to keep her Thai traditional life." So, this is also where, especially identity-wise, you become a minority in your own Thai community and also in this foreign country.

In a way, you kind of change your identity when you live in a place long enough. I've lived in Norway longer than I lived in Thailand. Now I've lost my mother tongue, which is Thai. Norwegian is now my mother tongue. I lost it very fast, because we spoke Thai, English, and Norwegian at home. My mom tried to be persistent with speaking Thai to us, but because the Thai language itself is

very different from both Norwegian and English, which are more similar to each other. I couldn't maintain my Thai, it was too far away. I am really an explorer and adventurer, I threw myself into new things, picked them up very easily, and then forgot the old stuff. I got influenced quickly and my will to adapt and master new life and languages was highly prioritized for me. After many years, I still speak like a child in Thai. You know, my Thai vocabulary kind of stopped there when I came to this country.

The funny part is that now that I've grown up, I actually try to go back to get a bit more of my inheritance and reclaim my roots. Now I'm starting to practice speaking Thai, and when I meet Thai people, I try to use the language as much as my knowledge goes.



I am self-taught, and I became interested in dance very quickly. I have always been since I lived in Thailand because I think it's an amazing form of self-expression. It's a therapy in a way, where you can express something that maybe words can't. When I lived with my grandparents in Thailand, I remembered one episode where I watched Bollywood on television. So, I just wrapped something in my hair to look like an Indian girl, and then I would start dancing and showing my grandparents what I just learned. I became this entertainer. I really liked it; I felt like it was fun because I thought it was so cool the way they could move their heads from side to side, with a very good isolation technique. I wanted to be able to do that, probably that was the starting point for me, to want to understand how I can control my movement and still have fun.

At school in Norway, I was not a shy person. When we arranged events, I was always the one who made people dance. I would be like, "OK, I can make a dance choreography", and then pick two of my friends or some others, and then we would create a choreography together. So, I started, in a way, my own dance team in Rossfjordstraumen. We even performed for the whole village for the celebration of Norwegian Constitution's Day, 17th of May. This was fun, but our parents were embarrassed. Because we danced to Missy Elliot and Ciara with the song "One, Two, Step" and Black-Eyed Peas with "My Hump". As you could imagine, lacking other

learning channels, I took my inspiration from MTV and yeah, it was indeed some ass shake, and slap while we were trying to look cool.

In 2001, the Shakira song “Whenever, Wherever” came out. But I watched the music video in 2002 or 2003, and I was hooked. She shakes a lot of her ass and hips. I was just amazed at how she controlled her body and moved to the rhythm that I didn’t understand. So, as a kid, you’re like, “Wow, that’s amazing.” “That’s technique.” I didn’t even know what the technique was. There was something about her movement that made me want to do it, to transfer it to my body. So, all the time, I tried to show my parents, and I think they were like, maybe that’s not a very good music video because they had another context, like affection, you know. But I didn’t understand that; I was interested in the movement. I was like, “OK, I’m gonna start dancing more,” and then I just worked on myself and mostly drew inspiration from hip-hop dance on MTV. Though my parents tried to show me different types of dance videos, like river dancing, so I could open my horizon to more than just “ass and hips shaking.” I appreciated what they were trying to do; unfortunately, river dance didn’t fall into my taste.

I started at Kongsbakken High School in Tromsø in 2007. Which meant I had to move from home, from Rossfjordstraumen at the age of 16. It was at this high school when I first got introduced to the dance style, the most western traditional one, classical ballet, jazz, and modern/contemporary, which I didn’t know before. This



was all new to me and after three years with this, I lost my interest in dance because I found it too strict and too formal. I missed discovery and creativity, from where it all began for me.

### The Caravan and Family Travels

So, two or three years after I moved to Rossfjordstraumen, my dad bought a caravan. My dad is always a practical man and approached life this way. He wanted a car that could be used for more than just commuting. This caravan was more convenient than any other vehicle.

It was ugly! It was brown, and at that time as a teenager, I was not a fan of the 70s interior. The fashion wasn't to my taste. It was a red color mixed with a light wood cabinet. It was like something didn't fit in. It was not aesthetic in my eyes. I thought, "this doesn't look pretty." It made so much noise, and maybe I wished we had a newer car because all the other parents had newer cars.

