



SIEBENQUELL

Giving Orientation: ... So that you might walk



SOURCE: ROSEMARIE MONNERJAHN, ST. MALO 2013

Do you know Marie-Laure? Then you should get to know her.

The American author Anthony Doerr tells of her in his Novel »All the Light you cannot see«.

She is living alone with her father in Paris when in 1934, at the age of 6, she goes blind. All of her certainties fall away, everything familiar becomes foreign, dangers lurk everywhere and everything makes her afraid. »Her only sanctuary is in bed, the hem of her quilt at her chin, while her father smokes another cigarette in the chair beside her, whittling away at one of his tiny models, his little hammer going tap tap tap, his little square of sandpaper making a rhythmic, soothing rasp.«

Carefully, patiently and lovingly he helps her move into her new life. Marie-Laure learns how to find her way around their apartment. With a white cane in the one hand and with one finger of her other hand hooked into the belt of her father, she daily goes with him to the Museum of Natural History. There he is responsible for all the keys and locks and he takes her along on all his patrols.

Every evening he labours at his workbench in the kitchen. Here he develops, bit by bit, a scale model of their entire quarter: houses with large windows, bakeries and laundries, gullies and small lanes, public squares with benches and trees - he leaves nothing out. Marie-Laure, however, is not particularly attracted to this. It is not like real life. It does not smell like the

roses at the flower vender or like the bread through the door of the bakery. The voices and notices are missing. Nevertheless, her father insists that she repeatedly brush her nimble fingers over the small houses and imprint the lay of the streets in her mind - day after day, week after week. After many months, he takes her along on the familiar route to the museum, stands still, turns around three times with her and then challenges her to lead them home. She cannot. She does not know how. She is utterly in despair. »I want you to think of the model, Marie.« He calms her down, he helps her reflect. She counts her steps, loses her cane, and weeps. He comforts her and encourages her. From now on they practice every week on her father's day off - with differing degrees of success. Then, almost one year later, the break through comes: »She runs her fingers over the model in their kitchen, counting miniature benches, trees, lampposts, doorways. Every day some new detail emerges—each storm drain, park bench, and hydrant in the model has its counterpart in the real world.« From then on, she manages, from time to time, to lead her father closer to their house, until one day she stands smiling before it and is lifted up by her laughing father.

Here Anthony Doerr tells of the tireless devotion, the extraordinary wisdom, and the admirable patience with which the father, Daniel LeBlanc, helps his blind daughter, Marie-Laure, to find orientation in their world.

He refuses to see this fate as a curse, no, he becomes a blessing and helps her enter into life. He creatively uses his talent and builds an image of their surroundings for his beloved daughter, in which she must learn and how to find her way. What is described here is loving care on the one hand and deep trust on the other, on a path of many small steps, and repeated setbacks. Giving orientation and accepting assistance in orientation are equally important in life.

Then the war begins; the Germans march into Paris, the great Exodus beings and Marie-Laure's father decides they should flee. With great difficulties they reach St. Malo and a great uncle. After a few weeks, during which Marie-Laure thinks they will soon return home, her father measures the streets, makes sketches and builds, step by step, a model of the fortified old city of St. Malo. Yet, he does not want to let his daughter outside. He is afraid.

»There has always been a sliver of panic in him, deeply buried, when it comes to his daughter: a fear that he is no good as a father, that he is doing everything wrong. That he never quite understood the rules...How do you ever know for certain that you are doing the right thing? There is pride, too, though - pride that he has done it alone. That his daughter is so curious, so resilient. There is the humility of being a father to someone so powerful, as if he were only a narrow conduit for another, greater thing.« The extraordinary development of the move will show how right he is. Many people will live, because he has helped Marie-Laure enter into life.

In Psalm 18 we read: »You, Lord, make my lamp shine, my God makes my darkness bright.

With you I can storm the battlements, with my God I can scale walls.

God has girded me with power, he leads me on a path without obstacles.

You gave me your help as a shield, your right hand supports me; you draw near to me and make me great.«

Marie-Laure's father lives God upon this earth.

To this we are all called - to walk ourselves and to give orientation to others.

Quotes from Anthony Doerr, »All the Light you cannot see«, 2014

Rosemarie Monnerjahn

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