

Estefanía De La Concha

Portfolio



Who's Behind the Pen?



Estefania De La Concha

Writer • Educator

I'm a creative nonfiction writer and memoir instructor who believes every life holds stories worth telling. Through writing, teaching, and ghostwriting, I help people discover the meaning within their lived experiences and transform them into compelling narratives.

As a Venezuelan writer living in Canada, much of my work explores immigration, identity, belonging, and the ways personal stories connect us across cultures and generations.

Featured in



The Narrative Arc



Recognitions



Services



Writing & Ghostwriting (Memoir & Nonfiction)

My work focuses on clarity, emotional depth, and storytelling that connects with readers.



Workshop Facilitation (Writing & Storytelling)

I design workshops that help individuals explore their voice, develop their writing, and tell meaningful personal stories.

Rates

Every story is different — so is every quote. Let's chat!

[CONTACT ME](#)

Portfolio Contents

Nonfiction - First Person

- P.6 I spent a decade in love with Montreal. Now I've outgrown what it can give me - **PUBLISHED IN CBC FIRST PERSON**
 - P.8 I've watched my parents grow old over video calls. It's a quiet grief I never expected - **PUBLISHED IN CBC FIRST PERSON**
-

Creative Nonfiction & Storytelling

- P.11 The Polite Stranger Who Held a Gun - **SUBMITTED TO CBC NONFICTION PRIZE 2026**
 - P.17 The Silence That Followed - **SUBMITTED TO CBC NONFICTION PRIZE 2026**
-

Editorial & Blog Writing - Wellness

- P.22 Rejecting the Content Machine Helped Me Find My Authentic Writing Voice - **PUBLISHED ON THE WRITING COOP**
 - P.24 Burnout Taught Me That Hustle Isn't the Path to Freedom - **PUBLISHED ON WRITE A CATALYST**
-

Translation

- P.27 Una cita de Tinder, cuatro sorpresas. (Spanish original version)
 - P.29 My Date Collected Families Like Starbucks Mugs (English translation)
-

Nonfiction - Micro-Narratives

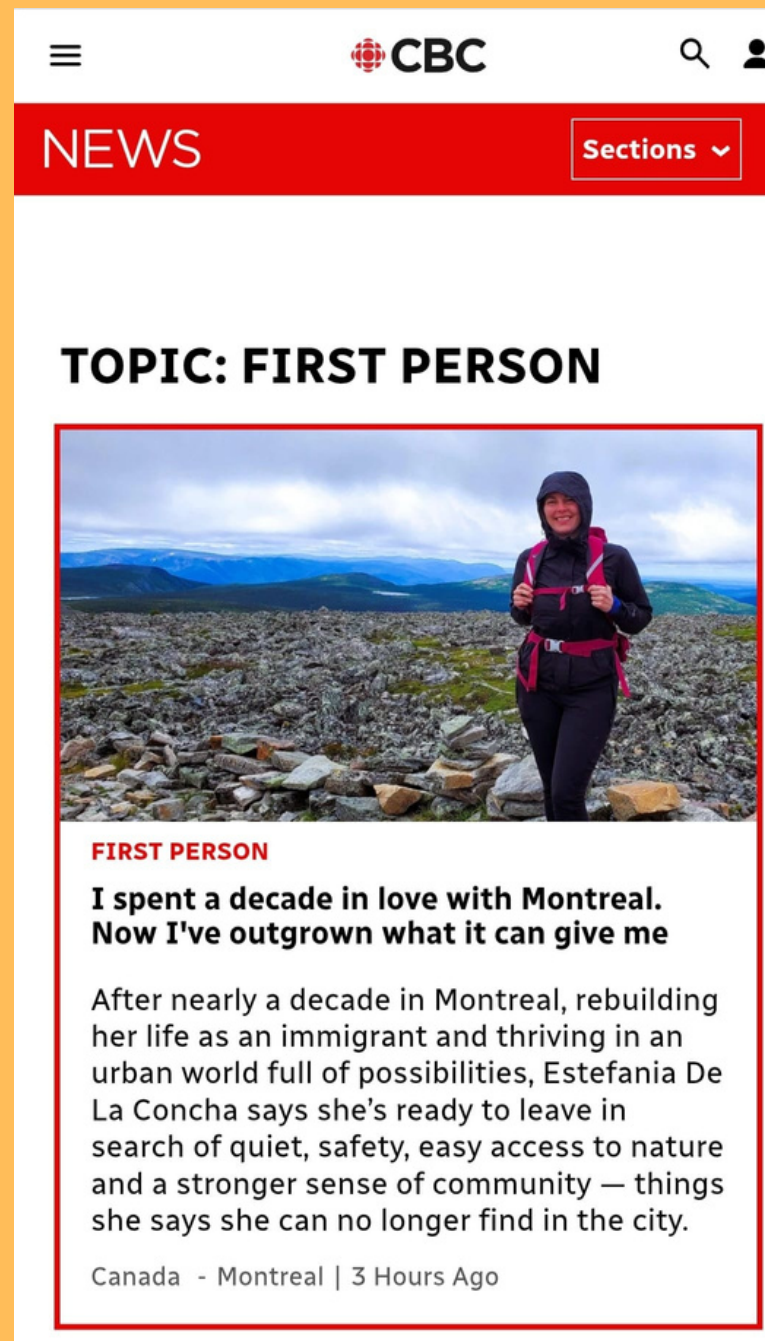
- P.32 My Date Collected Families Like Starbucks Mugs - **LOGLISTED FOR THE TADPOLE PRESS 100-WORDS WRITING CONTEST.**





Nonfiction - First Person

[Read it here](#)



I spent a decade in love with Montreal. Now I've outgrown what it can give me

PUBLISHED ON CBC FIRST PERSON

When I first arrived in Montreal in February 2016, straight from the tropical heat of Venezuela, I was in awe of the city lights on the ride from the airport to my cousin's place, where I'd spend my first few nights. I was mesmerized by the beauty of the buildings and excited about the life I was about to build.

For nine years, Montreal was where I rooted myself. I travelled outside of the city, but I always looked forward to coming back. I'd feel a rush of emotion every time I passed the Jacques Cartier Bridge and glimpsed La Ronde or the Olympic Stadium from the bus or car window, thinking, "Yes, this is home."

Throughout this time, I was enriched by the presence of many cultures. I partied, tried foods I didn't know existed, made lifelong friends, expanded my horizons and hiked Mount Royal more times than I could count. For years, I couldn't imagine living anywhere else, and I was the one wondering why anyone would ever want to leave.

Then came the pandemic, and the excitement of urban life faded. I couldn't enjoy it as I used to, so, like many others, I turned to nature to keep my sanity. Every weekend meant escaping Montreal to discover new hiking trails, cross-country skiing, ice skating and paddle boarding. I'd do anything to be outside, in nature, moving and breathing.