We drove down from the north to Oslo for my football match. I played football till I was 16, and then I decided to quit football because I wanted to dance. And I was actually quite good and was scouting for the county championship, but dance has a bigger place in my heart.

That was the first trip we ever went on with Rico. It was me, my dad, my mom, and my little sister, Naomi. On the way down, I don't remember that much, but on the way back, I remember a lot, because I was in a teenage mood. There was the Norway Cup, so a lot of different teams from all around the country met and played football. I injured my ankle while I was there. Then, first, my parents told me they wanted to drive this car to England, but we didn't get the paperwork done. So they said," no, we're going to drive back to the north and have our road trip vacation in Norway".

"So there'll be no vacation outside Norway" I yelled back. And that was all in one message. I was disappointed. Another option, I could go on the plane home with my teammates, so I could be home and stay with my older sister and, you know, start partying a little bit. I was not allowed to do that. So, I was stuck in the van for two weeks with my parents and my little sister. During that time, I was heartbroken for the first time because my boyfriend at the time broke up with me, while I was playing football. So, I was in a bad mood.



I didn't want to be in the van. I didn't talk to them. I was just being a teenager. Very moody, very sad. We went to Monolitten at Vigelandsparken and Geiranger with this beautiful scenery. I was looking so sad and angry in every picture of me and my family. We went to Trondheim. I didn't get out of the car. I didn't want to move. Then, maybe some of the time, I would play cards with them. That was a bad experience. I didn't understand how my parents could handle me and my teenage mood swings. But there were some fun moments, like one day when we arrived in Trondheim, my little sister peed herself, and that became a hilarious story because we started mocking her. She was so embarrassed. The reason she peed herself in the van was because it was raining outside, and she didn't want to go out. And then, of course, it was horrible, because it smelled of pee in the car for so long after. We mocked her for so many years because of that. This became one of those stories you remember and that maybe was one of the moments I actually laughed during the trip. So, that was a great memory. Every time I use that car, I would always think of her pee.

Also, my grandmother from Thailand came to visit us one summer, and I went on a trip with her for maybe one or two days in that car, with my parents as well. But then my grandmother and the rest of the family travelled to Finland with that car. I'm quite saddened by my absence for not spending more time with my Thai Grandmother when she came all the way to visit our new life in Norway. I was just careless and self-centred and just wanted to

spend my time with my friends. If something I would regret in my life—it will be this.



### Pursuing a Dance Career

When I was 16, I moved away from home to study in Tromsø, to pursue a dance career. I never felt that I was an outsider, even though I probably was, but I didn't feel that. Maybe because two of my best friends are Norwegian, I always had this pack with me and all three of us shared the same passion for creativity. We moved together to the city, with another friend of ours from Rossfjord and lived together almost throughout the whole high school. So, we were kind of outsiders in a way, but people in Tromsø city or from high school knew who we were. The Rossfjord crew was accepted because we were youths who arranged or

hosted a lot of parties at our apartment. It was too much fun and too much of a party, we even took a very cheap entrance fee a couple of times, so we could cover small stuff for the apartment, such as toilet paper, soap, snacks, and beverages. We were just 16-17-year-old kids without parents trying to indulge our new life with independence while trying to do our best at school. We suddenly became young adults and not just teens anymore.

But to move to a new place was not just about adapting to a new environment for me. It was another challenge, language-wise, I sometimes felt left out, not socially but linguistically because the level of Norwegian suddenly became much harder. I think I was a bit weak because I felt like, in a way, I didn't quite understand everything they were saying both at school and in the social context. In terms of Norwegian jokes or internal cultural references that kids who grew up in Norway could only understand.

And then of course, I had to strengthen my own discipline and create some kind of routines for myself. I didn't have parents to nag or push me "do this, do that" like at home. I didn't visit my parents that much even though it was just an hour away by boat ride. When we were together too much, it escalated to arguments.

To my parents, I am definitely the black sheep in the family because I chose this life. So, we didn't see each other that much already from my teenage period, because I probably felt like they

didn't understand my life or what I wanted to be. This is also at a personal level where they didn't understand what it is to be an artist or me wanting a different life and not the conventional life that my mom had wished for me. Like studying something that will give you a steady job for the rest of your life kind of thing.

