



SIEBENQUELL

Take the Stories Seriously IV

Every Episode has a Meaning



SOURCE: KARL DITT 2018

Years ago, I stumbled upon a book in the library of an elderly woman who had invited me to view her collection of books. On one shelf, conspicuously housed, was a beautifully bound book laid within a simple wooden box with a glass cover. On the side of the box the following was inscribed: The Book of Frustration.

When I asked her about the book, the lady told me it was a book written by her brother about his experiences during the Second World War. I nodded and asked, whether she was frustrated because he never got a chance to finish it. But that was not the problem. She assured me that it was finished, but during the transport back to England, two and a half chapters were torn out. And for years she was frustrated by the book, because an episode was missing. Her brother, who had fallen in the war, could no longer tell her what was happening in that part of his life. »To miss even one part of his life has been a lifelong pain to me! I ever wonder what was on those pages!«

I understood her frustration instantly. I once bought a book and was engrossed in reading it when suddenly I realised that I had a defective copy and several chapters were missing. I kept reading, trying to piece together what I had missed from the rest of the story, but it was as frustrating an experience as I have ever had with a book. Here was one of many encounters with a lesson the storytellers have taught me: You cannot interpret a story without every episode. You cannot tear a chapter out and think that you still have a whole story.

That rule applies to all storytelling. If a person suppresses an incident or an episode in their life story, then their story starts to lose its harmony, balance and meaning. Often, when people skip over such episodes in their life story, we tend to suspect, that there is something missing, something being left out. It does not quite add up. At other times, we have rushed to judgment about the meaning of an experience or an encounter, only to discover that we got it all wrong, once someone supplied an episode of which we were unaware.

Every episode counts. They make the story whole, indeed, they are the building blocks of every story. In my third article in this series I wrote that an episode alone does not a story make. But a story also cannot afford to ignore the individual episodes. There is no contradiction in this, indeed, they are complementary truths. If you hold only one building block in your hand, and stare at it alone, you miss the grandeur of the whole. If you ignore the building blocks, you miss the beauty of the way something was constructed and how it was put together, you miss the links and connections.

I watched this deep storytelling wisdom at play this summer. I watched with admiration, as friends of mine planned for the day of recovery of one of their beloved ones. She has been ill for many weeks and there is a long road ahead before she is fully recovered and able to resume her life. In the meantime, her family quietly and diligently gathers photos of these days she is missing, of events and experiences close to her heart, of deepest meaning and interest to her. These are episodes she is missing, but those who love her longingly wish to show her each one of them, when this time has passed. It is one of the most loving and tender of actions I have witnessed in my life. It is their way of saying, that they will not idly stand by and allow a chapter, and episode, to be torn from the life of their loved one. And so the album grows, the pictures are gathered, the moments are marked.

I smile when I think of it. I would be privileged to look at that book with her. It gladdens my heart to know that a book of love is being forged love, because love and love alone ensures that every episode counts. I smile even more when I think of the day that young woman is recovered and able to look at that album, to have all the missing episodes shown to her, to have her story completed. If she ever establishes her own library, there will be no volume marked »The Book of Frustration« on her shelves, because her beloved ones took the stories seriously.

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Olpe, September 6th, 2018