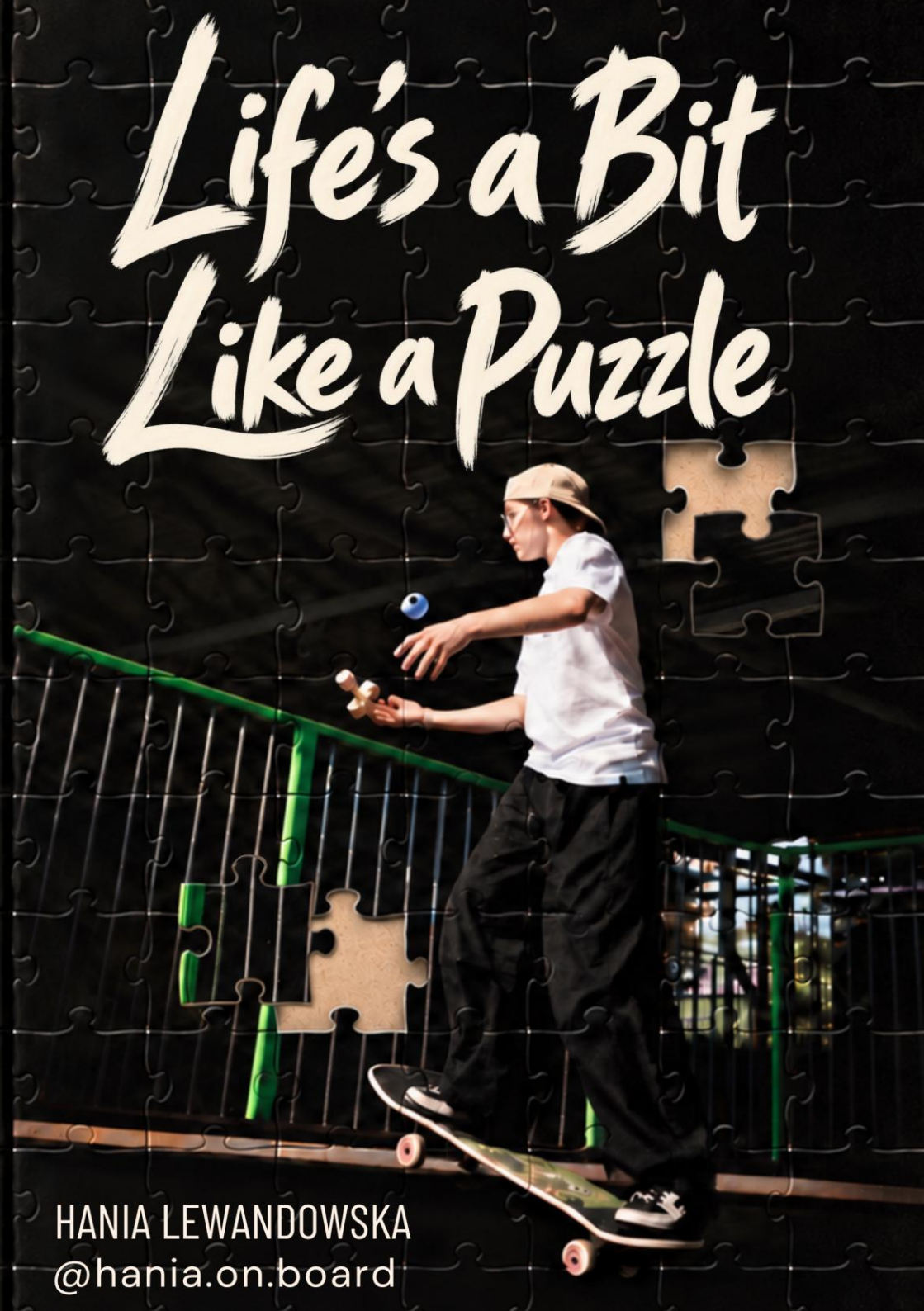
Life's a Bit Like a Puzzle



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LIFE'S A BIT LIKE A PUZZLE

Skateboarding, Growing Up, and Everything in Between

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Hania.on.board From the Inside

Hey!

