This story just as well begins like that, with the one big difference that it is not a fairytale but a true story.

Once upon a time there was a little boy, about six years old. He lived on a big island, far away from Austria, in an area in which it is always warm. Well, every now and again it rains and sometimes a big storm comes up, but apart from that the sun shines most of the time. The little boy had six siblings: Five brothers and one sister.

Together with their parents they lived in a small village that had a market, an administrative building and a school. His brothers had left home long ago. They worked in different professions in the island’s biggest city. Only he
and his sister were still at home. Let us call my little friend Francis. He was a very blithe child, but he saw himself confronted with one problem: His parents were poor and times were difficult. They could not afford to send both children to school and so the choice was made that Francis should stay at home to tend the goats.

Francis however was not the least bit impressed with that. He wanted to learn how to read and write very badly. Sometimes he would secretly sneak to school and peak through the window into the only classroom that there was, longingly watching the other children participating in their lessons. His little sister too was among the pupils, neatly dressed in her school uniform, following the teacher’s explanations with her eyes all lit up.

Suddenly Francis had an idea: Weren’t he and his sister often mistaken for one another? Yes, it was true, when they were both roaming around in shorts one really could not be sure who was the girl and who the boy. In that case - why not dress up as a girl in order to be allowed to go to the much desired classes? In a school uniform no-one would notice the difference, and if his sister went along with his plan they could share the days between them. He could go to school on odd and she on even days.

To cut a long story short: This is how it was done, and Francis learned how to read and write. Later he went to university in the United States of America, and today he is a respected and competent businessman who lives here in Austria. He is a friend of mine and sometimes, when we sit down for a talk, he reminisces about days gone by, for example about this story. But what would have become of Francis if he had not gone through with his daring plan? That would have been a completely different story!