

Doina's Journey

Learn English with Short
Stories

By Nicoleta Dvornicov

Volume I: Moldova

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To my nieces and nephews.

Preface

Doina's Journey is an independent book project designed for people who are learning English. The purpose of this book is to support the transition from learning separate words to using them in sentences. It allows the reader to learn new vocabulary contextually, and to read texts that deal with everyday life.

Each volume consists of 10 short stories, and each story is followed by a vocabulary section (which gives the contextual meaning of the words), five reading comprehension questions, and a writing activity.

Do you want to improve your English level? Are you willing to learn new vocabulary? Do you want to explore other cultures?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then I invite you to join Doina, a girl from Moldova, on her journey to discover the world, while developing your English skills!

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1. My family and I

My name is Doina, but my parents call me “Doinița.” I am from the culturally rich country of Moldova, located between Ukraine and Romania. My parents and I live in a small village, where people are hospitable, friendly and thoughtful. Let me tell you more about my family and my country!

My mother works at a kindergarten in our village. Every workday she wakes up at 6 a.m., she eats breakfast with my father, and at 6:45 a.m. she leaves the house. Currently, my father is not employed, but he used to work as a teacher in a school for children with special needs. Unfortunately, the school was closed down last May. It is quite difficult to find a



new job in our village, but my father always keeps himself busy with work. He has a lot of responsibilities around the house, particularly in the garden. My parents grow tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, beans, potatoes, onion, and garlic. We also have cherry trees, apple trees, peach trees, pear trees, walnut trees and a vineyard. As you can imagine, such a rich garden requires a lot of work!

My two older brothers do not live in Moldova anymore. Alexander moved to Italy when I was fifteen years old, and Dimitri to Great Britain one year later. Alexander is married and has two beautiful daughters, and Dimitri is studying to become a lawyer. My older brothers loved working in the garden, especially participating in the winemaking process. It was their favorite fall activity!

Although my brothers are far away from us,
they come back for a few weeks every summer...to
our welcoming country with delicious food,
traditional music, picturesque sights, and hard-
working people.

Would you like to visit Moldova?

Vocabulary

Hospitable- welcoming to visitors or guests

Friendly- kind, nice

Thoughtful- showing consideration and care for the needs of others

To let- to allow, to give permission

A.M. - in the morning

To be employed- to have a job, to work for someone

Unfortunately- unluckily

To close something down- to cease to exist, to not function any more

To keep oneself busy- to have many things to do or to think about, with the connotation of filling up time

Vineyard- land where grapevines grow

To require- to ask for, to demand

Lawyer- a person who practices law

Fall- autumn

Far away- distant in space and/or time

Sights- places of interest, something that is worth visiting/seeing

Questions

1. Where is Moldova located?

2. Where does Doinița's mother work?

3. What are the names of Doinița's brothers?

4. What does Dimitri want to become?

5. When do Doinița's brothers come back to Moldova?

2. My Free Time

It is a warm summer afternoon. The sun is shining, the birds are chirping, and I am starting to eat a delicious chocolate ice-cream cone as I exit a small store by my house, which sells everything my family and I need. Some would say that I am a loyal customer because I visit it at least seven times a week, but I prefer to call myself “an old friend” of the store. This store has been selling me candy, cakes, potato chips, ice-cream cones, and so many more goodies since I was five years old. Even now, when I am already seventeen years old, I still choose to shop here.

On such warm days I prefer to be by the lake, swim with my friends or lie on a blanket and look at the clouds. My best friends, Michael and Diana, and I choose to be in nature as much as

possible. Our favorite activities include fishing, picking mushrooms, planting flowers or vegetables in the garden, picking fruits from the tree, walking



in the forest, and riding our bikes through the village. Even when we

have too much homework to do, we still go outside, sit on a blanket and study together.

Michael is very talented: he plays the piano and the guitar. He also sings beautifully. Diana takes drawing and dancing classes twice a week. Both of them participate annually at the local festivals organized in our village. I am not as talented as they are, but I like to play soccer, read astronomy and language books, help my parents with the daily chores, play with our dog, and write

in my journal. I am lucky to have such friends, and I feel happy every time we spend time together.

Who are your best friends? What do you like to do in your free time?