You know, not that my family didn't support me, but they didn't have the same understanding. Every year, you would hear, "when are you going to start a real life?" I always get that, and I would be like, "but this is real". Like, you know? Come on, just accept it.

### Embracing Thai Culture in Tromsø

While living in Tromsø, I had the opportunity to connect with the local Thai community. This was a new experience for me as I had not embraced my Thai heritage as fully before. Tromsø hosts an annual Thai fair day, where the city celebrates Thai culture with a market and traditional performances. I was honored when they asked me to be the host because of my fluency in Norwegian. My role was to translate for the audience, sharing the stage with another speaker who spoke Thai.

This was my first time participating in such a large Thai event, and I felt a sense of pride and belonging. The community knew about my dance background and asked me to choreograph two traditional Thai dance pieces for the event. Although I had some

knowledge of Thai dance, I had to immerse myself in learning the intricate movements, focusing on the hands and arms' delicate lines and forms. I did this by watching videos, my preferred method of learning dance since living in Rossfjord. So, this challenge was quite enjoyable and we performed on a stage in the middle of the square (Torggata).

The highlight of the event was convincing my best friend, Ragna, to join the performance. She was the only non-Thai dancer in the group, and seeing her embrace my culture so wholeheartedly made me incredibly proud. Her willingness to understand and participate in my heritage was a beautiful testament to our friendship. It's rare to find someone who is so open and eager to engage in a mutual cultural exchange. I love her so much for that.







## Moving to Denmark for Studies

I was not grounded. I didn't know what I wanted to be, and during the third year in high school, I started smoking weed. When I finished high school in Tromsø, I moved to Denmark for three months. I kind of needed to get away from the people who smoked so much weed around my life at that time and have a change of scenery. I needed to get away from all this partying and weed smoking. I knew that I didn't want to be a stoner. I wanted to get something out of my life. Not that I didn't smoke when I was in Denmark, I still smoked, but it was in a more responsible way.

I moved to Denmark to study in autumn 2010. It was something called a high school there, but it's more like a preparation school, where you stay for three months and take the course you want to deepen in before you actually study at university. I went to study

Body and Mind awareness at Odder Højskole. This is a subject where you learn how to be aware of the whole body when you use your body, and how to be more connected to the Earth and be more presence. I'm always up there, in my head, and constantly rushing with thoughts.

My teacher always said that I needed to find some roots. So, I gained more awareness of myself, and with that awareness also came this kind of healing process. Probably I didn't quite accept all the changes because I didn't take time to realize all the changes. So, because of this, becoming more aware, I also became aware of, "oh shit, I'm actually in a new place again, in a new country." Like, all the new contexts again.

You know, I asked myself questions like, am I running? Is this adventure still? What is this? So, it became a healing process for myself to understand and accept this change. And that's hard, in a way, because you kind of felt a bit alone sometimes. But I didn't know that because I was constantly in a rush for adventure. But when you learn about body awareness, you get to look inward and reflect on what actually happened in your life. And that was a good thing also because my friend asked me if I wanted to move to California right after the course finished. It definitely intrigued me! I was still like, of course, adventure everywhere, I will go. But then, I think that awareness study made me like, you know what, I think I need to go back home and just figure out which direction I want

to take. That's why I went back to Tromsø. I worked and saved up money, and then I decided to work on my dancing.

Personally, I grew a lot by being in Denmark, especially not being close to home, to family, and friends. I had another good friend who is Norwegian, Anna, there with me. I asked her during the summer if she wanted to join me for this school and bam she did. She was a good student, while I'm once again rebellious and almost managed to get myself kicked off school before the semester ended. I was in solidarity with a group of friends, who got caught smoking marijuana during a school trip in Krakow. I thought that if all of us came forward, then the punishment would not be that bad, because we were at least half of this school that smoked weed during these three-four months stay. The school didn't send me back home to Norway, but they made us (around 20-30 students) apologize for our behavior publicly, to the rest of the school. One by one, it was a bit of a shaming vibe. Not a comparison, but I did feel like Cersei Lannister from Game of Thrones when she did her walk of shame. I felt the look from the crowd or in this case my schoolmates and teachers and I was embarrassed, with blushed cheeks and was shrinking inside. Anna was not on that apologizing list, but she supported me from the crowd. She was and still is my go-to person.

