

# DŽĪVĒ ŠEIT

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## INTRODUCTION

Dzīve Šeit means Life in here in Latvian.

Before coming to live in Riga, the capital of Latvia for a year, I had no idea how that life could be.

Words are not enough to describe and capture this year. However, the words and expressions that I have learned in Latvian language throughout these months, transmit through specific places, moments and people, fragments of the wealth experienced during this life's adventure.

Dzīve Šeit, is a compilation of stories based on my memories. It is an absolutely subjective literary experience, full of judgments and emotions, and that is precisely why I am convinced that it attends to the universal laws of what it means to be a human, and to live outside of our comfort zone long enough for a place that started feeling so different from what we know, to end up becoming a new home.

I came to this country looking for a purpose and a sense; and it wasn't until I forgot about the search and immersed myself into the infinite possibilities of the present moment, that I was able to re encounter my passion: stories.

Thanks, Latvia.

## MELNS UN BALTS

Kafija ar pienu, katru rītu

Rupmaize no centrala tirgus

Black and white

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Black and white, is how we tend to track life

The good and the bad

“Could have been better”, we say to others

“It can always get worse”, we tell to ourselves

But why? Where is this black and white?

The black balsam, with vanilla ice cream

- Garšigi

The contrast between my dirty boots and the snow on the ground

- Forši

The extra hot and the extra cold, and all the time spent soothing  
them into one another

- Sūds

Putting layers on, taking them off, putting them on, taking them off...

- Blyad

The frozen sea. The burning tea?

The dark brief days, and the sunny endless nights,

Slow motion and the fast free fall,

Destructive storms during the warmest swim,

And dark bruises over non tanned skin,

The warmth of your neck

and the cold of my hands

To be sarcastic, upset, cranky and moody,  
To be silly, loving, and then spend all night shaking your booty.

Next morning, white pills for intense headache

Disturbing memories of the last pint of Brenguļu tumšais beer

The beauty of the extreme, of the opposite,  
of the contradiction, of the impossible.

The beauty of feeling duality on every step,  
of thinking fast, laughing loud, sleeping lots.

The beauty of extra messy hair.  
Passage of time,  
Creation with purpose,  
sense of oneself,  
an endless discovery for one entire lap around the sun  
To surpass our own limits and beliefs:  
Swearing, sweating, and crying,

O v e r t h I n k I n g .

But also, the beauty that no matter who is looking,  
Or even if someone is looking at all, still lies in there ...  
In the grey, the quotidian, the almost, the in between.  
The deep beauty of what could have been.  
All of that we didn't do, or we didn't say;  
we didn't finish, or we just didn't care  
The beauty in the barely good enough;  
in arriving five minutes too late,  
In losing things, breaking cups,  
feeling sick, missing friends

To sometimes even, just pretend  
The other three hundred and forty days of this experience,  
that did not contain stories that would possibly,  
anyhow, ever, at all, make it to this book  
because they were just there, days that go by,  
lost memories on a Latvian calendar  
Name days, after name days  
Daudz Laimes Tev!  
Because that is also life,  
Life in here, and everywhere  
- Kā dzīvo šeit?  
- normale

## SUNS

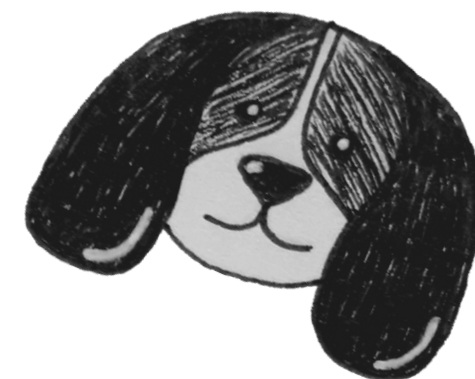


Generally they have four paws, are friendly, understand every language and sometimes, bark. When I see dogs on the street, really high pitched tones come out of my throat and my fingers automatically point at them to assure that everyone else has also acknowledge their presence. Dogs are the magicians of the universe.

