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# *The Living Story of Cultural Identity*



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***This is the story of a girl, Maria, who travels around the world.  
She wants to see and understand the world she lives in and  
the world where she would like to spend all her life.***

*The story is told by pupils from Romania, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal*

## The Living Story of Cultural Identity

### Chapter 1

I am Maria and I lived there for my whole life and everything seemed to be perfect till one day when everything changed... I still remember the call I received from my mother that day, I remember all the words she said, I remember the fear that I felt down in my bones, and I remember all the details from that day.

Every time I close my eyes I think of that day over and over again as if I were stuck in a completely different dimension forever, and I can't do anything to escape, because it's a dimension that is constantly feeding out of my fear.

I can't do anything but run, that's what I have been doing since then, since the nightmare began... and for those who don't know my story, I'm Maria, a teenager who was forced to flee the country where she lived all her life because the government decided that immigrant families, like hers, are not as well welcomed as before. And the day they made that decision was the day I last saw my family, the last time I hugged them and all that for our protection, we had to split up, we had to learn how to live without each other, how to survive and look for support in other countries, but for how long? I don't know either... I don't know how long it will take us to find a place to be a family again... All I can do is hope to see them again one day and be as happy as ever, but until then I'm on my own, in a new country I know nothing about...

That's how I felt one year ago when I took the first plane to Romania. At the moment it seemed unreal, I didn't know how to feel, I was scared, nervous and even anxious. I didn't know where I was going, I didn't know if I had made a good decision to get on that plane, I just felt like I had lost a fight, a fight that left me without a family on the way to a country where I had no idea what to expect... Around me other emigrant families, either complete or divided, were in the same situation as me, some were crying, some were screaming, but I... I didn't realize it, I was still amazed at what had happened to me, how my life could be changed by a simple call from my mother.

When I landed in Romania I felt more lost than I was before, but also safe even if I was put in front of a stage in my life that I had not imagined until then. I knew that



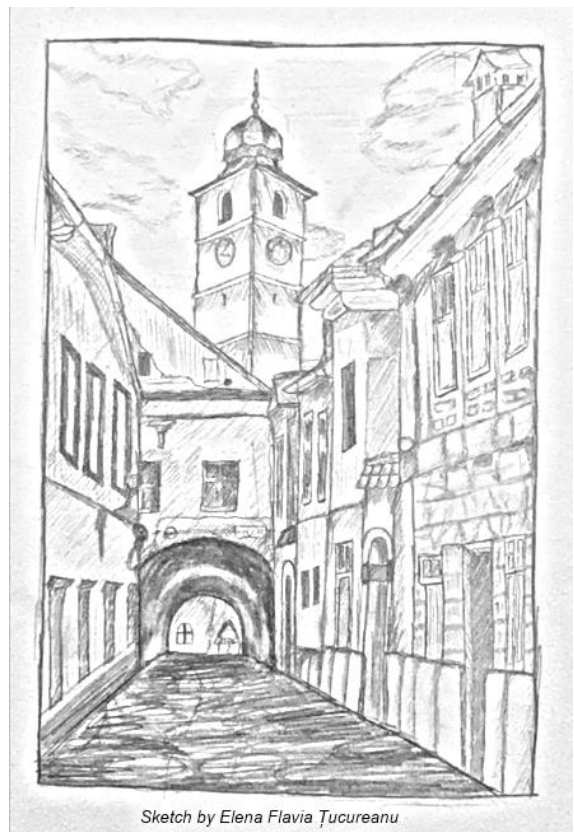
settling in a new country was not easy and that I would have to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and lifestyle, but my luck was to get into an immigrant program from the moment I landed. All the immigrant passengers were greeted by a group of young volunteers from an organization that supports people in my situation. I remember that I approached that group fearfully and timidly, then I met a girl who turned out to be the one who would help me to adapt for a while to the Romanian way of life and even if I didn't know her, she inspired me confidence and turned out to be the good person I needed at that moment, when I felt like everyone had betrayed me and was against me.