All the hassle aside, it was a revelation for me because for the first time, I felt like, wow, I'm really far away from home. maybe it's good for me to realize that turbulence so I could reflect upon

myself and my future.

### Auditioning for the Dance Academy in Oslo

I came one weekend to visit a dear friend, Maya Mi here in Oslo, and she told me the dance academy she studied at was quite amazing, because you get to be yourself. You get to work on your artistic development, and I didn't want to be a ballet dancer or to be in an ensemble dance company. I wanted to be creative and use it in my artistic expression.

Then she said, "go for the audition." And I was like, "I am not prepared for the audition at all. I'm not ready." She said, "Come on, just go."

You know what happened? I went. And this was for the second-year students, and then we had the interview later, and they asked me if I had studied the first year. Then I already know I wouldn't be accepted, because you must have the first year at another place. But then they knew I was not ready, then I burst out in tears and started crying in front of them. It was not the rejection because I knew myself I was not ready, but it was like I pushed myself to come and get that rejection in my face. For the first time in my life, I kind of felt lost, that I didn't really fucking know what path I want for my life. I didn't know if I wanted to dance. But if I want to be a dancer, I am gonna work for it.

I went to another preparation school for ten months in the west of Norway, Ulsteinvik - the bible belt. I needed somewhere where I didn't get too much distraction and to have a more strict regime to be able to focus and just to work on my goals, which was applying to a professional dance academy. So, that was good, because it led me to reach my goal and I got accepted at Skolen for Samtidans in Oslo. The only dance academy I went to for the audition for. It was a magnificent day. I received this news while Ulsteinvik Folkehøjskole was on a school trip to Riga and we were having lunch. The whole restaurant applauded and cheered me one step closer to being a professional dancer. Also Folkehøjskole people knew how hard and determined I worked on pursuing these wishes and finally I got accepted.

### Freelance Dancing and Moving to Denmark

I've been traveling to Denmark, outside of Copenhagen, to perform at the event called Copenhagen Art Run. We got invited to do some projects there three years in a row. Then, one year, I decided that maybe I should just move to Denmark. I was like maybe it's a sign because I've been working with art projects here anyway, so why not? That was just a thought. Then I started seeing a guy, Hjalmar who was Danish and lived in Copenhagen, but we knew each other since Kongsbakken high school in Tromsø. We went to a parallel class, he studied music and I studied dance. So

this was a perfect accident, that we started to see each other in 2016.

On the street in Copenhagen, my dance partner Elise, introduced me to her Norwegian friend who was living in Copenhagen, and she said she was going to move to Norway for exchange, and she needed a room. Elise was like “Why don’t you guys swap rooms?”

So, that was the start of my life-changing, on a professional and personal level. I decided to move to Denmark, but I didn’t have a backup plan. I just wanted to be a performer there, and it was not that easy. So, I applied for a job because I needed money and during one week of my cafeteria job, I got a concussion. I managed to get this huge juice pressure machine, the big one with iron, to fall on my head. I was doing something and holding it, and then it kind of fell on my head. I was hurt but still working because I didn’t know that I had a concussion.

I started seeing double, Hjalmar said “maybe you should go to check”. I went to the emergency room. Came out with a drug prescription and a sick leave. Well that was not how I expected to start my life in Copenhagen only after three weeks.

Suddenly my life in a new city where I couldn’t do anything. I have to stay inside, wearing sunglasses all the time, and can't watch or read anything. I was so sensitive to everything. That became like a trap, especially when I wanted to network, to work as a performer,

I can't be in bed all the time. I was like, I cannot sit like this, during my two months in concussion. My friends tried to say to me "but this is good, then you can take a break and think about your next move".

The good part of that, even though it sucked and was depressing. When I started to get a little better, I was restless and craved restarting my life again. So, I started searching for auditions or if I could apply for a project and founding and such. Then I came across an open call, I saw that Marina Abramovic was looking for a performer. And I was like, "oh my God, this is meant to be!" I got a response to come for an audition. I was like, OK shit, should I say to them that I still have a concussion? I did not. I just went there and faked that I didn't have a concussion.