Vocabulary

Chirp- the sound made by birds

To exit- to leave or to go out of a building

Customer- client

Goodies- something delicious to eat, with the connotation of being sweet

Even when- in the case, in the situation

Annually- every year

Soccer- European football

Daily- every day

Chore- a task

Questions

1. How old is Doinița?

2. Who are Doinița's best friends?

3. What does Doinița like to do when it is warm outside?

4. What instruments does Michael play?

5. What lessons does Diana take twice a week?

3. Dreams

In one year, I will graduate from high school. My friends and I often talk about our future plans. The transition from high school to university is terrifying, but I know that it is inevitable. I have mixed feelings about graduation since it involves leaving my home and going to a different city or even to another country.

When I was younger, I wanted to become an astronaut. I used to read astronomy books every



day, gaze at the stars during summer nights, and analyze the constellations. I was fascinated by the universe and its mysteries. However, my interest decreased when I grew older, and, suddenly, I started to spend most of my time learning foreign

languages. I often dream about being able to speak Spanish, German, Italian, and French fluently. I would love to travel to all the countries where these languages are spoken, meet the local people, and learn about their traditions.

My latest dream is to be accepted in the U.S. for my undergraduate studies. I am interested in studying International Education because I want to open an organization that would offer student exchange programs between Moldova and other countries. I became more interested in other cultures thanks to my brother Dimitri. Every time he comes home from the U.K., he tells me interesting stories about the lives of international students whom he met at his university. Directing such an organization would allow me to travel to other countries, discover their cultures and learn new languages. I

strongly believe that through education I can make the world a better place.

My parents are very supportive of me. They constantly reassure me that I can make my dreams come true if I am committed to them. My brothers also say that I can achieve anything I set my mind to. Their encouragement and support make me more confident in my abilities and in my dreams. I am lucky to have such a loving family!

What are your dreams? Where do you see yourself in five years?

Vocabulary

To graduate- to finish a course of study

Terrifying- scary

Inevitable- something that cannot be avoided

Mixed feelings- both positive and negative feelings toward something

To involve- to include

To gaze- to look

To be fascinated- to be captivated

Mystery- secret, something that is unknown

To decrease- to lower

To grow older- to mature

Suddenly- something that happens unexpectedly

Fluently- freely, with ease

U.S.- the United States

Undergraduate studies- first university degree, bachelor's degree

Student exchange programs- programs in which students from one academic institution go to study at a different institution (usually, in another country)

U.K. - the United Kingdom

To direct- to lead, to manage

To allow- to give permission

To believe- to have faith in something

Better- higher or improved quality

Constantly- without interruption

To come true- to become reality

To be committed- to be dedicated

To achieve- to obtain something

To set the mind to- to decide upon something

Questions

1. When will Doinița graduate from high school?

2. What did she want to become when she was younger?

3. What is her dream now?

4. What does she want to study?

5. What type of organization does she want to start?

4. Summer

Summer is my favorite season. School ends on May 31st, and the summer vacation starts on June 1st, when we celebrate Children's Day in Moldova. The summer months are filled with adventures, laughter, and positive thoughts (compared to the stressful days of the school year).

Today is the first day of August. Two months of summer have already passed, and I feel nostalgic. This is my last summer vacation as a high



schooler, which means that I need to make important decisions about my

life during this upcoming school year.

I am sitting on a blue blanket under the biggest walnut tree in our garden. I feel the summer

breeze and I smile, thinking of how much I love the seasons in Moldova. I love summer because it offers me the freedom to play and be outside the entire day. I can explore the forest with Michael and Diana without thinking about homework or other academic duties.

– *Doinița! Come here, there is a surprise waiting for you! I hear Daddy’s voice. Come here!*

– *Just one minute!* What kind of surprise can it be? My birthday is not until next week. Maybe it is an early gift! I fold my blanket, fix my green dress with yellow dots, and start running to the house. I see Mom and Dad sitting on the porch, smiling and waiting to see my reaction.

– *Doinița, the surprise is in your room!*

– *What is it? Tell me!*

– *Go to your room and find out!* I leave my sandals at the door, and run to my room.

– *SURPRISE! Happy early birthday, dear sister!*

My older brothers scream, as I enter the room.