I felt that she was a good person from the moment she hugged me and whispered to me that everything would be fine. She just grabbed my luggage and told me to come with her, so I followed her closely for fear of losing her.

We got after some minutes into a small flat, somewhere at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, in a building which seemed to be a sort of protection centre or a special home for immigrants... After getting comfortable with the place, she made me a cup of tea and started talking to me as if she knew me, she just wanted to make me feel safe and she succeeded... She also asked me about my family and how it was in my country before the decision that the government made and I felt for a second that I was at home, with my family after a long day telling them about my day at school. It was really nice for a second to believe that nothing changed and I was not far away from my loved ones. After telling her my entire life story she nearly cried, but told me that "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new" and through that she reminded me about my grandpa who always told me something to make me feel better...

We have become friends and she has been helping me since my arrival in Romania. We got closer day by day and she was the one who guided me in this new country. She participated with me at the special courses for immigrants that I attended and she always tried to make me feel good by saying that after a while she and the organization would help me to look for my family. She accompanied me on a short tour of Romania, she told me a lot about the Romanian culture, and made me feel better those days when I missed my home town and family terribly.

At the end of the courses I had to prepare and present a project on the topic "Finding the story of a Romanian emigrant". I spent a lot of time in the library, documenting myself about the troubled Romanian history,



Sketch by Elena Flavia Țucureanu

its twists and turns and scars that had a great impact on so many lives. So many life stories of people who managed to survive wars, famine, dictatorship...

After hours of research, I finally found the amazing story of a Romanian gymnast whose life full of torments resonated with my own story.

Her name is Nadia Comaneci. She is the greatest gymnast in Romania, she is the gymnast who won the first mark ten in the world at the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976. The note did not even exist in the scoreboard, which showed 1.00 instead of 10.00. Until 1984, when she retired from competitive activity, she collected 25 medals won at the Olympic Games, World Championships and European Championships,

Practically, she spent all her youth practicing, trying to be better and better at what she did. But even though everything seemed so beautiful, Nadia had to run away. In November 1989, Nadia emigrated to the United States, then to Canada, then returned to the United States and settled in Oklahoma. She has not spoken openly about her illegal emigration or why she fled... Maybe because of the political system at the time or because she felt pressure on her and just wanted to be free.

Only a few weeks before the outbreak of the 1989 Revolution, Nicolae Ceausescu and the communist authorities were informed about Nadia's disappearance.

She said back in 2012 that "in 1989 it was time to leave. The decision was difficult because it affected my family. I had little time to think, but honestly, I followed my intuition. Someone else came up with the idea, I just agreed, I got to the border, I ran through a no-go zone, and after I got to Hungary, I crossed the border into Austria. It was dangerous, but I had no choice... I couldn't tell them. I left with only the clothes I was wearing that day. I only got in touch with my family after the Revolution."

She had to adjust to the new environment, and live without communicating to her family to avoid hurting them after coming in America. Despite the fact that she was in excruciating agony and did not contact them, they suffered, and the police extensively monitored her family and friends.

She made a lot of sacrifices to succeed, to get away from a country that may not have appreciated her enough to America, to the land of all possibilities, where she managed to reinvent herself and build a career. What I appreciate about her is that she never forgot her origins, she never forgot where she came from, and she never forgot who she really is. She remained the same amazing and serene person who wrote history, she remained the same person who loved her family and who suffered because she lived important moments in her life without them being with her, and all of this for safety and especially out of love. She remained the same person who chose to love her people and make them proud, because even though many years have passed since she left, she remains an incredible Romanian symbol.

And at the same time, after so many years, the Romanian people love her just as much, and appreciate her even more than they did before, and she has truly remained a role model for the little gymnasts who want to follow her path in this area

of sports and for all the people who understood that patience and determination is the secret if you want to succeed in life. Besides the fact that she is so loved by the little ones, Nadia loved her country just as much, every time she was in the stands for Romania and every time she supported her native country.