What started as a coping mechanism quietly became an essential part of my identity and my sense of belonging.

Ever since returning to "normal" in 2023, the city I once loved has constantly reminded me that my soul is craving something different. I feel the heavy weight of concrete on my shoulders — the noise, the traffic, the chaos, the endless construction and a growing sense of insecurity that wasn't there when I arrived. I still remember walking home alone at 3 a.m. through the Plateau Mont-Royal after a night out, feeling lucky to live in a city where a woman could do that safely. Now, even in daylight, I move with more caution — a habit I thought I'd left behind.

It's like living in a constant state of overstimulation: crowded streets, rushing strangers, everyone moving fast to get somewhere that seems important but probably isn't.

Even the escapes that once recharged me have started to feel more like a burden. On Saturday mornings, it often takes over an hour to get out of Montreal and then another hour or two on the highway before I can even begin my hike. I've explored almost every trail in and around the city. I know the familiar climbs and the lookout points by heart. I'm grateful for them, but I'm also ready for something new, and I crave the spontaneity that doesn't require four-hour round trips.

Now, after years of watching prices rise and apartments shrink, the idea of living somewhere with more space, less financial pressure and easier access to nature feels like a relief.

In a few weeks' time, I'll be moving to Sherbrooke in Quebec's Eastern Townships, a place where trailheads begin just minutes from home, and bike paths run along the Magog and Saint-François rivers.

When I tell people I'm leaving, their reactions are often laced with concern or skepticism.

"You'll regret it." "Why Sherbrooke? There's nothing there." These are the most common reactions. Once, a friend laughed and said, "If nobody outside Canada knows Sherbrooke, is it even a city?" It was meant as a joke — but beneath the laughter was a strong statement rooted in a worldview that perceives fast-paced urban life as inherently more valuable than a quieter, slower one with deeper roots and more space to breathe.

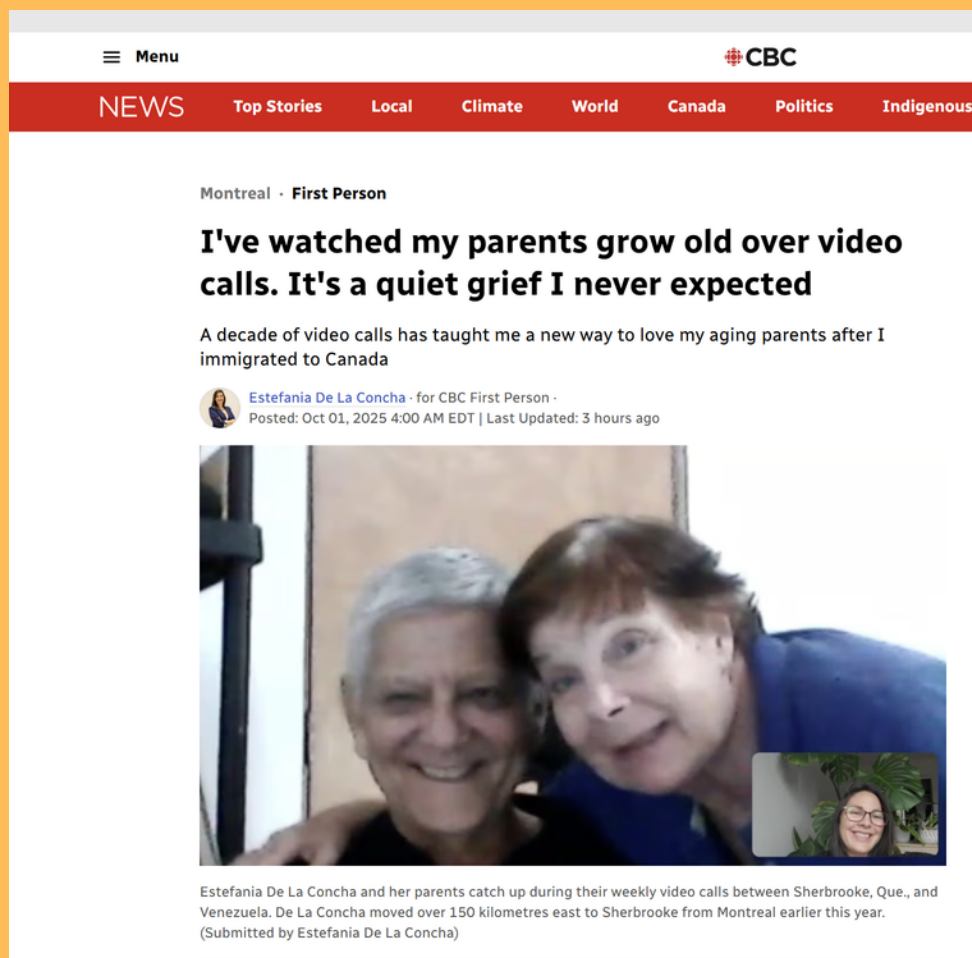
I don't blame them. Like many others, I grew up in a society that taught me success meant chasing big cities and striving for more — more money, recognition and shiny things. I know their reactions come from a place of care, but they often reveal more about their fears than my decision. It's not really about Sherbrooke. It's about what leaving the city represents: the possibility that a different life might be just as valid.

Montreal once felt like everything I had hoped for: a safe place to rebuild my life, far from the instability I had experienced in my homeland, and alongside family members already established here. And for nearly a decade, the city gave me everything I needed. It allowed me to immerse myself in a diverse, dynamic world. I felt connected, alive and full of potential. But over time, my needs shifted.

Part of me already misses it, even though I haven't left yet. I find myself walking familiar streets, savouring everyday scenes, knowing they might not be mine much longer. Nostalgia came as an unexpected guest, not because I doubt my decision, but because goodbyes are never that simple.

Choosing to leave isn't about rejecting Montreal or choosing Sherbrooke; it's about honouring who I am today, recognizing that I've grown and trusting that it's OK to want something different now — even if someday, life calls me back.

[Read it here](#)



I've watched my parents grow old over video calls. It's a quiet grief I never expected

PUBLISHED ON CBC FIRST PERSON

My father answers the video call with the same cheerful greeting he’s given me for almost a decade. My mother leans in, trying to squeeze her face into the small screen that allows us to share fragments of our daily lives across thousands of kilometres.

It’s been nearly 10 years since I moved to Canada from Venezuela, and seeing their faces on screen has become a comforting weekly routine.

I ask about their health, their routines, and I listen patiently to everything they want to share, trying to read between the lines of their carefully measured reassurances.

Still, I notice the slight tremor in my mother’s hand and the full whiteness of my father’s hair. All these years of milestones have passed, witnessed only through the grainy pixels of a screen, a few photos and just two short visits.