I can't believe that my brothers came home. I have not seen them since last July, and I thought that they would not be able to come this summer because of the many responsibilities they have. When we talked last week, Alexander said that he had two important projects to finish and Dimitri mentioned that his summer courses would last until mid-August. Apparently, they planned this surprise trip together with my parents.

My parents, my brothers and I are having lunch in the gazebo in our garden. We are drinking cold water from the spring, eating fried fish with

cooked vegetables, and listening to the radio, which is playing a calm melody. What a perfect summer afternoon!

What is your favorite season? What do you like to do during that time?

Vocabulary

To be filled- to be full

Laughter- the action of laughing

Nostalgic- a feeling characterized by missing a period from the past

High schooler- a student who attends high school

Upcoming- future, next, approaching

Breeze- a current of air, wind

Duty- responsibility

To fold- to bring into a compact form

Porch- a covered area at the entrance of a house

To find out- to discover

To mention- to make a short comment, to say something briefly

To last- to continue

Gazebo- a small building that is usually placed in a garden

Questions

1. What is Doinița's favorite season?

2. Where is Doinița sitting?

3. Why does Doinița love the summer season?

4. What was the surprise that Doinița found in her room?

5. What are Doinița and her family eating for lunch?

5. At School

– *Good morning, Doinița! It is already 6:30 a.m. It is time to wake up and get ready for school!*

– *Mom, can I just sleep five more minutes?*

– *Yes, but no more than that. You need to make sure that you have enough time to get ready, eat and catch the bus.*

September 1st is the day when all the schools and universities in Moldova start their academic year, celebrating the Day of Knowledge. All the students are dressed in black and white: the girls wear dresses and the boys wear suits. Also, they



bring flowers to their teachers to express gratitude for their hard work and educational guidance.

The school day starts with an assembly, opened by the principal of the school. There are guest speakers from different municipal institutions who come to wish the students a great academic year. Also, the pupils sing songs and recite poems about education. The assembly closes with the school bell, which officially indicates the start of the fall semester.

– Doinița, come eat! The fried eggs and the tea are ready. I am going to work now. As I come out of my room, Mom kisses me on the forehead and gives me a warm hug. Have a great first day of school!

– Thank you! I hope you have a nice day at work! I kiss her on the cheek and give her a big hug. I love you!

Well, this is the beginning of my last year of high school. I will make sure that it is an excellent one! In general, when does school start in your country?

Vocabulary

To get ready- to get prepared

To make sure- to check, to verify, to confirm

Enough- sufficient

Suit- a professional outfit

Gratitude- appreciation, thankfulness

Guidance- advice, direction

Assembly- a group of people that gathers together

Principal- the leading person of an organization,
usually a school

To indicate- to show, to point out

To be ready- to be prepared for something

Forehead- the part of the face above the eyebrows

Questions

1. At what time does Doinița need to wake up for school?

2. What does she eat for breakfast?

3. When is the Day of Knowledge celebrated in Moldova?

4. Who opens the assembly on the first day of school?

5. What indicates the start of the academic year?

6. The Harvest Festival

I breathe in the fresh air of a cold fall

afternoon. I look around me, and I notice that the



trees are no longer green. The leaves have changed their color to yellow, orange, and red. The hills that surround my village look as if they were painted

by a great artist.

The streets are filled with people who dance, socialize, eat traditional food, and drink wine. It is the harvest festival! People from our village and the neighboring ones have come together to display the best products from their own gardens, to talk to potential customers, and to just have a great time.

I hear how people talk, laugh, and sing.

Everyone seems to be enjoying the festival and the good music. My friend Michael is now performing

a song that he wrote about our village. He sings about the fertility of the soil, the beauty of the forest, and the daily blessings that make our lives in the countryside meaningful. He has been participating in the annual harvest festival since the age of six. Everyone admires his talent!

As I listen to Michael's song, I feel someone's hand touching my shoulder.

– Doinița, come dance with us! Diana tells me. It is so much fun!

By the time I get the chance to respond, I realize that I am already in a big circle with all our friends. We are holding hands and dancing joyfully to Michael's song. I have not danced with so much fervor since last year's festival!

Do you like to dance?