I'm 16, and sometimes I don't even know where to start when someone asks me what I do. The easiest answer would be: I skateboard. But then I'd be leaving out school, friends, teaching, competitions, SkateLab, travelling, other sports, and about a million other things I just like doing.

So, one more time. Hey! I'm Hania. I go to Artes Liberales High School in Warsaw. I train with my coach, Jean. I hang out with my friends, go to concerts, like photography, and sometimes do flips on a trampoline. I also do sudoku. I know, it makes me sound like an old lady, but seriously, it's fun.

And board sports? They've been part of my life since 2017, so that's already a pretty big part of my life. It started with a little penny board, then came more boards and more sports. Today, skateboarding is the most important one for me. I skate, train, compete, and teach others, but it's still not the only thing that describes me.

I think that's why something I once wrote about myself fits me best: my life is a bit like a puzzle. Every piece looks a little different, but it's only when you put them together that you see the whole picture.

I've already experienced a lot in my 16 years. A lot has happened, both in sport and with the people I've met. Sometimes I even feel like there's probably nothing left that could surprise me.



Photo: Gabrysia Zielonka

A Bit Like a Puzzle

The biggest piece of the puzzle is board sports.
My skateboard comes first for me now, but that's not where it all started. First there was my penny board, then a surfskate, a longboard and a snowboard, and over time more boards and more sports came along. I ride a RipSurf too. I still snowboard in winter. I used to do mainly alpine snowboarding, but now I'm more into freestyle.
And in summer there's surfing, windsurfing, SUP and skimboarding too.

I like trying new things. Not because I need to keep changing what I do all the time. It's more that when something interests me, I want to find out what it's actually like. Sometimes I stick with it, sometimes I don't. Sometimes it goes quickly, sometimes my first attempts look terrible. That's pretty normal with board sports.

I got my first penny board in spring 2017. We went specially to the Fish Skateboards shop to get it. Outside the shop, on a bit of pavement, the guy who worked there showed me how to stand on it, how to push and how to ride my first few metres. There was no big plan back then for boards to become such a huge part of my life. There was just this little plastic penny board, and I wanted to see what I could do with it.

A few months later, I started riding the Carver Wave near Wola Park Mall. At first I rode it on my penny board, even though the wave was made for surfskates. I went back almost every day. I met my first coaches and the first people I knew through board sports. Not long after that, I got my first surfskate of my own. I still have that first penny board. And my first surfskate too. It's cool to look at them sometimes and remember that this is where it all started.

Skateboarding taught me that you can not know how to do something and still keep trying. You can ask your coach. You can ask someone to spot you. You can try something easier and come back to the harder thing later. It sounds simple, but in real life it isn't always that easy.

Over time, I started looking at other things the same way. I don't need to know the whole plan to take the next step. If I don't know something, I can ask someone who knows more. And if I do something wrong, I'd rather understand why and do it better next time.

That doesn't mean I'm always cool with failing. Totally not. When I really care about something, I can get frustrated, especially when I've tried loads of times and it still isn't working. But that's exactly how I've learnt that one failed attempt, one training session or one competition doesn't say everything about what I can do. Sometimes I need to come back to something later, sometimes try a different way, and sometimes just keep going.

It's similar with learning at school. I'm not equally interested in everything, and not everything makes sense to me straight away. I learn best when I understand why I'm doing something or can see how I could use it in real life. Theory on its own is okay, it just sticks in my head much better when it connects to something real.

I also like listening to people who have more experience. If a coach, teacher or someone I trust shows me a different way of doing something, I want to understand why I should do it that way first. If it makes sense to me, I'll try it.

But obviously, it's much easier to think calmly about a mistake afterwards. When something isn't working right there and then, I don't always immediately think about what it's going to teach me.

And that brings me straight to people, because for me sport is almost never completely separate from everything else.