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Oppositely to Mexico, stray dogs doesn't teem in Latvia. Weather is of course a determining condition for this fact, since they would not survive on the frozen streets. So they either live in a shelter hoping for an adoptive family, or they already have a human companion, so when you try to make friends with dogs, most times, the human companions are also there, and also, most times they become challenges between you and the four legged potential new friend. I would still try every time, human interaction in between and all; so this allowed me to pet many dogs and interact with many humans. But one particular night this year, it wasn't me who made the first move. I was sitting by the window in KKC, waiting for my smoker friends to come back inside and continue our conversations, when I felt a humid, hairy, warm breath on the back of my left hand.



A small creature with pointy ears and wondering gaze was there. I instantly loved her and slowly we engaged into a spellbound exchange of funny and gruff jiggyery – pokery, which escalated to me not caring about the surroundings and using a very ridiculous voice tone to tell her repeatedly:

- You don't have a nose, you flat, pug, and inexistent-nose.

As for her, took place as biting my hands, soaking them in extra stinky saliva and making pig noises. We were very happy. And after some minutes of this, her human came over to us from the other side of the bar, with a leash on his hands.

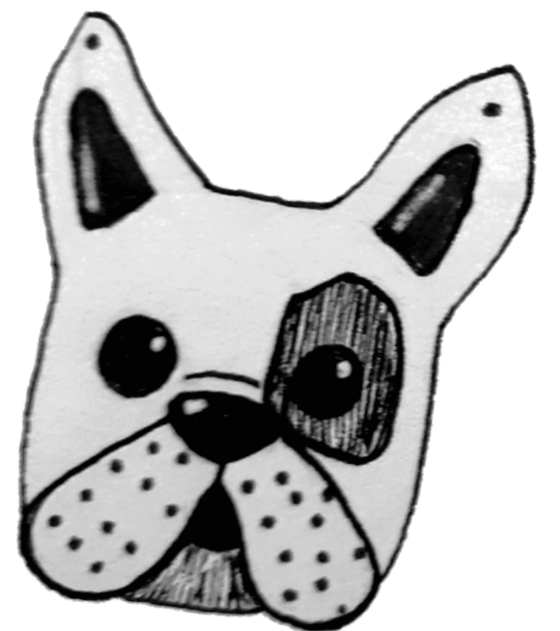
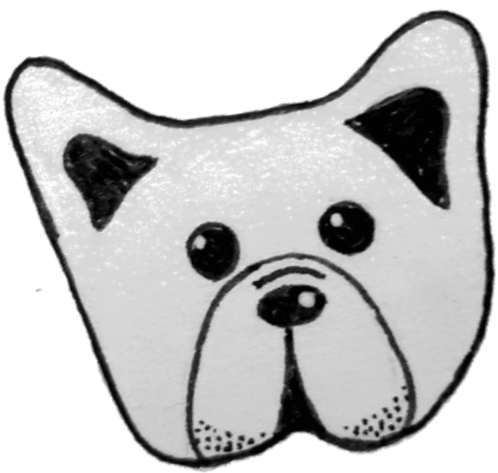
At first I thought she would be in trouble, but instead, she was encouraged to keep chilling with me by this guy, who also decided to tell me the story of the creature, her name: Madame Zuzu.

- She belongs to my sister, who leads a “normal” life - he said, quoting with his+ fingers the normal part.

And then continued with the tale:

- With my sister she has comfort, and safety, good food, a place to nap, routine. But sometimes she is out of town and I take care of Madame Zuzu. She spends some days with me, and I take her everywhere I go.

I nodded in silence, listening, observing, and still playing with the smelly creature.