In 2018, two years after I left home, my parents came to visit me in Montreal. They were both in their early 60s. While I noticed subtle changes in their appearance and strength, they remained active and independent, and navigated the city on their own even though neither spoke French or English. My father even went to Canadian Tire on his own and successfully bought the synthetic grass I wanted for my balcony, using drawings to show the employee exactly how it should be cut to fit.

They stayed for six weeks. On their last day, I took them to the airport and said goodbye with a knot in my stomach, unsure when I would see them again. Two years later, in 2020, the pandemic made travel impossible, and it wasn't until 2023, when I finally returned to Venezuela for the first time since leaving, that we were under the same roof.

I immediately noticed how much they had aged in the five years since their visit. My dad could barely walk and my mom was struggling with her own health issues.

They had always tried to protect me from worrying too much, keeping much of their struggles silent or downplaying them. Getting them to talk was like pulling teeth. But being there in person made the reality impossible to ignore. I stayed for three weeks, and while being there brought comfort, it also felt painfully insufficient.

Watching your parents grow old is hard, but watching them age through a screen is its own quiet, devastating grief. It's a sorrow that's difficult to explain to my friends in Quebec, whose families live just a drive away.

When my father, now 70, was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease earlier this year, I wanted to rush home, to sit beside him, to distract him from the four-hour treatments he endured every Thursday for a month. My mother, 67, has also struggled with her health this past year, and I wished I could hug her, accompany her to appointments and ease her burden. Instead, I sat in my apartment in Montreal, offering advice and comfort over a choppy internet connection.

These video calls carry both our joys and our heartaches. We celebrate birthdays and Christmases through a screen, just as we share bad news and say goodbye at funerals. We live here, and there. We do our best to keep a smile through it all, but for me, the fear of that inevitable phone call is always in the back of my mind. I know, being thousands of kilometres away, that when it comes, it will be impossible to make it in time.

To fight the sorrow, I measure care in small acts. The long phone call after a difficult treatment, the good morning and good night texts, the shared laughter at a story retold one too many times, and the hope that we will meet again soon. For now, I find relief in knowing that they are caring for each other — trading roles as caregiver and cared for. These modest acts have taught me that being a family is not about physical proximity; it's about attention, emotional presence and intention.

I've learned a new way to love — from a distance, but just as deeply. And for those lucky enough to be close to their loved ones, may this serve as a gentle reminder to never take a Sunday family dinner for granted.



Creative Nonfiction and Storytelling

The Polite Stranger Who Held a Gun

SUBMITTED TO CBC NONFICTION PRIZE 2026

The motorcycle cut me off before I could step off the curb.

I noticed a flash of chrome. A helmet visor glinted, reflecting my own stunned face. The rider’s voice was calm and low, far too controlled to match the situation.

“Listen, love. Give me the phone, or I’ll kill you,”

I froze, not from fear, but disbelief. The man cornering me looked nothing like a tuki—the skinny young thugs with sagging jeans, tinted glasses, and backward caps who roamed Caracas on roaring, cheap Suzuki motorcycles. Whenever I heard one of those engines, my blood ran cold. Seeing the tukis would make me instinctively cross the street or duck into the nearest shop.

But he wasn’t a tuki.

He was an older, attractive man with light brown hair and hazelnut eyes, wearing a high-end helmet, perched on an expensive motorcycle, telling me that he would kill me if I didn’t hand over my cellphone.

“Hurry up, or I’ll shoot you,”

As he repeated what suddenly felt like my fate, my eyes dropped to his sleeve. The silver zippers and the leather's softness didn’t match the threat, but then I saw the gun tucked neatly under the jacket's cuff, and everything became real. I was living one of those “what if I get robbed?” scenarios I’d rehearsed every morning before leaving for work.

That morning, I woke up to the hum of the broken ceiling fan as usual. I ate the same ham-and-cheese arepas, and packed my purse with the same awareness that it could happen again, still hoping it wouldn't. Two wallets, two phones, two versions of myself—one prepared for work, one prepared for danger. In Caracas, this was the new normal in 2015. We adapted, shielding ourselves from a reality we couldn’t avoid.

The voice threatening me had the confidence of someone just doing his job. Killing me there, at noon, in front of people lining up for rationed toilet paper—the new symbol of the scarcity choking the country—was standard procedure. Routine.

I dug through my purse as fast as I could, desperately searching for my decoy phone.

My chest tightened, and a hot, churning wave rose in my stomach, the kind that warns you you're about to throw up, but I didn't have the luxury of listening to my body. I was too busy with a demand that determined whether I lived or died.

My sweaty hand swept through the purse in frantic circles, over and over, for what felt like ten minutes but must have been ten seconds. My eyes never left the impatient men in front of me.

My fingers brushed receipts, keys, and lipstick. Each empty corner made my stomach drop further, and my chest tightened even more as desperation clawed at me.

But I couldn't find it. The decoy phone wasn't there.

A clear flashback from that morning blocked for a moment the face of the polite stranger holding the gun. It was the decoy phone on the kitchen table. Alone. Forgotten.

The realization hit me the way the Ice Bucket Challenge had a year earlier, when my friends and I laughed as freezing water crashed over us. Only this time, the shock was colder, the ice sharper, and I wasn't laughing.

I closed my eyes, bracing for the impact of a bullet fired from inches away, still digging desperately through my purse as I prayed silently for a miracle to save me.

My real phone—the expensive one my father gave me as a graduation gift—was somewhere in the purse, probably buried in the deepest corner. Somehow, my hand went straight to it, as if by divine intervention, confirming it wasn't my time yet.

The phone surfaced in my trembling hand. I waved it in the air—not as a prize, but as a surrender flag.

Right then, a familiar sound cut through the moment, the unmistakable rattle of a Suzuki. I shifted my eyes away from the man in front of me for the first time and saw the bike approaching, two tukis on it, stopping right behind my attacker. The knot in my stomach loosened for a moment, rising into a pinch behind my forehead. Fear didn't vanish; it shifted, just enough for confusion to slip in.

Why were they approaching him? Why would they come now?

The passenger jumped off without even glancing at me, snatching the phone from my hand in one quick, practiced motion, and turning back to the bike before my fingers had time to curl into a fist.

And that's when it clicked.

The expensive bike.

The clean-cut look.

The confidence.

He didn't look like a tuki, because he wasn't one. Every detail screamed of another life, a life that should never intersect with violence. He was someone who wasn't supposed to be doing this. Maybe he was a man protected by the uniform he wore when he wasn't on his bike, shielded by a world that rarely touched him.

These three men knew exactly what they were doing. This has been done before.

They sped away together, disappearing as quickly as they had appeared, only to return later, uninvited, in my nightmares.