The audition was focusing on groundedness and energy, to understand energy in the room and to be here and now. My background in body awareness from Odder Højskole helped me here. Being Thai, I grew up with meditation as part of everyday life, which also contributed. We also did the piece where we stand by the door and stare at each other "Imponderabilia". That was the piece that would be on the exhibition at the Louisiana Museum. So, everybody was naked in pairs. I stood with another girl. Nobody knew each other, but you stood there for one hour because that's the performance length, still and maintaining eye contact. Even though I'm focused on the person in front of me, I'll have glimpses a little bit on the side. What happened next was I

saw this girl's face, her mouth swallowing and bloating up like this, and then suddenly, just like in nanoseconds, she was walking past me, and then she threw up behind me. The worst part was I saw it coming, and then suddenly, it was bam! She threw up because standing still for a long period of time might not get your blood circulation flowing as it used to. Then your blood pressure could drop and you can feel very dizzy, worst case you can faint. Even though the audition was hard for my body and I did not fully cover the concussion, the accident got me my dream job in a way. I think maybe the universe tried to tell me that I needed to slow down.

I then became one of the main performers who got to perform with “The Cleaner” by Marina Abramovic exhibition in different European countries. I've been everywhere. First was in Denmark, then Germany, and then Italy. Again, a lot of moving. It was like four months in each place. So that was a lot of standing because “Imponderabilia” was the main re-performance piece for this exhibition. I performed this piece for three hours a day, and I've done it for two years, also other re-performance pieces. such as Freeing series, Luminosity, Cleaning the mirror and Work Relation. All of her performances are durational performances that require you to push your endurance both physically and mentally. It's tough, but especially “Imponderabilia”. I don't know how many hours I have stood still, stared and shared energy with “The Cleaner” performers. You know, just standing there and being there, exchanging energy with the audience and the partner you



were performing with. Sometimes it was too hard to perform this piece. I actually have fainted a couple of times during live performances in the museum. My body sometimes just doesn't function, especially during my cycle. Suddenly, if the pain gets too much and you feel the blurriness and dots clouds coming up, then you're out. It comes like a wave that slammed you down.

These performances work in a different way or it requires another strength from me, especially for my mind, it was somewhat liberating, because I don't think, I just am, you know what I mean?

### Rediscovering My Identity

I kind of rediscovered myself, you know. I can't just be everywhere both geographically speaking but also psychologically speaking. Especially after working with Abramovic´ and her work was so much about being present and energy exchanged. I think by working so much day after day, it was kind of a meditative practice like that. So, I think maybe that's something that was kind of renewed or resurrected in me; that I probably underestimated myself or that I probably neglected myself as a Thai person to become a Norwegian one. Not because I wanted to fit in, I just wanted to explore and adapt myself in every new situation. Maybe because I adapt too much, a code shifter, I forgot who I was, and then with experiences working for Abramovic, it made me realize who I was, and then that's why I want to come back to myself or

explore myself in another way, like how Thai I am, you know. So, yes, definitely it had an effect on me by performing in her work.

Today I'm currently working on another project called Me, Myself, and I. That's a project that I will be showing here at Dansens Hus for Koreografilaboratoriet.

What is my identity? I am Norwegian, but sometimes I also feel like I'm not quite there. I'm a person who falls between the chair, in this case, between my Thai heritage and a Norwegian upbringing. I started writing about this description in 2017. But now, like this year or two years after, I kind of understood why I actually really wanted to make a project about it. That's probably because I felt lost within myself and have this duality in my identity. I feel like this, "where is me, myself, and I when you have layers and baggage like me?" And that has become a project that I'm working on, you know, to be adventurous all the time, you kind of lose a sense of yourself a bit. It's a conversation between the selves and how the collective self is like if I'm not me, how can I participate in a social way? And if society is not there, how would you know who you will be? Cultural dialogue and understanding are core elements in my work. I explore the topic of ego in today's society and compare Eastern and Western perspectives on the ego.