Her story impressed me a lot and made me think that the impossible is possible and that I do not have to fight alone, because there are always people around you who want the best for you as your parents who are thinking of you from a very big distance, as my friend who guided me in Romania, as the people from the organization and many other people out there..."

Because of Nadia's experience, I've now realized what I need to do... I have understood how important it is that when you are running from your memories or fleeing your country you must not forget who you really are, you must not forget your origins, on the contrary, you have to stay as you were, because if you are honest with yourself and the world around you, you will be successful, no matter how difficult it may seem.

It made me understand that even if I am an immigrant, I must be happy and live my life to the fullest, as well as help people in my situation because if Nadia could do it a long time ago, I can do it now, when I have all the support I need. So, I'll propose to those in the organization that I join their programme as a volunteer and travel to the other four countries where more and more emigrants have arrived, because I want to tell them my story, how I got somewhere far away from the country I've lived all my life and away from my family that I may soon find, how I stayed in Romania for one year and progressed day by day, how I integrated into a new society, and how after hearing the incredible and mysterious story of Nadia I found a purpose in life in a period that at first seemed to be a nightmare.

The time spent in Romania represented an open gate to a world of possibilities. I got inspired by Romanian hospitality and kindness, tormented history, rich culture, astonishing landscapes, delicious food and amazing traditions.

I know that I have a lot to do, I know what I want.... to find new stories from other personalities to inspire immigrants and the people around me, and yet I've learned that if everything seems like an end it is actually a new beginning and also I still can't realize how much I've changed, how much my life has changed, and yet I'm going to find other interesting stories....

Andra Mihaela Andruță, grade 11 B

## Chapter 2

I took off to Greece. I fell asleep... I kept running and running through a forest. The trees looked like huge claws about to catch me, I was all alone. The feeling of fear, me being out there all alone, helpless, it was something I couldn't stand anymore. In fact, I actually couldn't stand on my feet anymore. I lay on the ground and...

"Maria!" I heard my name somewhere in the distance. I opened my eyes. The stewardess tells me that I have to leave the plane.

I travelled towards a beautiful forest that I had seen from the plane. From then on, I lived a strange but beautiful story.

I was in a beautiful square close to a river. The place was full of beautiful flowers, trees and paths made of stones. I found a swing hanging from a tree. I walked closely and sat there. For a few minutes, I felt like a normal kid, just swinging under a beautiful tree, with a cool breeze drying my tears, and playing with my hair. "Maria" the voice again. "Who is it?", I whispered. Suddenly, a dog approached me. He also seemed lost and scared, such a lovely little creature in a big unloving world. "Hey little friend, why are you here all by yourself?", I patted his head and he gave me a little kiss. I was smiling after so many hours. "Have you lost your friends little guy?", I asked him and he looked at me with his puppy eyes as if he could understand every single word. "That's okay, I've lost them too", I sighed. "But don't you worry, you can be my new friend now", he barked happily.

The sound of a musical instrument interrupted our conversation. What is that? Where does it come from? Is someone there? So many questions without an answer were swirling in my mind as the music kept getting louder. My little friend had noticed it too, so he stood up and ran to the sound. "Hey! Wait." I followed him.

I didn't run for long until I was found in front of a building, a white building with two floors, it seemed very old. It had a huge door, I tried to enter but it was locked. The music was coming from this place. What is this instrument? And where is my little pal?

"Hello Maria", the voice finally made an appearance, in almost flesh and bones. It was a ghost of a man, a dark-haired man with a moustache. He was dressed as if he was from another century. He was holding something that looked like a guitar, though it wasn't. It was smaller. "Who are you?" I asked him. "I'm Vasilis, Vasilis Tsitsanis" he answered and gave me the warmest smile. He giggled a bit, and started singing. "What is this song? Are you a musician?", "Hmm I was, back when I was alive. Now my house is this building. It is a museum with a long history. It used to be a part of the old Trikala jail building shared with the archaeological site of the

Twin Ottoman Baths." "Wait, wait, and wait" I stumbled, you said... Trikala? You mean, I am in... Greece?" "Ha-ha-ha! Of course, didn't you realize it the moment you saw the bouzouki?" He laughed and started playing that weird guitar. "What is bouzouki?" I asked and the ghost of a man that seemed to be very wise, answered me without a word. He released the small guitar-bouzouki and the music was louder than ever.