Vocabulary

To breathe in- to smell, to feel

To notice- to observe

To surround- to be all around

To socialize- to communicate/interact with other people

Harvest- the period or the process of collecting crops

To come together- to meet in one place

To display- to show

To perform- to present to an audience

Meaningful- having purpose

To admire- to regard with respect

Chance- opportunity

To realize- to understand, to become aware

Joyfully- cheerfully

Fervor- enthusiasm, passion, dedication

Questions

1. What change did Doinița notice?

2. Who is displaying their products at the festival?

3. What is Michael's song about?

4. Who admires Michael's talent?

5. Who invites Doinița to dance?

7. Exams

The school semester is almost over, which means that the exam period has just started. This week, I have three semester tests for the following subjects: Mathematics, Chemistry, and Romanian. I also need to prepare a presentation on World War II for my World History class, write an essay regarding my winter plans for my English class, and make a report on the Ukrainian conflict for my Ethics class. Additionally, I have daily homework for each of the thirteen classes that I am enrolled in this semester.

Michael, Diana and I agreed yesterday to meet every day this week to study together for our exams. We will study at my house on Monday and Tuesday, at Michael's house on Wednesday and Thursday and on Friday we will celebrate the end of

the exam period at Diana's house. Her parents will organize an end-of-semester party for us. We are allowed to invite as many guests as we want. Until then, however, we need to focus solely on passing the exams!

I must admit that this week makes me feel stressed, anxious and worried. Even worse, I cannot sleep well at night because I am thinking about the material that I am learning for the tests. Even though I am extremely tired, I cannot stop my brain from analyzing formulas, facts, and other significant information. My parents know that I have trouble sleeping, and they always prepare for me a cup of herbal tea an hour before I go to bed. Diana



recommends that I listen to calming music and think of something nice when I

can't sleep. Unfortunately, none of these methods helps me fall asleep. I hope one day I will overcome this sleeping problem that appears only during the exam period.

Oh, it is already late! I'd better go to bed and try to relax. How do you manage stressful situations?

Vocabulary

To be over- to end

Regarding- about

To be enrolled in- to be registered

To agree- to have the same opinion

Party- celebration

To be allowed- to be permitted

Guest- an invited visitor

To focus- to concentrate

Solely- only

Stressed- being subject to pressure

Anxious- feeling nervous about something

Worried- being preoccupied by something

Herbal- containing herbs

Unfortunately- sadly

To appear- to become visible

Questions

1. How many semester tests does Doinița have?

2. In how many classes is she enrolled this semester?

3. Where will the three friends meet this week?

4. Who will organize a party for them?

5. What problem does Doinița have?

8. Winter Vacation

Today is the first day of the winter vacation, and I finally slept well. It feels nice to rest after four months of intensive school work. I get out of bed and look through the window. Guess what? It snowed all night and now the hills are covered in white. My village seems to be a part of a fairy tale!

Winter is Mom's favorite season. When my brothers and I were young, my parents would wake us up and invite us to play outside. We were happy



and enjoyed the magic of the winter season. It was a family tradition to make a snowman, snow angels, and to fight with snowballs on the first day of

snow. The tradition ended when my brothers moved to different countries...

I hear someone knocking on our front door.

– *Good morning. May we please speak with Doina?*

– *Good morning, Diana and Michael. Of course.*

Please come in. Would you like to drink hot tea?

Mom asks.

I run to the door and I see my friends wearing warm coats, wool gloves, scarfs and hats. They are prepared to battle with the cold weather, more precisely, with the minus 8 degrees Celsius.

– *What are you doing here so early? It's just 8 a.m!*

I ask them.

– *Let's play outside! We worked so hard this past semester, and it is time to have some fun!* Diana tells me.

– *Mom, Daddy, come with us! You love winter and the cold weather! We can all go in the yard and build a snowman.* My parents start smiling. I can see the spark and excitement in their eyes.

– *The tradition is back!* Mom exclaims.

What family traditions do you have? Which one is your favorite?

Vocabulary

To get out of bed- to leave one's bed, to stand up

Guess what? - an expression used to draw someone's attention and alert them that you are going to tell them something interesting

Fairy tale- a story that contains magical elements

Tradition- custom, ritual, practice

To knock- to cause a short sound, especially on a door

To come in- to enter

To wear- to be dressed in

Wool- a type of yarn or textile fiber that comes from sheep

To battle- to fight, to combat

Precisely- exactly

Early- happening before the set time

To have fun- to have a good time, to enjoy the time

Spark- a light in the eyes

Excitement- enthusiasm

Questions

1. What was Doinița's family tradition?

2. Why did the tradition stop?

3. Who came to see Doinița at 8 a.m.?

4. What did Doinița's mother offer as a drink?

5. Will Doinița's parents go out to play in the snow?

9. Spring

I noticed today, in the garden, that the first snowdrop appeared. I admire this flower for its endurance and strength. Although the snowdrop seems so fragile, it is the first plant to bloom. It resists the harsh winter weather, and shows that appearances can be misleading.