I also realized that this is parallel to my early life, that I always move and find something, I stand still for a moment, but then I'll drift off again. There is always a bit of, you know, the anxiety that I

may not belong anywhere, even though I'm for now settled here in Norway.



## The Van: Rico

I have a van, that's my home, that I can park wherever I want or stay wherever I want. Rico was born in 1986 and is a real oldie—a veteran. It belongs to my parents, but I inherited it two years ago. It was bought on the same day that I inherited it from my dad, when I got Rico, Hjalmar and I shared the ownership of him together. Yeah, I think it was maybe just a day before or after, exactly the same day that was crazy. I've owned it for two years now. This is quite cool and meaningful to me because I don't come from a privileged family at all. I know that my parents don't have much, but I know what they have and what resources they can provide me. I said to them, "I don't want anything else other than that van as my inheritance". This van is not gonna give me money, it will rather be an expense for me to have it. But this van has more value than you could ever imagine. It suits my life perfectly. Because I'm moving and traveling around so much. I like to be independent and take an impulsive decision on where I wanted to be.

I don't think I have a home because I never felt connected to Thailand or have deep roots to Rossfjordstraumen, my childhood home with my parent in rossfjords. I think my home is where I live. I moved around a lot already at a very young age and also now due to my freelance life. That's why my car is a symbol of home for me. It has a very strong emotional value for me. I think maybe because of that bad experience (as a teenager), I want to make up for that

experience because it was quite hard. My grandmother from Thailand also travelled with this caravan and maybe when she passed away, it became more important for me. It was something that she did and experienced in Norway, you know, beside staying at our home, my childhood home in Rossfjord. But my parents sold that childhood home also, so now it doesn't exist anymore. That's definitely no more home feeling rather than that van at the moment, that can give me a sense of connection to a "home", because it has been with the family for so many years and we have had our life experiences with traveling or commuting. Rico is my nostalgic to the memory and a feeling of a home.

2016 was the first year I used Rico. I went on a road trip with him before I even got my driver's license. In Norway, you can practice if you already had the basic traffic course (trafikalt grunnkurs), if the driver (the one you're practicing with) has had their license for at least 5 years. I was lucky enough to embark on this first journey with one of my dearest friends, Amanda. We started our journey together and planned to take a road trip from the north of Norway (Rossfjordsstraumen) all the way down to Esbjerg in Denmark and then back up north again. Amanda had never been to the north of Norway before and I wanted to show her all the hidden treasures in Midt-Troms.

Northern Norwegian summer is often filled with drizzle rains, but when it is good you'll get the sun that lights bright the whole day. The midnight sun shimmered from the sky as we drove through

narrow streets with peaks and valleys. It was exciting to embark on this trip and we were super stoked for this trip.

I learned to surf in Costa Rica two years back and would love to do it again, so this was also an adventure van that was hunting for waves. Back then Unstad or Lofoten in general still hadn't blossomed like today. it was indeed a hidden paradise. One of our last days at this surfing paradise and beautiful scenic spot. Rico had become this gathering van that can provide shelter, but also gives warm food in the stomach. From his little kitchen we ´re able to serve dinner for several people We had a joyful dinner with some travellers, my Sami/Norwegian grandmother and my dad who drove 8 hours for two days' visit. It was at Unstad I taught my father at 42 years old to surf. I think it was really awesome that he had these adventures and a child's mind-like, wanting to try new things.

I remember when it broke down the first time when I just drove it away from my parents, and then we got stuck in the mountains just around the Polar Circle not far from Rognan. My Danish best friend, Amanda, and I borrowed this car, and we were supposed to drive all the way to Denmark, but the car broke down, and then I got super emotional and cried for three days because of the circumstances and the chaos that came with it. I felt like everything stopped, we couldn't get anywhere. But I couldn't leave the car at the shop. I had to be there until it got fixed. And that's when I realized this car meant so much to me because I wanted to

stay in this car. I wanted to travel with it, to experience my life with it. So, I did cry. I called my parents. I was like, "I don't understand what's happening", and my dad was like, "let me talk to the mechanic". They said we have to wait 4 days. I said, "Oh my God. "Four days."