Suddenly, the door unlocked and I entered the building. The first floor was full of books, like a forgotten library but the signs of the old jail were still there. I climbed the stairs to the second floor. The vibe there was a bit different as a music studio appeared in front of my eyes. "This is the place where young artists show their talent and explore the creative world of music, and I? I'm always here, giving them my energy, the energy of the Greek folk music, created by people who through pain, made masterpieces that Greek people sing and remember after such a long time. This is rempetiko and bouzouki, the sense of passion with a taste of Greek history.

I felt my heart melting just by listening to his moving words. The fact that he was able to unite the Greeks with his art, this a priceless talent. How I wish I was able to do this myself. To unite people, that have been scattered all over the place, not only for my family, but for every family of immigrants. How nice would that be? Just by listening to the music of your country, you can find your loved ones no matter how far away they are.

My thinking was interrupted by the little dog. He was barking as if he was trying to tell me something, "what is it little friend? Do you want me to follow you?", and that's what I did.

I was following him for ten minutes straight. I didn't care if I was running, if I was barefoot. The only thing that seemed to matter for me that moment was to find out what he wanted to tell me. At the end of the road he led me to a park. I read the sign in front of it: "Milos Matsopoulou". It was a huge park full of green and beautiful plants, the river was passing by and a wooden pond made everything look like it was a place straight out of a fairy-tale. A person that also looked like he was from another century, came by me. He didn't see me?

"HEY! WAIT!" I followed him.

He was dressed as he worked in a mill. I walked through the park. There were so many workers. It was actually an old mill. I certainly wasn't on today's date. An industrial building pioneer since 1884, yes that was the date I had travelled to. The mechanical equipment was quite fascinating. Nobody paid any attention to me. Was I invisible? I heard a group of workers talking: "The flour production is going very well." "I know we'll make history my friend".

They didn't have the time to enjoy their laugh when a flood covered everything. I didn't feel anything, I was just floating waiting for it to be over. I was transferred to the present. Where there were mill machines before, now, there was an open air cinema. And to the building next to it, some kids were rehearsing for their theatre performance at the end of the month. Such a glorious past was continued through the summer and Winter Municipal Cinema and the Centre for



the Expression and Artistic Creation, the Municipal Theatre of Trikala and the Painting Workshop of the Cultural Organization of the Municipality of Trikala. At the same time, the venue is the venue for the most important cultural activities of our city, such as the "Comedy Festival", the theatrical performances, the performances by the Municipal Theatre of Trikala with "natural" backdrop, the historical monument itself, music concerts of professional and student formations, and presentations and many other activities. How I wish I had the chance to participate in one of these theatre acts.

The little dog barked again as if he was telling me to go for it. To be part of an artistic feature. Maybe by this I could spread awareness for other people that feel so lonely, exactly like me. I ran to the door but the dog went the other way. He jumped into the river! "Wait noooo!" I shouted and tried to catch him. I was in a boat paddling in the river. It is the Lethaios River. I remembered the sign.

Our boat ride lasted as long as a midday nap, and that is what I did. I woke up to see a big statue of an old man with a snake wrapped on his sceptre, his hand was... waving at me? That couldn't be possible. He is a statue. I came to the shore and climbed to the pond where I saw him. I was standing in front of him. He was standing still and lifeless, was I delusional? I sat beside the statue and sighed again.

"You are not delusional little Maria", the statue laughed. Yes, he was actually moving and talking to me.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Asclepius, the first doctor of history, I lived in ancient Trikala, Trikki". Come, you can climb on my shoulders to see the view. And so I did. "You see over there, that was the ancient city. The ancient city of Trikke, an important city of the Thessalian quadrat of Estiaotida, stretched between the river Lethaios, which still crosses today's modern city, and on the hill "Kastro", where the ancient acropolis was probably located". I was fascinated, such history. I was reminded of the history of my country.