After such a long winter, the coming of spring brings hope and positive energy. I can't wait



for the green grass to appear, for more plants to bloom, and for the sun to shine every day.

My favorite spring activity is to go into the forests with my friends and pick flowers. We spend hours walking through the woods, talking about our

dreams and admiring the beauty of nature. I love the Moldavian woods!

Spring brings beautiful holidays in Moldova. For example, March 1st is the celebration of the coming of spring and we give each other a *Mărțișor*, a talisman consisting of a white and a red string that people wear on their clothes during the month of March. Also, on March 8th, we celebrate Women's Day, focusing on the special role that mothers play in our lives. In my opinion, the entire spring season seems to be a celebration of life.

Looking at this snowdrop, I realize that I am graduating in a couple of months, and I will, most likely, move to a different city in August. I am excited to take a new step in my life, to have life-

changing adventures, to meet new people, and to
develop my professional skills.

What is your next step in life? Do you like
changes or are you afraid of them?

Vocabulary

Snowdrop- a plant that is thought to be the first to bloom during late winter/early spring

Endurance- the capacity to resist and overcome difficult circumstances

Although- even though, in spite of the fact

Fragile- delicate, easily broken

To bloom- to be in flower

To resist- to withstand

Harsh- severe

Appearance- the way someone or something looks

Misleading- giving the wrong impression

To shine- to spread light

Woods- forest

Talisman- an object thought to bring good luck

String- thread

Opinion- a view about something

Life-changing- having a strong impact on one's life

To develop- to advance

Change- transformation

Questions

1. What did Doinița notice in her garden?

2. Why does Doinița admire the snowdrop?

3. What is Doinița's favorite spring activity?

4. What holidays are celebrated in March?

5. When will Doinița have to move to a different city?

10. Accepted!

– *Good morning, Doinița!* I hear Mom’s voice as she opens the curtains in my room. The sun comes through the window and lands on my face.

– *Good morning!* I give Mom a hug.

– *Good luck with your exam, today! I know you will do well! I brought you a bouquet of daisies.* She tells me as she leaves my room.

Today, on the 2nd of April, I have a simulation exam, which prepares me for the



Baccalaureate exams that each graduating student has to take every June. Honestly, my classmates and I are stressed. If a student doesn’t pass the Baccalaureate, then she cannot start the university studies. Such a

comprehensive exam puts more pressure on us than it stimulates our interest in learning. I believe that an important change must occur in our educational system for it to develop the desire of obtaining new knowledge instead of focusing on receiving good grades.

– *Hmm...who is sending messages at 7 a.m.?* I feel my phone vibrating on my bedside table.

*“Dear Doina Popa,
Congratulations! It is my great pleasure to inform you that after careful review of your application, we are happy to offer you admission and a 100% scholarship. We are excited to welcome you as an international student in August.”*

– *I can't believe what I am reading! I am going to study in the USA!!!*

Vocabulary

Curtain- a piece of material that covers the windows

To land- to come down and rest on something

Simulation- imitation

Honestly- sincerely

Comprehensive- including all elements

To stimulate- to encourage, to promote

To occur- to happen, to take place

Instead of- in place of, as a substitute

Review- evaluation

Admission- entry, entrance

Scholarship- a sum of money given to support a student's education

To welcome- to greet in a friendly manner

Questions

1. What day is today?

2. What kind of exam does Doinița have today?

3. What is the Baccalaureate exam?

4. At what time did Doinița receive a message?

5. Where will she go to study in August?

TO BE CONTINUED

Do you want to join Doinița on her journey to the U.S.? Are you interested in discovering her adventures as she starts a new stage in her life? Would you like to learn, together with her, important lessons on travelling, living in a different country, making new friends, and starting a professional life? If you answered “yes,” then you can follow Doinița’s story in the upcoming volumes!