I have friends from high school, from board sports and from earlier years too. At school there's Sara, Ewa, Zuzia, Alek, Basia, Ami, Tosia and Gabrysia, among others. From board sports and my previous school, there's Paula, Ola, Gabryś and Marcela. Some of those friendships started simply because we ended up in the same place, at training, at school or on a trip. This isn't meant to be a list of everyone I know. It's more that when I think about my life, people are pretty much everywhere.

Sport is way more fun when you can do it together. At competitions, of course I want to skate well and the result matters to me, especially when I've worked on something for a long time. But there are also people, conversations, watching other people's runs and more things to learn.

I feel the same about other people's success. I can want to win and still be happy when something goes well for a friend. One doesn't cancel out the other. Competition is part of sport, but it's not a reason for me to stop liking the people I skate with.

Friends are really important to me outside sport too. I like having people around me who I can talk to, laugh with, do something with or just hang out with. When something matters to someone close to me, I want to support them. Sometimes that means actually helping with something, sometimes talking, and sometimes just being there.

In May, we went on a school trip to Podlasie. Both first-year classes together. For a few days, we were basically doing things together all the time. What I remember most is one evening around the campfire. We sat there for hours, talking, roasting sausages over the fire, messing around and singing songs. Nothing huge, really, but those are exactly the kind of normal moments I like most.

When Skateboarding Became Something More

As skateboarding started becoming a bigger part of my life, I added more skateboarding sessions, Woodcamp camps and more and more skateboarding competitions. I'd trained and competed before too, just in other sports.

I learn so much at Woodcamp and always come back with something new to work on. Now I train with Jean and compete wherever I can, as long as I have the time and can

get there from Warsaw. Sometimes I come home with a prize, sometimes I don't. Competitions simply show me what I've already learnt and what I still need to work on.

My favourite moment is when, after loads of attempts, something finally starts working. But I think I've learnt just as much from the times when nothing worked. Skateboarding shows you pretty quickly that just wanting something is not enough. You can really want to land a trick and still not land it. You have to keep trying, fix the details, sometimes take a step back and then come back to it.



On the other hand, I don't like pretending that failing is great. Because it isn't. When something doesn't work, I can get frustrated. When I care about the result, I take it harder. It's only afterwards that it gets easier to see what I can learn from it. I think I'm getting better at that as I get older, but I'm still not the kind of person who says after every failed attempt, "Great, I've just got another life lesson."

And that's fine, because I guess I'm just not like that.

At some point, I stopped being just someone at the skatepark who was learning herself. I started teaching other people too. I teach skateboarding to children, teenagers and adults.

I really like this job because I'm learning how to understand other people at the same time.

And I think that's what I like most about being an instructor. Knowing how to do something on a skateboard and knowing how to help someone else do the same thing are two different things. Some people want to try straight away. Someone else might need spotting first, or the instructor's hand. One person needs more explaining, another less. Someone might be scared of a particular trick, while someone else is scared just to stand on a skateboard at first.

In my classes, I want everyone to have a safe space to learn without being judged. Asking an instructor for help is normal. Being scared is normal too. If someone is scared, I don't just tell them to stop being scared. We can start with spotting, holding hands or an easier version, and only then move on.

I don't want to do things for the person I'm teaching. I'd rather help them get to the point where they can take the next step on their own. It might be their first ride, their first turn or a trick they were scared of before. That's exactly

why I love getting people into skateboarding. It's cool to see someone start out unsure whether they can do it and then do something on their own.

Teaching has become another part of my life. I remember what it was like when I started, and I know not everyone feels confident at a skatepark straight away.

Then SkateLab came along too. I created it with my friends as a school project, a skateboarding event with workshops and competitions. It was important to us that someone who already skates could come, but also someone who just wanted to try it for the first time.

With a project like this, I'm not only thinking about what I need to do anymore. There are participants, instructors and things to prepare. If I mess something up, it can affect other people too.