Suddenly, I felt my feet lighter. They weren't on the shoulders of the statue anymore. I was flying. The sensation was unbelievable. I felt like a bird, free. I was able to make my own moves and go wherever I wanted without worrying about borders and police men. In the sky there is no fear of anything. Actual freedom.

I saw the houses from above, the beautiful meadows, people living their lives, laughing, talking, and having their friends and family all together. I had tears fall down my eyes and someone thought it was raining. I laughed instantly. Sometimes people can be so naive.

As I was traveling between the clouds I saw some big rocks rising above. They had a weird shape.

"This is Meteora" an eagle that was passing by saw my confused face and explained to me.

"The first ones who arrived in the area to use the cliffs of Meteora for spiritual reasons were Orthodox Christian hermit-monks. They came to this place between the 9th and the 10th century to find peace and to isolate themselves in the many

caves found scattered among the cliffs. For centuries those monks lived in complete isolation. Exposed to weather elements and to all sorts of dangers they relied heavily on the help of the locals. They will regularly receive donations of food, water, clothing, wood, essential things to allow them to survive. The locals saw them as holy men who came to dwell in the area, worthy of their support. You should go to see the view."

"Thank you, so much!"

And so I did. I landed on the highest cliff. I was out of breath, but not due to the hour of flying, it was truly the view. My eyesight went from below, from the houses, from the trees, up to the sky, the clouds and finally the sun. I felt relieved, but I knew, this was just the beginning of my adventure. I heard that Italy is a beautiful country. So...



### Chapter 3

It was a long to get to Taranto, in South Italy. I left the Greece. First of all I flew to Rome where I spent two days. I had a wonderful time there. I visited the Coliseum that was built between the 72 and the 80 AD. I heard that people used to fight lions in that place. Today it's one of the most representative symbols of Italy all over the world, but I promise you, visiting it is an absolutely unforgettable experience!

Once, I ordered a carbonara pasta. I was amazed because I've always thought it was made with cream, mushroom and parsley, but the chef got crazy for this request and he told me about the real recipe of carbonara pasta: pasta, eggs, cheese, guanciale (similar to bacon, but not exactly the same!), black pepper. Italian people often argument if onion should be put or not. Through the acknowledgement of this recipe, I could understand how much, for Italian people, food doesn't only mean physical satisfaction, but it represents a characteristic element on a national, popular and cultural level.

Then, I went to Taranto. The transportation to the South of Italy isn't very comfortable, so I had to spend many hours on a bus during the night, but at least it didn't do many stops.

Taranto was beautiful: the city has two seas and fishing is one of its most important economic activities. In Taranto, I ate a lot of mussels, cooked in oven with rice and potatoes. I made friends with local people and once I went on a boat and practiced fishing: the food we had all together that day, taken and cooked with our own hands, was one of the best I've ever eaten.

The two seas are connected by the swinging bridge, the only bridge in the world that opens horizontally. The city was built on a Greek settlement, so I could see ancient rests at the National Archaeological Museum. I also visited its cathedral, built during the thirteenth century over an earliest orthodox church from the fourth century. Chapels were built during the seventeenth century, so the Cathedral was so interesting to me because it contained many years of history and culture.

At first I was hosted by some friends, but I didn't want to bother them and I didn't know where to live, so I moved to Grottaglie, near Taranto, where I visited a centre for migrants. I stayed there for a week: I wasn't sure I wanted to be there at the beginning because I was afraid I couldn't make friends with anyone, but then I realized that there were so many people like me and we shared confidences and remember beautiful times we had in our native countries. Grottaglie is famous for its production of local ceramics, so, together with the operators of the association, we modelled and painted some clay: it was fun, but also hard! I didn't think that it needs so many steps to produce even the smallest ceramic piece. The typical symbol of



Grottaglie is called *pumo*. It's a sculpture with the shape of a flower that people put in their houses or on their gates to attract good luck. I love them.