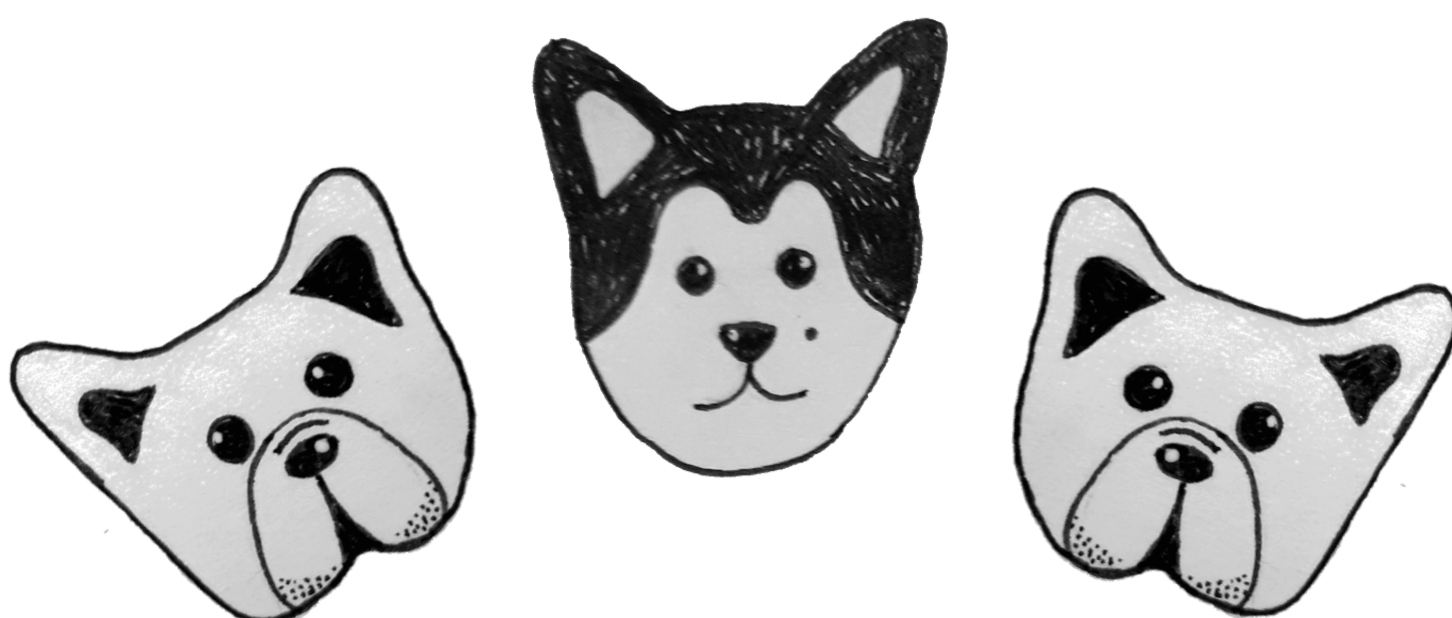


The guy got thoughtful, and continued with his train of reasoning by saying out loud:

- I think she is very lucky, because she gets to have a double life. Two lives that are right for her: the organized one and the adventurous one. She has two gods, and two lives. One for each, and each as good as the other one.

Is not like for humans, you see?, we usually have a god and a devil, and we struggle with our double lives - he finished saying and our eyes met for an instant. It is impossible to know for sure, but I'm quite certain at that moment we both realized about the strength of his idea, and the power of his words, and the irony and magic of this moment. So we got speechless, because that is what happens with words, they tend to be not enough.

I smiled, thanked him and Madame Zuzu, and they went on with their double life, and so I went on with mine.



## DRAUGI


Beings that we find along the way and that add happiness to our experience. Laughter and jokes are the main currency with them. But also unconditional support, respect and patience.

If we have friends, we are amongst the luckiest people in the whole world.

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Nearby the old town of Riga, there is a hard to spot for the first time place. In the corner of Lačpleša and Skola streets. It is a cultural centre and bar, better known as KKC. Maybe this place is the equivalent of millions of others on every corner of the globe. Actually, it has nothing really special inside its walls, but still, it has been since my first week in Riga, and it continues to be par excellence, the friends meeting point.

One day at the end of September, was particularly hard for me. I just recently made the decision to stay away from what at some point appeared to be a great personal connexion, but that indisputably was hurting me.

It was the beginning of the afternoon and I had been crying almost uninterruptedly since the night before. After a considerable amount of mind changes and of using the last reservoirs of inner strength, I decided to attend a party organized by my girlfriends at KKC.