I don't do everything myself. SkateLab is a project we do together. If I don't know something, I ask people who know more about it. I ask my coach about sport, and for other things I ask someone with more experience. To me, being independent doesn't mean you have to do everything by yourself.

You can't always manage everything perfectly either. I have school, training, classes, projects and normal life. Sometimes everything happens at once, and then I have to decide what matters most right now, what can wait and what I simply won't do.

I also run the @hania.on.board Instagram and TikTok accounts, where I share sport and just bits of my life. There's training, competitions, trips, lessons and projects. Another cool thing is that these accounts help me find people who are into similar things. Through skateboarding, school, trips,

competitions and projects, I'm meeting new people all the time.

I also work with brands connected with clothes, electronics, sports equipment and food. Among other things, I'm an ambassador for OMW Boards and I have my own discount code, SK8HANIA, which gives you 5% off.

What I like most about being online is showing things I actually do. I don't want to pretend to be someone else. Obviously, no one posts their whole life, but I want what I do share to actually be mine.

I'm Still Me Off the Board

If I only talked about skateboarding, it would sound like I hardly do anything else. But that's not true. There's school, friends, concerts, photography, trampolines, other sports and travelling.

I want to travel as much as I can. I've already been to lots of countries and places, but I don't want to turn that into a list. For me, it's much more interesting to see a new place, meet people and try something new. I want to discover new places and meet new people simply because I want to understand the world better.

When something interests me, I often just want to try it. Not everything I try has to turn into something big later. Sometimes it just turns out to be fun and stays with me for longer.

Photography doesn't have to become my job, and a concert doesn't have to teach me some kind of "lesson". Some things are fun simply because they're fun.

School is a big part of my life too. I like going there, seeing my friends and teachers and learning new things. I spend

so much time there that I kind of treat it like a second home. This might sound weird, but I like my school.

I like having lots of things I'm interested in, but there are still only 24 hours in a day. You can't do school, training and a project perfectly all in one day and still have time to rest. Sometimes you just have to choose what matters most, and sometimes leave something for later.

Rest is important too. I like meeting up with people I know, listening to music, taking photos, doing sudoku or just having a normal day off.

It's easy to forget that when I start listing competitions, projects, training and brand collaborations. I'm 16. Sometimes I want to improve and grow, and sometimes I just want to spend time with people I like.

And one doesn't get in the way of the other.

What's Next?

I have lots of dreams. I want to travel all over the world. I want to compete in international skateboarding competitions. One day, I'd like to start my own skateboarding school. I also want to have a healthy family of my own in the future.

I don't know exactly what the path to each of those things will look like yet. I'm 16, so I think it would be a bit weird if I already had my whole life planned out.

But I do know that I want to keep trying. I want to skate better, learn new things, travel, meet people and work on projects that make sense to me. Some of my plans will probably change. There will probably be things that I haven't even thought about yet.



I like having goals, but I don't need to know straight away how I'm going to get all the way to the end. Sometimes it's enough to figure out the next step.

When I need help, I ask. When something doesn't work out, I try to understand why and then I try again. And if I discover something new along the way, I'll see what I want to do with it next.

Success doesn't always mean the same thing to me. When I've worked on something for a long time, I want to see a result. It's cool to win, land a trick I'm proud of or see that

a project really worked out. I'm not going to pretend the result doesn't matter. It does.

But the result isn't everything either. What makes me happiest is something I've really worked for, especially when I know how many attempts it took. It also matters who I did it with and whether I'm happy with how I got there.

And obviously, I still don't do everything perfectly. Sometimes I keep trying for too long, sometimes I want things to work straight away too much, and sometimes I get it wrong when I think about how many things I can fit into one day. I'm still learning that.

If I started this book with a list of things I've already done, it would all be true, but it still wouldn't show all of me. Most of the things that are part of my life today started because at some point I tried something, then met people, learnt something new and took the next step.

My puzzle is still coming together.

I also wrote that I've already experienced a lot in my 16 years and that probably nothing can surprise me anymore.

Okay.

I'm 16.

There's probably still a lot that will surprise me.

And that's good.