While I was being robbed, the entire world had shrunk to a single frame: my attackers and me. My life didn't flash before my eyes like in the movies; there was no grand revelation, no self-pity thoughts either, the only thing on my mind was finding a phone in my purse. But once it was over, the world came rushing back like a landslide.

I looked to my left and saw no one, then turned to my right and remembered the line of people waiting for toilet paper. They hadn't moved. They were all staring at me.

I didn't cry. I didn't scream. I didn't run. I just crossed the street, one heavy, wooden step at a time. I couldn't feel my legs, yet I kept moving past the crowd. No one broke the line. No one spoke.

They weren't heartless; they were conditioned. In a place where violence erupted without warning, you learned to stand still, look away, and protect your own. Intervening wasn't bravery; it was suicide. So they stayed put, silent witnesses to a story they'd seen a hundred times before, not realizing numbness carries its own kind of approval.

The sun kept shining. The world kept turning. And I kept walking. Each step was a reminder that I had survived. Behind me, the street buzzed faintly, cars honking and vendors calling out prices, but to me, it was muted, like I was underwater. I could see the noise, but I couldn't feel it. I was alive, but moving as a hollow version of myself, drifting toward the safety of my home just a few blocks away.

As I approached the small kiosk on the corner, I saw the cheerful man who was always there — the one who greeted me every morning with a smile and a bad, harmless pickup line. But that day he didn't smile. His eyes lingered on me, scanning every line of my face, and he didn't joke. He just looked at me and knew something was wrong.

“Chama, are you okay? You're so pale!”

The stranger I waved at every morning became my lifeline, the only person whose world seemed to stop with mine. The only one who cared.

His words snapped something back into place. Suddenly, I felt the sun on my face, the breeze through my hair, and the city noise returning, as if my body had just remembered how to feel. Adrenaline caught up. I knew what I had to do next.

“No! I just got robbed. Can I borrow your phone?”

It wasn't even the first time. In the last year and a half, tukis robbed me twice. They never showed a weapon. They didn't need to. The threat was invisible, but I wasn't about to test my luck. I handed over what they wanted and walked away shaky but unharmed.

I thought I knew the script by then, but nothing had prepared me for a man who didn't look like a criminal. For a gun hidden beneath a nice leather jacket. For a threat delivered in daylight, with the confidence of someone who knew nothing would happen if he killed me.

My first instinct was to call my dad, but my finger froze over the numbers. I pictured his hand pressed to his chest, the hospital room from two years ago, and the way he startled at sudden news. His fragile heart. I couldn't risk scaring him like that.

So I took the borrowed phone and dialed the only other number I knew by heart: my boyfriend's.

His voice was the final pull that brought me back. Panic, anger, and relief were released in a torrent of tears that ran down my face. Each sob stole air from my lungs. I gasped between words, and the urgent message I needed to pass came out as broken sounds rather than a full sentence.

"I'm okay... I'm okay...call my Dad. I just got robbed...near my place. Don't scare him. Just... just tell him I'm fine."

"I'm coming to you" was the only thing he said. The only thing I needed to hear.

Right until that moment, I'd bargained with danger the way you bargain with an unpleasant neighbor. I carefully planned my path to avoid the alley where someone had been kidnapped the month before. I kept my keys between my fingers like claws when the sun set early, but I didn't make it home in time. I memorized others' safety recipes.

It was part of life, so I stopped associating these actions with fear.

Thirty, maybe forty minutes later, the apartment intercom buzzed. My whole body rattled. I ran down the stairs, opened the heavy metal door, and found my boyfriend. I didn't rush into his arms as I thought I would; I just stared at him in disbelief.

His face was white, all color drained. His eyes silently scanned my face, arms, and shaking hands, as if counting the places a bullet could have gone but didn't.

In those few seconds, the life I once imagined came flooding back. Walking through Paris at dawn, speaking French with a flawless accent, buying second-hand books from street vendors, or grabbing an early coffee by the Fontana di Trevi before class. I'd always pictured going abroad to grow, to learn, and then to return home wiser and stronger, ready to help mend the cracks in the country that raised me.

It was a 'someday' plan, distant and wrapped in patience and hope. Fleeing and never looking back had never been part of that dream. But a gun pointed at me in the middle of the day changed everything. The bullet never left the chamber, but it killed every excuse I had for pretending that living in fear was normal. A cold slap across the face, reminding me that waiting for 'the right moment' could cost me my life.

Then, I saw my Italian grandparents arrive in Venezuela after the Second World War. I imagined their boat slicing through rough waves, the salt stinging their eyes, and their tired hands clutching a baby and empty suitcases. Dreaming of a country that promised a better future.

They built a new life from nothing, only to have their hopes taken away years later. My heart broke at the thought of walking away from the place they had chosen with such faith. At the idea that so many of us—descendants of immigrants—were now tracing a route back to the very homelands our families once fled. The irony sat heavy in my chest, bitter and undeniable. The cycle was complete.

My mind quickly replayed every moment I had lived on alert, every time fear dictated my actions. I could feel the inevitability of change pressing against every thought.

Under that weight, a clarity I'd never known rose to the surface. Still staring at my scared boyfriend, I said:

"I'm leaving the country... with or without you."

The Silence That Followed

SUBMITTED TO CBC NONFICTION PRIZE 2026

DETACHMENT

Rebuilding my life in Canada was never part of the plan.

But when a stranger held me at gunpoint in the middle of the street, at noon, I knew I had to leave my homeland if I wanted a better life—or a life at all.

Like a *Cattleya mossiae* torn from the high, humid canopy of the Venezuelan rainforest and suddenly placed in cold, dark territory, I arrived in Montreal in February 2016. Only one suitcase came with me, carrying twenty-six years of love, laughter, and the promise of never looking back.

I worried about the new weather and the different language, but wilting never crossed my mind.

Yet it happened.

I became someone who had to pause mid-sentence to translate who she was to strangers.

In an attempt to revive my brittle, silver roots, I turned to dating apps, even when it felt ironic to search for belonging in a place where connection often begins and ends with a photo.

A confident guy in a blue coat standing at the start of a hiking trail, surrounded by friends, ready to take on the challenge. That was the photo. The promise of someone who could teach me how to thrive in this country, not just survive it.

THE SPIKE

Meeting someone straight off the internet went against everything my mother taught me about safety. Her voice fed my imagination with worst-case scenarios, the most vivid being my dismembered body found floating in a river.

But loneliness was louder than fear.

He entered the room looking exactly like the life I thought I wanted — composed, stable, sure of his place in the world. The air thinned as he reached for my hand and sat at the table. It wasn't his confidence or the smoothness of his voice; it was the spark in his sky-blue eyes, telling me that I wasn't just a foreign accent anymore.