When I arrived to the place, I immediately went to the second floor, trying to hide my toad's face. There were my four most beloved people in this city; all of them knew that I was not feeling very well and welcomed me with jokes and absurd comments that made me feel home right away.

The most incredible part is that all of them, Europeans who have never visited Mexico (yet) were working hard in a massive production of vegan ceviche\* for the party.

There were so many onions being chopped, and their scent was so impregnated on the air, that sooner than later, we all had the eyes on the same terrible condition. It was an amazing party night with toad's eyes.

We will always have the memory of ceviche in the heart.  
\*Sort of mexican dish that I had cooked for them twice, and now they adore.



## KLUSUMS

Condition of the space in which my social clumsiness and my loud voice become very present. It exist in most public spaces in Latvia, and it is deeply disturbed specially when I talk about dogs, absurd jokes, México and or any subject in Spanish.

It is usually followed by a: - Shhhhhhh, you're being too loud, from my companions.

Silence.

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It was 8th of March, and the continuous documentary screening project about international human rights, hosted by KKC every Thursday evening could not leave aside the social date to commemorate: International Woman's Day.

The film selection was sponsored by the Swedish Embassy in Latvia, and it was a documentary based on the life of Astrid Lindgren (author of Pippi Longstocking), that narrates her difficult journey to find personal stability and the projection and distribution of her literary work.

We arrived at the exact time of the screening, and the room was completely full and all seats already occupied, so my friends decided to skip the documentary part of the plan and go straight to the bar; but still, and specially due to the insistence of y gaze in search of a little space in which to fit myself, I was able to spot a little opening in front of the room amongst the crowd, so I decided to sacrifice my personal space and the one from others to also watch the film.

Sshhh...

With effort I was able to finally take off all the layers of clothing, better known as the “winter struggle”, and to sit in an awkward position without stepping on anyone’s feet. The perspective towards the screen was certainly not ideal, almost from a vertical chopped angle that was even making me a bit dizzy; even so I was still happy with the context and to be part of this experience, so it was bearable. But when the narrative of the film had already caught my attention and interest deeply, and I stopped thinking about how numbed my legs would be at the end of the screening, the projection started to fail and get stuck. This happened again, and again for about five minutes, growing exponentially, until at once the screen completely turned off and the room light was turned on. In my perception this meant that it was the end of what the event hosts could offer to us due to technical issues. I was a bit disappointed, but above all I was feeling awkward.

I waited a little longer to see if the problem would be fixed. It could have been only a few minutes, but it felt like days, so eventually confronting the silence barely scratched by some scattered whispers, I got up with difficulty, I picked up my belongings with extreme slowness, sort of secretly hoping that someone would tell me:

- No, wait, now it's going to continue, do not go ...

It did not happen. The silence was deluging, the looks of people were low, their breathing calm and rhythmic throughout the entire movie theater.

Sshhh...

When I was ready to leave, still with a big lack of understanding;

I gave one last chance to the moment, and I stubbornly searched around for a friendly pair of eyes that were observing me and would have the kindness to explain something.

Neither that happened,

so I left the room, with the thought in mind that I was the victim of some hidden camera practical joke. Behind my back, beyond the closing door, the silence was unreal.

I went downstairs to the bar, and shared the anecdote with my friends, still intrigued about the existence of such silence, such collective patience.

Cultural shock.

Hours later at the bar, I stumbled upon who was my improvised seating neighbor at the screening, and I asked her what happened in the end with it.

Clueless, she replied: - Nothing, we waited and when it was fixed, we watched it until the end.

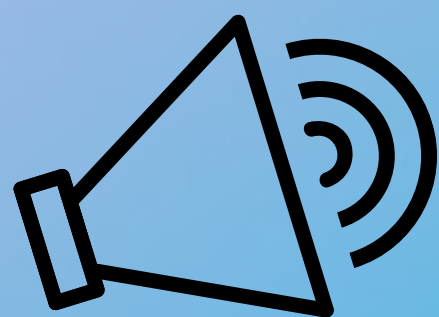
I never got to watch the end of the documentary.