The volunteers noticed my wish for working with people and helping them, so they offered me to stay and work with them. I thought about it and I decided I wanted to stay because I fell in love with this country

and its people.

Everything was wonderful here but I was going to leave the country. It was a wish for me to find my place in the world.

Alice Villano Petrosino

## Chapter 4

### *Home is not a Place, but a Person*

It was obvious that I had arrived at Malaga airport as soon as I touched down. The weather was warm, quite the truth. I was a bit lost, which people seemed to notice, as a girl came up to me to ask if I was okay. I explained my situation to her, and she told me to wait a moment. She came back after a few minutes with a smile from ear to ear and she told me that she had talked to her mother and that she had agreed to take me in until I found a place for me to stay.



On the way to her house, she told me a little about herself. She told me that she was an only child and that her father moved to another country years ago because of her job.

She only saw him a few days a year and missed him terribly. She also told me about the place where she lived. It was a town in Córdoba, where she had lived her entire life.

She told me about the patios full of flowers, the churches full of statues representing the life of God, about the emblematic places and the places where she went with her friends. She seemed to me a very curious girl, not about me but about everything that surrounded her. She was very observant and she always had a gleam of hope in her eyes when she talked about anything. From that car trip, I knew that we would be very good friends with her and that it would not be easy to forget her.

When we arrived in Priego, I did not stop looking out the window as I listened to Sandra naming each place for which we were going through. He lived on a very large street with many bars, and told me that the name of this was because years ago it was a river for her and that she was now under the street. In the background there was a kind of square, with a very large source with statues, a children's park on the left and a small walk with very beautiful trees on the right.

As we unpacked our things, she kept telling me about the city and about her friends.

Also, she told me about her school and what she was studying. She was in the first year of science in a high school that was almost on the outskirts of the city. She told me that every morning she would meet her friends and they would walk to school together while they talked about the work, homework or exams they had that day. She reminded me of home, when I used to do the same thing with my friends.

The next day she didn't have classes, so she suggested a tour of the entire city. The truth is that, after everything she had told me, I wanted to see all the places, so I enthusiastically agreed. We set off and the first place she showed me was 'La Fuente del Rey'. She told me a bit about the fountain, which had 139 spouts of water. She also told me that the statue was a representation of Neptune and Amphitheater. In addition, she told me that the small fountain behind it was 'La Fuente de la Salud', named after the carving of the Virgen de la Salud on it.

Then we went up some stairs that were on the side and we reached a kind of roundabout with a palm tree in the middle. She told me that this place was 'El Palenque' and that it was where the city's library was located. Then we continue down the street until we reach a square with a fountain in the middle. You can see that the fountains here are very famous, because there are fountains everywhere. She told me that this was 'El paseillo', the main square of the city. The town hall was located there and it was the meeting point for everyone. We continue a little further forward and we find her street again, where she explained to me that almost all the young people met there on the weekend, because where the most visited nightclubs and bars are located. We continue along a street full of shops, each one different, with an ice cream parlor at the back where we buy some ice cream to cool off. We found another square, in which there was another fountain in the middle. Fonts suck! She told me they called her 'Corazon de Jesus' or 'Llano'. She told me her anecdotes, because she used to play there with her friends when she was little.

We keep walking while I told me about all the sites we saw. Until we finally arrived at 'La Villa'. The most beautiful place without a doubt of the entire city. Everyone was full of bright and precious colours embodied in the flowers, with that white background making it see even more beautiful. For a moment, he reminded me of the movie 'Mamma Mía'. I do not know why, but I loved it. I was mesmerized.

Then we came to a cliff, which had three benches in the shape of a square. She said that it was 'Los Adarves' that connected with a candy store on one side and with another very nice square on the other side. Obviously, this square had not one fountain, but two.