As we said goodbye, I lingered, hoping he'd close the gap between us, choosing to overlook the rot in what appeared to be the perfect bark to set my roots. A sixteen-year age gap, carefully concealed in the younger version of his digital self. A marital status recently changed to *separated*.

"I want to do things right," he whispered, his composure barely intact.

There it was.

The proof of integrity.

Not the sign of someone still untangling his past.

UNFURLING

For a few weeks, I thrived in the artificial warmth of his attention. His hand was a comforting guide, and somewhere between evening walks and mornings wrapped in his sheets, I became infatuated with my own unfurling.

Without warning, a sudden drop in temperature stalled me.

Another photo, the wrong one this time. A group of people around a table, celebrating a birthday, and he was sitting right next to the guest of honor, his ex-wife.

The image revealed the cracks I'd been ignoring.

The omissions, the doubts, the cold every time he left.

I kept staring at the screen, unaware of the people surrounding me in Montreal's Grande Bibliotheque. My jaw locked as I analyzed every detail. The way his torso inclined toward hers, and that familiar spark in his eyes. Heat climbed the back of my neck until my ears burned.

Yet I was convinced that we could still save it somehow.

We met to talk, and the lightheartedness felt almost cruel. We were both laughing as I scrunched my face over my first bite of nigiri. Then, he got serious.

“I like you... But I’m still in love with my ex.”

Hearing him confirm it left me no choice but to end things. For my own sake. For his sake, too. And so, I did—in words at least.

He held my hand as we walked out of the restaurant, intertwining his fingers with mine like a man in love, even though he had just spoken like one already gone.

“What are you doing?” was all I managed to ask.

“I just wanted to see what it would be like,” he said, still holding my hand.

In that moment, the thought of being left suspended again felt more unbearable than the truth I had just heard. He invited me to his place. I went with him. Walking hand in hand as if we were beginning our story, not ending it.

The next morning, we lay on our sides in silence. I let myself get completely lost in his face, trying to memorize every detail. “You’re an amazing woman,” he said, breaking the silence. A tear slid down my cheek. He didn’t wipe it away. I kept staring at him, memorizing a life I would no longer have.

DORMANCY

In the months that followed, I lived off the tenderness we had built on shared loneliness rather than shared life. Every attempt to reach out was met with polite, disengaged replies. With each one, I withered. Eventually, I accepted it and entered a long period of dormancy.

Three years later, the belief that I needed borrowed light to belong had taken root. I searched for it in other men, even in one of his friends. But I was unable to recreate the same warmth.

I relapsed.

I sent one last love declaration, breaking the promise I had made to myself.

He read the message.

The days passed.

I told myself silence would be “out of character.” So I waited.

He never replied.

SUSPENSION

The weight of that silence kept me suspended for years. I replayed our story again and again, searching for the moment I went wrong. My chest ached each time I remembered I still cared. Why did I send that message? I kept asking myself, over and over.

I was convinced it had to be love.

It wasn't.

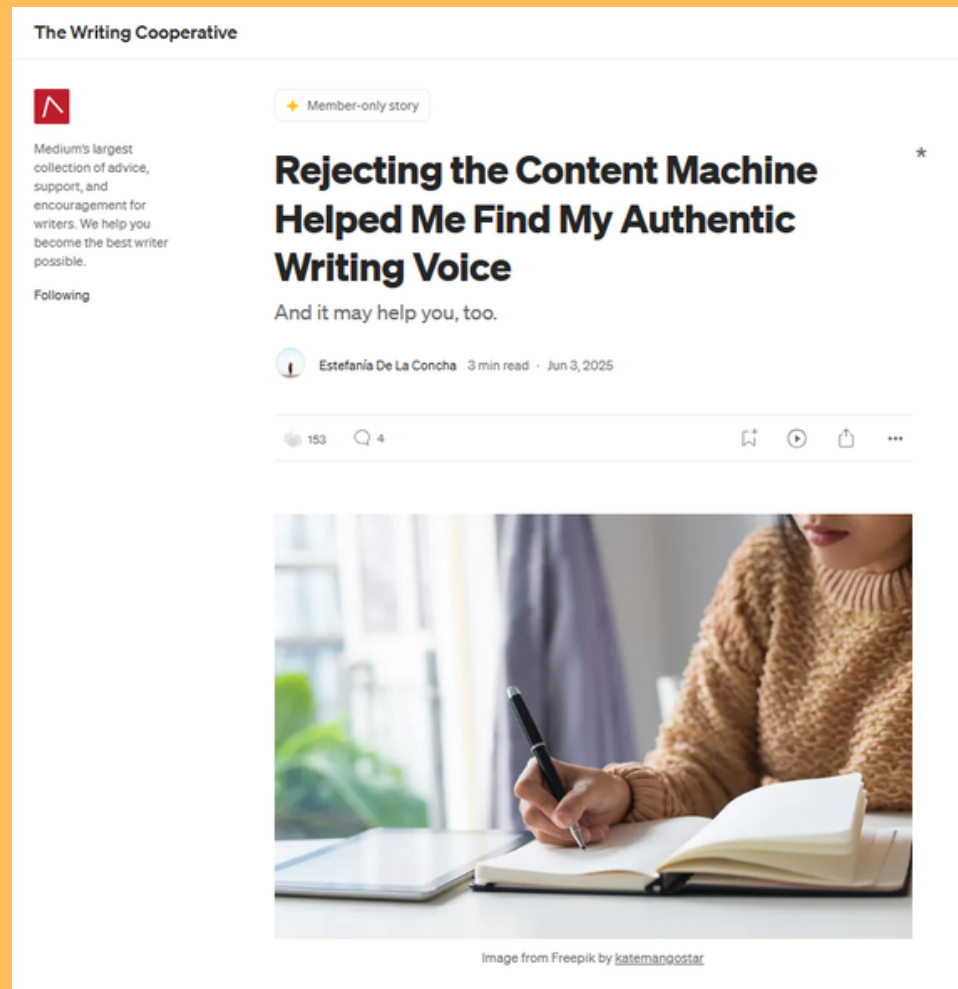
I had clung to a man in a desperate attempt to set roots in a country that wasn't my own.

But my roots were never meant to settle on anyone other than myself. I made Canada my home, in my own chaotic, mixed-culture way.



Editorial & Blog Writing

[Read it here](#)



Rejecting the Content Machine Helped Me Find My Authentic Writing Voice

And it may help you, too.

Writers and creators are pressured to become content machines to feed a monster that isn't satisfied with quality but with quantity. For me, writing can't be forced. When I try to write on demand, my mind goes blank; my words lose their meaning, and my voice gets completely buried. I don't recognize myself in those prefabricated words.

