



Free style story chain

Find below the long version of the texts written by the partner organisations.

How do I deal with the current situation?

Maria checked her appearance once more. Did she seem inviting, but not seductive? Confidence-inspiring, but not naïve? Were the trousers not too tight? Was it noticeable that she was sweating quite a bit in her long-sleeved T-shirt at 30°? Would she be able to speak well in the foreign language? She was standing near the tollbooth on the highway to the south of France. She was hitchhiking. Alone. A test of courage. Simone de Beauvoir and others have also done this. But women are not encouraged to do so. Her goal: to come along quickly. But not: to get away. A few cars drove up. She decided on one man in his mid-forties. Heart palpitations. But 300 km of intense and interesting conversation followed. Literally about God and the world. Because the gentleman was a ...

... pastor. That, too, was a new horizon for Maria. They floated past enchanting countryside, sometimes through the scent of cows, then along lavender fields, in the light that only the south knows. She told them about her life in the East of the Eastern neighbour country and what it was like for her in 1989, when the old power was removed in the German Democratic Republic and democracy was enforced by the people. How alive everything was then. She learned from him how the annual festivals were once celebrated in the villages. And according to which rules they sang together. Chanson culture since time immemorial.

Maria remembered all this when she read her diary from 1993. She had already experienced half of Europe at that time. Courage had brought forth the fruits of the encounter. She does not feel empty today. But she also knows what is missing.

The sound of the crowd, the smell of summertime, people around her dancing in a collective trance guided by drums and voices...

It seems so far, so so far away in time and space, when people could touch each other, could hug each other, dance together, whispering in other people's ears, telling secrets and confessions, smelling and breathing so close to each other.

Sometimes she even doubts it is a memory, dancing so close to people, experiencing the feeling of being one thanks to the power of the music.

12 months have passed since the last time she danced in the crowd. We often forget how fundamental human contact can be in our life. An entire year of isolation.

Too close, too much breathing, too much touching, wash your hands, close your mouth, make the line, move the chair, stay home, stay far, keep the distance...

Now she dances alone: waiting for a new beginning full of hope, drums, music and human beings.

Maria said. She was not sure yet what do first. Maria decided that she would ask other women for support. She knew there was strength in the group. She felt that it was worth taking advantage of the kindness of other women who also take up daily challenges. She realized that she didn't always have to be strong. *Sometimes she*



can be weak and lean on friendly people. Maria realized that she needed to listen to her own intuition and always be on her own side.

It was difficult at first. Losing someone, who I hoped that I would be able to reach the end of my life, is something you can't get ready for. In the beginning, you might feel like you are on the verge of collapsing. But eventually, you realize that life is worth living. You have to learn to make it through every single day.

So step by step, I returned to my hobbies. I started to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. There are so many things that are truly beautiful and important and you may appreciate them and start to make yourself happy again, even if it is so difficult at first. But you shouldn't chain yourself from the simple pleasures.

Yes, that is the solution for me. I am a strong woman and I am sure I can undertake new challenges and start to be happy again...