With these obstacles along the way, we rearranged our plan and that was the real road trip experience- when you can just enjoy the journey and not only fixate on the destination.

During this trip, Amanda and I created an Instagram account for Rico, so we could share our journey with the world. Rico on the Run was then announced to the world, and from time to time when I'm traveling with him, his account will be active. Rico was called Rico and not T2 or T3, because his interior was of Norwegian design. With Rico on the Run, resonates with a spirit of a young mind, and people can interpret it as they want.

Rico transformed his outlook at Hoddevik that would become his marker that we know of him today. Another well-known surfing spot in Norway. When we arrived Rico was a sensation to the other visitors by the beach camp, I guessed because it was rare to see this type of van in this landscape.

It was here I changed the van's colour. First, the van was just brown, you know, all this wavy thing. I painted it or it was not me who painted it, but Sander van der Valk did. He was the artist who

we just met after a few minutes we arrived. He spray-painted and gave Rico the identity that was extended from me. All this wavy thing. That's my art or my vision. I told my dad that I was gonna do this. He was ok with it.

I think when he saw it in real life later that summer, he indeed was shocked and thought this was all too hippie for him.

This journey was significant in terms of friendship with Amanda, we cried, laughed, shared deep conversation, and supported each other in every way. This roadless trip was the road that binds our friendship. I had also grown to attach deeply with Rico and just had an epiphany that travel like this was my call and I was hungry for more. Four years after that, I felt like it belonged to me. In 2019, I decided I wanted to be the owner of the car, with an agreement with my dad that “ if I ever gonna sell the van he will be the first to buy it back - if he still wants to”









Hjalmar and I adopted Rico, we sat out on adventures from the north towards Oslo. I wanted to share my experiences and some of the places I discovered in 2016 with Hjalmar. I wanted to show him the magnificence of taking the ride through an unbelievably beautiful landscape that makes your jaw drop or shout “look or oh my good”.

Hjalmar and I proved to be quite an inventive travel couple. We would stop if we found a good spot to camp our van and from there we would be hiking up the mountain, dancing around, singing like animals or just rolling down the hill. We ´re both playful like that.

Even though we were a couple, we were each other's best friends as well. Our sense of humour and lust for adventure align very well. Though we did have our difference when it came to tidiness. I would be this OCD and obsess about how our belongings should be placed in the van and was nagging him. Because we're two people who were living in tiny spaces for a month. So, our trip was not just blooming with love, laughter and fun, we had our arguments, especially how to collaborate to have a more zen vibe with Rico. All in all, it was an unforgettable experience and I was lucky to share this with someone I loved dearly.

Hjalmar supported and comforted me in every way that he could. Because before we went on this trip, another event occurred that would stir up my life. We had been to the Roskilde festival and were heading up to Tromsø, before picking up Rico.

At Oslo airport, I received the news from Thailand that my grandmother is dying. I was devastated and was lost about whether to continue my summer as planned or booked the first flight to Thailand. After a long talk with my family, I decided to stick to my plan, even though I was broken into pieces and cried a lot. But to go on the road trip with Rico and have my loved ones with me, help me healed. Also, it was a trip in memory of her, a celebration of her life and her journey she had with Rico. I was grieving and saluted her in a way I thought she would appreciate.



## Rico: My Moving Castle

Rico became my vacation home during the warmer season. I have been on road trips all across Norway—north, south, east, west, and then back again, mostly to destinations where I can surf. But in Norway, you have the peak and land, the long and winding road. He was not the most reliable companion because he did break down or have some small problems along the way. But he was and still is the most comforting travel bud.

I cherish every moment and all the adventures I have experienced with him and shared with friends, family, and also some hitchhikers. I personalize him because he needs so much care to still run, and he is more than just an old rodeo. He carried much deeper than just a fun adventure, he holds memories of all the people I came across with this van, stories were made, and he carried me home. He is my family, my home, and home is where I can park it. The journey with Rico is not done because there are still more adventures that await both of us.



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## Credits

Profile picture by Tale Hednes

Profile with the chips: Helge Brekke

The last Picture of Rico: Madeleine Nilsson



*“Remember, this book is me talking, not writing. I hope you find  
my voice amusing”*

- Chollada Phitnitduang