I stumbled into writing in 2023. At first, I used it to untangle my emotions around a difficult love story, one of those experiences most of us have lived through, the kind that haunts you, filling you with pain and doubts about your worth. I wrote it all — every conversation, every kiss, every encounter. And in doing so, I accidentally discovered a love for writing and the relief it brings to my soul. It also sparked others about my life as an immigrant, leading me to uncover my passion for storytelling.

Now that I'm ready to share my stories and see where they lead me, I've found myself stuck in the content machine trap, trying to write when I don't have anything authentic to say — churning out work relentlessly to keep the algorithm happy and avoid being forgotten. That kind of pressure only drained my creativity and made me lose that spark of emotion that first made me fall in love with writing.

True creativity requires space and time to think, live, and experience. That's why I couldn't force myself to follow the popular advice that focuses on publishing by volume, chasing clicks, and crafting click-worthy headlines. Do I have wild dreams that fate will guide my words to the right eyes? Absolutely. But I've decided to chase those dreams without putting that ridiculous amount of pressure on myself, consciously choosing to resist the toxic cycle of overproduction to protect my authenticity and mental health. I hope you can do it too.

If you are feeling trapped and overwhelmed in the content machine, too, here's what's helped me and might help you:

Give yourself permission to write without a rigid schedule.

Set aside time each week to write freely without worrying about deadlines and expectations. It is important to write consistently, but a rigid schedule could kill your creativity, and the pressure to produce constantly could lead you to burn out.

Slow down and think about purpose rather than engagement.

When you slow down, you allow yourself to shift your attention to why you are writing that story and what you want people to see, leading you to create more meaningful work. Focus on writing for the simple joy of making sense of this messy thing called life, and quality work will follow.

Protect your voice fiercely.

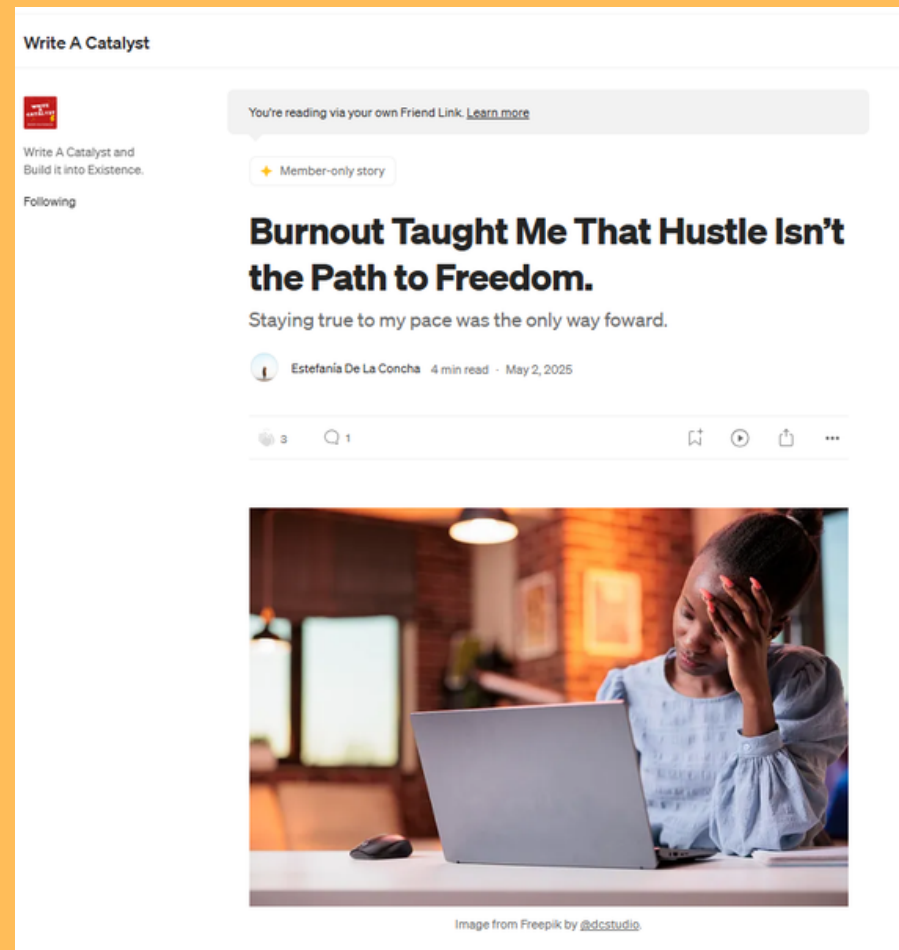
You do not need to copy formulas to be successful. Write from your heart, be authentic, and tell your story. Trust me; you will connect more deeply with your work and readers and create something you can be proud of on your deathbed.

Understand that success is a personal journey.

Define what success looks like to you — not your parents, not society, and definitely not the algorithm. Embrace the processes (something I'm still working on) rather than the outcome. Trust that the right audience will understand and appreciate your work.

For me, success isn't about algorithms or metrics. It's about creating work that feels true to who I am and finding joy in connecting with others through raw, honest, and shared experiences. If my words remind even one person that they don't have to sacrifice their authenticity to be seen, then every sentence will have been worth it.

[Read it here](#)



Burnout Taught Me That Hustle Isn't the Path to Freedom.

Staying true to my pace was the only way forward.

I thought transitioning into freelance writing would solve the exhaustion and frustration that had been building up over the past few years.

I was wrong because the problem wasn't just what I was doing, but how I was doing it.

Embracing the fact that I prefer working on my own rather than playing The Office Game wasn't easy, but I wanted to try. I imagined slow mornings, joyful creative sessions, and finally living life on my own terms. But this wasn't my first attempt at freelancing.

A few years earlier, I had taught Spanish online and tried to build a business. I poured countless hours into it, doing everything myself — lesson planning, marketing, admin — but I couldn't make it financially sustainable. I had to return to a 9-to-5, because paying the bills was becoming a real concern.

That worked, until it didn't.

I ended up joining the hustle culture, working my 9-to-5 by day and side-hustling by night. I was constantly striving for the moment I could finally “break free.” But the only thing I broke was myself. I burned out. Hard. For the second time in my life.

I wanted to do it all: maintain the job that paid the bills, build a new freelance career on the side, exercise four to five times a week, cook healthy meals for my husband and me, keep the house clean, call my parents, be a present friend. And somehow, I still couldn't understand why I was always exhausted.

Eventually, I had to face the truth: I couldn't go on like that. I quit the Spanish school project and decided to focus on the 9-to-5, hoping a simpler life would help. I told myself I'd conform this time: no more big dreams, no more pressure. Just do the job, skip the ladder climbing, and keep it simple. But my burnout wasn't just about overworking, at least not entirely — it was about a deep misalignment between my values and how I was spending my time.