After a hot morning we arrived at her house, where we had lunch. After resting for a while, we went in the opposite direction from this morning and she showed me the rest of the city. Along the way, we met some of her friends, whom she introduced me to and who accompanied us for the rest of the trip. They asked me some questions about me and then they talked a little about themselves to introduce

themselves and get to know each other better. They were all very friendly and funny. They made me feel at home and I loved the feeling, because I missed it.

We arrived at a very large place and told me it was 'el recinto'. There was a park for children, a Skate park, some gardens and an esplanade below, where he told me that it was filled with fair attractions in September. Then we went up to a larger park, which she said was 'la ciudad de los niños'. We stayed there for the rest of the afternoon, playing and chatting among us.

The truth is that the time I spent there was incredible. I felt very welcomed by everyone, and they made me feel at home. I thought that after having to flee my country, I would never feel this feeling again, but I was wrong. I felt very comfortable with everyone and they didn't judge me for my story, which made me feel very happy.

Also, I tried a lot of Spanish food like 'paella' or 'tortilla de patatas'. I was amused that they fought each other the tortilla was better with onion or without it. I laughed a lot with them and I will miss them very much.

Now, writing this on the way to the airport, I realise that I don't know when the next time will be that I will return to Spain, which makes me a little sad, but I will do my best to be able to visit the boys. The truth is that I hope that the farewell at the airport is not very sad, I would not like to cry, although it will be impossible not to, because I am going to miss you very much.

However, I am excited for my next destination. Portugal awaits me with open arms and I no longer feel so afraid of being alone in a foreign country. Get ready Portugal, because now I'm ready to eat the world.

## Chapter 5

### *A Cosmopolitan Island*

I left Priego de Cordoba very early in the morning by bus to Malaga so that I could fly from there to Lisbon. It was already a long trip and then I had to wait for my connecting flight to Faial Island. I travelled for endless hours and I wondered what my trip to the Azores would be like. It was excruciating, but compensating, nonetheless. As we were approaching Faial and Pico islands, a mountain formed in the clouds. I was able to see the cone of the Pico volcano, the tallest point of Portugal and its only mountain. It was a staggering view.

At last, we arrived at Horta airport. Luckily, the weather was nice and there wasn't much trouble because of the rain. I entered the building and went to get my bags. After that, I picked up a taxi to a Local Accommodation, where I had a reservation. I was surprised to find that the "Horta Airport" was not, at all, in Horta, but in a nearby parish.

Along the way, I had a long talk with the driver. He was very talkative, so I had to keep up. He asked about the reason I had come and what I would do during my stay. I answered saying I was travelling around Europe and wanted to learn more about the city, for I had heard of it many times, from the mouths of some sailors that come and go to my homeland.

I got to learn a bit about the city during the drive itself. I learned that the bay of Horta is considered one of the most beautiful in the world which, after passing by the docks, wasn't too hard to believe. It was, indeed, a beautiful city.

I also learned that it had been a place where, during World War II, both German and British, as well as French and Americans, co-existed in peace, as if there wasn't any war at all. Remembering my home country, I found that hard to believe. I was surprised to learn a situation like that was even possible.

We went on talking, until we finally arrived at the Local Accommodation. It's like a rented house, but only for a few days instead of months. It was way cheaper than going to a hotel, and it is also a very common business in Faial.

After getting to the house, I left my bags there and went to visit the city. The driver was still at the door and asked if I wanted to grab some coffee, and while at it he'd show me the whereabouts.

We went to Peter Café Sport. It was a common hotspot for travellers and tourists to hang out. From there we could see the marina, and I noticed there were a lot of flags that weren't neither Portuguese nor Azorean. There were Greek, German, Italian, French, Belgian, Spanish, Swede and even a Romanian flag. I was



very surprised, and asked the driver why there were so many different flags. He answered that Horta is a safe harbour for travellers and sailors who cross the Atlantic.

At the suggestion of my new friend, I ordered a loaf of “Massa Sovada” and a Kima (an Azorean drink, very similar to Fanta, but, in my opinion, better). I found out that “Massa Sovada” is very similar to bread, but sweeter and with a different taste. I also learned that Azorean people consume it a lot, often replacing bread during meals (Another thing, Azoreans love to eat bread during a meal).

