



SIEBENQUELL

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## » . . . ennobled with the gift . . . « (I)

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*He gave me the coat as a gift, when it  
grew too large for him in later years.  
He ennobled me with the gift  
and the trust to preserve it. \**

I can't get these verses out of my mind. They come from Reinhard Mey. Towards the end of his song about »Father's Coat« he recounts this incident - just four small lines of a great song, and yet these words immediately make us feel something special, something of the significance of this gift and the awe it inspires in the recipient. It is as if he is elevated to a higher, noble status - by the gift itself and by the trust that the father places in him with this gift.

It is worthwhile for us to »unwrap« this gift. The whole song helps us to do so. For this coat is not just a memory of the father, but woven into it are his memories of his life: the drudgery of his apprenticeship as a tailor and his youthful caring for his many brothers and sisters, the horrors of war, the miserable return home and the terrible poverty afterwards, finally the caring for his own family. All this may now be preserved in the son to whom he gave the coat in his old age. But that is not all, for there is more in this fine piece, a wisdom that served and serves life. When his children were young, the father began to sew this noble coat for himself - in his spare time after work, on the kitchen table - and with devotion. From his youth, this man was used to fulfilling his duties and doing what others expected of him. Now he freely chooses to sew, what is perhaps the best thing he has ever sewn, for himself. What a profound dimension to this gift! The father, who knew poverty, war

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and worries for others, was worth it to himself: »But this coat, he sews it for himself, father's coat.« The choice of fabric, the cut, all his craftsmanship he put into it: »He sews it of heavy, precious cloth, he sews it forever, he sews it with love.« \*

When I travel in South Tyrol, I often ask myself what it is that stirs my heart, that gives my soul so much home there. What do the old farms, technically modern and stylishly renovated, tell me? Why do I love this authenticity, this enduring permanence? What appeals to me when I observe young families where parents pass on their love for this world to their children? Why does my heart swell when there are newly designed exploration and play opportunities for children along beautiful hiking trails?

Perhaps »Father's Coat« can lead to an answer. Life (especially in the rural mountain world) was and is never easy and most of it is about fulfilling one's duties - as the Psalmist says: »Our life lasts seventy years, and when it comes up, it is eighty. The best part of it is only toil and trouble; it passes quickly, we fly away.« (Ps 90:10) Mostly it is determined by what others expect and demand of me. What an art it is not to lose myself in this and not to make my value dependent on it, but to find and preserve the inner freedom to discover and fill times and spaces with what is valuable to me. How many people allow themselves to be determined by others, even in their free time, who are passive, who only consume. The father in Reinhard Mey's song, however, uses his free time and his craftsmanship to create a masterpiece for himself, »just« for himself. He was worth it to himself and everyone could see it. And this work, beautiful, memorable, and artistic, endures beyond him.

*The good cloth, new as the first day,  
The cuffs, the sleeves, the upright collar.  
I wear it and carry the memory  
Of the tailor on very special days  
With joy, upright and solemn.  
I am aware, today I wear  
Father's coat,  
Father's coat. \**

Thus, the impressions from the mountains and the song of Father's coat invite me to reflect on the beautiful, valuable things which I create in freedom, which are suffused with me - without ulterior motives, but simply beautiful, and for my joy.

And it makes me mindful of what others have left to me in such a fashion, to discover it, to appreciate it, to honour it and to draw life from it. More on this in 3 weeks!

\* Reinhard Mey, Father's Coat, 2013

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*Vallendar, July 20th, 2023*