Even when I pivoted to freelance writing, something I loved, I noticed I had brought the same toxic hustle mindset with me. I was technically free but still tying my worth to how productive I was, how many hours I was working, and how much I could cram into a day. It didn't matter if it brought real results — I just had to keep *doing*.

Until my body and mind forced me to stop.

I was so anxious I couldn't sleep, couldn't focus, and couldn't even do the things I loved. The brain fog was so intense that just the thought of sitting in front of my computer felt haunting. My digestion was completely off; I couldn't even eat without discomfort. Everything in me was screaming for rest, but I didn't know how to give myself permission to stop.

The myth of productivity.

For too long, I believed productivity was the ultimate measure of success. If I was busy, I was valuable and I was moving forward. I was trapped in a constant cycle of doing, with no space to just be.

When I got into writing, I tried to do it all again — pitching, researching, managing social media accounts, marketing myself, and keeping up with trends. Thankfully, I did learn from my first experience and quickly realized that trying to do everything was going to lead me to another burn out. So, I decided to quit a few things and focus on what really mattered. Writing quality pieces and finding the right places to pitch them.

I stopped trying to be active on every social media platform. No more posting on Threads, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and X. I made a conscious decision not to bring the same hustle mindset I had used in the corporate world into my writing life. My journey became about my creative process and not about making sure everyone could see me doing it. It's been an enormous relief, freeing up so much of my time and energy.

Staying true to my pace

Staying true to my pace has been one of the most liberating parts of overcoming burnout. I've realized that my journey can be as slow or fast as I need it to be. I've understood that achieving my dreams is a marathon, not a sprint. And if I want to make it to the finish line, I must train beforehand, rest as often as I need, and savor every mile along the way.

I've learned to embrace the slower days and give myself the grace not to be “on” all the time. Instead of racing against an arbitrary clock, I've started to move with intention, allowing my work to flow naturally rather than forcing it. Prioritizing rest and associating it with the most productive thing I can do.

It's not always easy, especially after spending my adult life in hustle mode, and while everyone around me still seems to be racing. But when I listen to my body and honor my rhythm, my work becomes richer, more fulfilling, and more sustainable.



Translation

Una cita de Tinder, Cuatro Sorpresas

Cuando una cita casual viene con un poco más de lo esperado.

Siempre he estado un poco obsesionada con los bomberos. Tienen un no sé qué, un misterio alrededor de ellos y unos aires de heroísmo que podemos quizás atribuirlos los uniformes. Por supuesto, cuando lo vi en la aplicación describirse a sí mismo como un bombero apasionado, amante de la naturaleza y muy familiar, además de sus casi 2 metros de estatura, el “Swipe Righth” fue casi automático.

Hicimos “match” y no esperó ni 3 mensajes para invitarme a salir. Me pareció un poco apresurado, pero, al mismo tiempo, pensé que era mejor, así vemos rápido si hay química y si no la hay... Chao pescao. Llegamos al restaurante casi al mismo tiempo, fuimos por un “brunch”. Lo primero que noté fue su altura, pero también su porte en general, musculoso, buena postura y calvo. Generalmente, no me siento atraída por los hombres calvos, pero a él le quedaba muy bien y hasta era difícil imaginármelo con cabello.

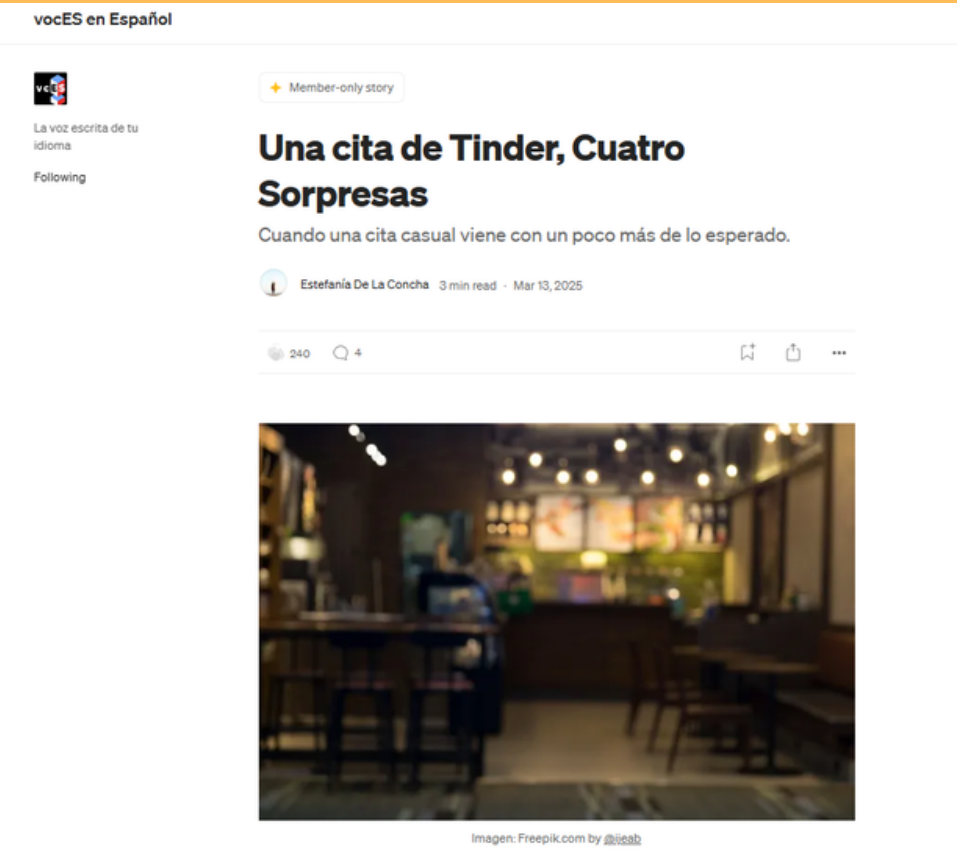
Tuvimos una muy buena conversación, simpática y ligera, me di cuenta rápidamente de que el tipo no era una lumbrera, pero era amable y divertido. Me atraía físicamente, pero no estaba loca por él, no lo admiraba. Tenía un pequeño defecto al hablar que, mezclado con mi poco entendimiento del francés en ese momento, no ayudaba mucho y me distraía, pero en general todo fue bien y quizás hasta hubiera aceptado una segunda cita. Sin embargo, al final de la primera, algo que cambiaría el rumbo de esa relación fugaz, sucedió.

Tengo que decirte algo y prefiero hacerlo de una vez, me gusta ser honesto. Dijo.