While eating, I asked my friend what other foods and dishes were common in the Azores, specifically in Faial. He told me the traditional gastronomy included Octopus stewed in wine, black pudding or pork sausage with orange, fish stew and “Sopas de Espírito Santo” (Literally “Holy Spirit Soup”. It’s a soup made with bread soaked in the water used to cook the meat, which is eaten with the soup and vegetables. It is often also eaten with “Massa Sovada”.), although these are found in virtually all the islands. In terms of traditional sweets, he introduced me to the “Fofas” (Literally “fluffies”) of Faial, a sweet regularly baked during Carnival, made with a paste aromatized with fennel seeds and filled with lemon or vanilla cream. Even though these all seemed delicious, we had just eaten, so we left.

After our coffee break, we went to the Scrimshaw Museum. Scrimshaw is the engraving of art, drawn or painted, on a Sperm Whale’s bones or teeth. It had many different kinds of pictures, almost all of them sea related. Later that day I also got the opportunity to go whale watching. I saw some sperm whales, which have become kind of an Azorean symbol. Fun fact: until the 1970s, sperm whales were hunted for oils and other substances. The whale hunting industry was greatly improved in the 19th century by the American Dabney family, who helped the locals during a food crisis and boosted the economy significantly. I finally had the opportunity to visit the whale factory, in the bay of Porto Pim. Not only does it have a staggering view, but it also has this very interesting story.

During the next few days, I visited some of the island’s points of interest. I visited the beautiful marina of Horta, filled with “Good Luck Paintings”, made by sailors who come by to give them luck in the sea. It is like an unwritten rule: if you dock in the marina, you have to paint something, anything.

However, it isn’t only in the food nor the museums that Faial stands out. It has lots of natural wonders, from the Graben of Pedro Miguel to the Caldera of Faial, the Mound of Castelo Branco, the Mount of “Guia”, the “Espalamaca” and, finally, the stunning view to the Pico Mountain over the canal, definitely one of best views in the whole island. But what impressed me the most was the Capelinhos Volcano, one of the few volcanoes still active in the entire archipelago. Little did I know the history behind this amazing place. I read that Faial Island was greatly affected by the Capelinhos Volcano in 1957 and 1958, when lots of families lost everything. Luckily through the Azorean Refugee Act, spearheaded by members of the Portuguese diaspora in New England and the Massachusetts Senator, John F. Kennedy, thousands of Azoreans immigrated to

the United States and had the chance to start all over again. This feeling of being a refugee seeking a better life in a different country is still present among the older generations and I believe that it is one of the reasons why people in Faial welcome immigrants so well, making them feel as if they were at home. Once I went to the Secondary school and I could see teenagers from several countries around the world, namely, from China, Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Cape Verde and Brazil. I had never imagined that such a small island could join so many people from different places. I learned most of these families had come for professional reasons, but others wanted to raise their children in a quiet place, far from the crowded cities. As for me, being a refugee, I really felt that this could be my home as I could be free, live within my beliefs and feel I was accepted by everyone.

As for festivities, Faial does not stay behind as well. During the year, there are little festivities called the “Impérios”, religious events, alongside the Popular Saints festivities, also celebrated in regions of mainland Portugal and in the Portuguese Diaspora around the world. During the summer, specifically in August, there are a lot of sea related events, mainly the “Semana do Mar”, a week full of regattas, concerts and even a book fair all across Horta.

Faial is a small island and Horta an even smaller city, but they certainly have things to see and learn. I stood there a week and I feel like I haven’t learnt a bit of the things there are yet to learn! It is such an interesting island and a beautiful city, not to mention the nice people. I hope to go back there, but I still have to continue my journey across Europe.

*Dear friends,*

*What can you tell us about the places you have visited? Maria will be very glad to know the details.*





## **Literature – a Framework for Social and Emotional Learning**

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