I guess that wait processes, especially those achieved calmly in silence, always bring a reward to our lives.

Sshhh...

Sshhh...

Sshhh...



Sshhh...

Sshhh...

## NEGADIJUMS

The surprising and intriguing ways in which works our ability to retain new words, for example during critical and painful moments. Accident or misfortune.

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I had just bought a bicycle a couple of weeks ago, with the hope that it would become my main means of transportation within Riga. Cold weather was not over, it was not even close to do so, but somehow the excitement of cycling the city, combined with the optimism that brings the temperature increase at each degree during the endless last part of the winter and its consequent transition to spring time, clouded my accurate judgment, in general.

One fine morning of March I decided to cycle across the city, with a time margin of one hour to reach the spot of my Latvian class.

As soon as I left my building I noticed that the cold was abrasive, and a rainfall that felt more like an icy breeze kept the humidity level at high percentages. Something at the back of my thoughts, told itself that probably biking today was not the best idea. Despite this, I rode on it. And of course that the weather, the road and the universe did not take long to prove to me that my first intuition about cycling that morning was correct. In a flash the rhythm of everything which was taking place in my world stopped on its tracks. It took me a couple of seconds to understand that what was throbbing now, was my face, which stood in direct contact with the pavement.



I waited, with the taste of blood in my mouth and the still not localized pain waiting to be revealed as soon as I would stand up. Somehow I felt that if I did not move, I would not confront reality, that someone else would do it for me, eventually. But that doesn't happen in real life.

Reality awaits.

I walked back to my office, because it was nearby, because the bike was not in perfect condition and especially because I had an irrational fear from it at that time.

Once there, my coordinator Līga, got consecutively surprised, worried and entertained with my recent lost battle against gravity. And once she was convinced that going to the hospital was not necessary, she told me in a very melodic tone (which honors the phonetics of Latvian language) and with a vague smile (which honors the Latvian culture):

- Negadijums

Since then, at least once a month I have seen a cyclist lose the battle against gravity in the exact same point of the city and directly face the pavement. I always wonder if may be it also happened to them because they needed to land back into their reality and gain trust on their own ability to overcome adversity; or if it's just a lousy road

for cyclists. Honestly

I believe more in the first option.





## LAIKS

Time, a frequent and interesting topic of debate.

One of the most common tools of auto measurement and self- activity tracking. By inexplicable rule, it flies when we are happy and it slowly drags like a snail when we are tired, fed up or mad at something.

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Liene is one of the most smiley people I have ever met. She speaks calmly and looks at you in the eye with attention and kindness. One night of July, in the middle of this deep and brief darkness that distinguishes the summer nights in this part of the world, she talked to me about time.

We were taking a break from a kayak tour of more than three hours along the veins of the heart of Riga (the Daugava River and the city canal). After a sigh, Liene thought aloud the mathematics of her time: the hours that vanish working, sleeping, cooking, cleaning; basically completing basic tasks and responsibilities.

Of course there is a great importance and value in enjoying all of those hours, and I know that Liene has it very clear, but still she speaks to me about a simple subtraction where the result is a few remaining hours every day, every week, every month, every year.

Hours that feel insufficient to encompass all that  
experience that she would like to  
accumulate in life.

While I listen to her I realize  
that this very moment passes by  
like a plasma through my emotions, unstoppable,  
but leaving a mark.

We agree that this feeling is stronger when we travel, but  
that in the daily life routine we easily forget about the  
warmness that grants the simple act of being. It is sad,  
because even the most humdrum of lives  
has a limited time, like travels, although in its case  
we don't know the end date.

Sometimes conversations end like this:

with a smile and a silence  
full of introspection.

My own silent calculation  
of theoretical left hours


to enjoy in life,  
feels very raw

and the moment then,

somehow stretches up to the day,  
along the infinite recalls of memory.

We got back to the kayaks,  
to finish paddling that tour that gave me the chance to  
understand the city in a very different way while traveling  
through its water sheds.

And laiks like the Daugava River,  
followed its unstoppable course.

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