Quizás debido a mi ansiedad y tendencia a imaginarme los peores escenarios posibles, en menos de 10 segundos muchas cosas me pasaron por la cabeza : Oh, Dios, estuvo preso y acaba de salir de prisión... Tiene problemas de drogas o alcohol... Es proxeneta...

Tengo 4 hijos, dijo finalmente.

Suspiré. Ok, bueno, no es tan grave, pero esos son 2 más que los que estoy dispuesta a aceptar. Pensé. Me gustaba salir con hombres mayores, así que sabía que lo más probable era que tuvieran hijos ya, no me molestaba mucho la idea, pero CUATRO, comenzaban a ser multitud. Además, este tipo tenía solo 34 años y yo 29, la diferencia de edad no era tanta.



Ah ok, ya veo, y ¿qué edades tienen? Pregunté tratando de evaluar los daños.

El más pequeño tiene 2 y el más grande 10. Dos niños y dos niñas. Dijo con ese tono de orgullo que solo los padres tienen. Son pequeños, estoy bien jodida, me va a tocar criarlos prácticamente.

Si de algo estaba segurísima, es que yo no quería ser la madrastra de nadie. Podía ser su amiga, quererlos, pasar tiempo con ellos, pero criarlos no. No me interesaba eso.

Y... ¿Qué tal es la relación con su madre? Pregunté.

Bueno, con la madre de mis dos hijos mayores no tan bien, es un poco complicado. Con la madre de mi tercera hija me va bien, es una mujer muy razonable y me acabo de separar de la madre de mi niña pequeña.

3 mujeres, 4 hijos de entre 2 y 10 años, saqué mis cuentas rápidamente y la pregunta lógica que me vino a la mente fue: AM I NEXT ?... HELL NO !

No tengo palabras para describir y poder transmitirlo bien en estas líneas lo que sentí, solo puedo decir que me hubiera gustado estar sentada frente a un espejo y verme la cara. Casi escupí el jugo delante de él. Parecía que estaba coleccionando familias como quien colecciona tazas de Starbucks.

Le agradecí su honestidad, no podemos quitarle eso, pero le dije que era mucho para mí, y que prefería no involucrarme. Traté de hacerlo sentir mejor diciéndole que no era personal, que parecía un buen tipo y todo, pero que no iba a funcionar para mí. Parecía decepcionado, pero no demasiado, quizás ya se habría acostumbrado a esa respuesta. Nunca lo volví a ver o a saber de él.

Desde entonces, cada vez que un hombre me dice que es “muy familiar”, me preparo mentalmente para escuchar una telenovela.

My Date Collected Families Like Starbucks Mugs

A modern dating horror story.

Let's be honest, we all have our types. For me, it's firefighters. I blame the uniforms and a general weakness for heroic vibes. So when a handsome, six-foot-tall firefighter popped up on the app, describing himself as a nature lover and a family-oriented guy, swiping right was as automatic as my overthinking. What I didn't know was that "family-oriented" was the understatement of the century.

We matched, and he didn't wait for three messages before asking me out. It felt a bit rushed, but I figured it was better this way — we'd find out quickly if there was chemistry, and if not, well, see ya later. We arrived at the restaurant almost at the same time for brunch. I first noticed his height and overall presence: muscular, good posture, and bald. Usually, I'm not into bald guys, but it suited him — I could barely picture him with hair.

We had a fun, lighthearted conversation. It didn't take me long to realize he wasn't exactly a genius, but he was kind and funny. I was physically attracted to him, but wasn't crazy about him — I didn't admire him. He had a slight speech quirk, which, combined with my limited understanding of Canadian French at the time, didn't help and distracted me. Still, overall, things went well, and I might have even agreed to a second date. But at the end of that first date, something changed the course of our brief encounter.

“I have to tell you something, and I'd rather do it now. I like to be honest,” he said.

Maybe it was my anxiety and tendency to imagine the worst-case scenarios, so in less than ten seconds, my mind was flooded with possibilities: Oh God, he just got out of prison... He has a drug or alcohol problem... He's a pimp...

“I have four kids,”

I sighed. Okay, well, it's not the worst thing, but that's two more than I'm willing to accept. I thought.

I liked dating older guys, so I knew kids were probably part of the package. I didn't mind that much, but FOUR? That was a whole crowd. Plus, this guy was only 34, and I was 29 — not a huge age gap. Clearly, he hadn't wasted any time.

Tinder Horror Story

Just a funny short story about Online dating!

Estefanía De La Concha · 4 min read · Mar 2, 2025

174 2



Image from Freepik by @pressfoto

“Oh, I see... and how old are they?” I asked, trying to gauge the extent of the damage.

“The youngest is two, and the oldest is ten. Two boys and two girls,” he said with that proud tone only a father has.

They’re little. I’m screwed. I’m basically going to end up raising them, I thought.

If there was one thing I was absolutely certain of, it was that I did not want to be anyone’s stepmother. I could be their friend, care about them, and spend time with them, but raising them? No thanks.

“And... how’s your relationship with their moms?” I asked.

“Well, things are a bit complicated with the mom of my two oldest. The third’s mom is pretty reasonable, and I just separated from the youngest’s mom.”

Yup. You did the math right. Three women, four kids.

I don’t have the words to fully capture what I felt. I wish I’d been sitting in front of a mirror to see my face. I almost spat out my juice. It seemed like he was collecting families the way people collect Starbucks mugs.

There were three women and four kids aged between two and ten. The only logical question that popped into my mind was: AM I NEXT? Hell no!

I thanked him for his honesty — I’ll give him credit for that — but I told him it was too much for me, and I’d rather not get involved. I tried to soften the blow by saying it wasn’t personal and that he seemed like a good guy, but it wouldn’t work for me. He looked a bit disappointed, but not too much. Maybe he was used to hearing that response by now. I never saw or heard from him again.

Since then, whenever a man tells me he’s “very family-oriented,” I mentally prepare to hear a soap opera.



Micro-Narratives

Longlisted in the Tadpole Press 100-Word Writing Contest (April 2025).

We Matched. So Did He... Three Times.

I matched with a 34-year-old firefighter — tall, bald, charming. I was 29 and thrilled...until he said, “I want to be honest,”

Anxiety crept in. Prison? Cult? Married?

“I have four kids.”

Okay... doable. I thought.

“With three different moms.”

The oldest was ten. The youngest? Two. I did the math and nearly choked on my juice. He’d been... busy.

He beamed like he was showing off a Pokémon collection.

I smiled too, but something shifted — I wasn’t ready to mother a crowd.

I left with a full belly, a tender heart, and a sharper sense of what I want.

What did the judges say ?

“Our favourite thing about this entry is the authentic voice and relatable humour that captures the awkwardness and self-discovery of modern dating with such wit and charm.” “We also love the ending line as it beautifully captures personal growth and self-awareness.”





Let's Collaborate!

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