

OF WOUNDED BIRDS (AND MORE BESIDES)

Vlasta Cabanová

Lauček, A. (2020). *O ranených vtáčatách (nie iba tak) [Of Wounded Birds (And More Besides)]*. Námestovo: Kubík.

Much has already been written about integration and social inclusion in professional pedagogical, psychological, and psychopathological literature. But how to raise awareness and acceptance of “otherness” in the public at large?

2020 saw the publication, by Námestovo, of a very interesting and stimulating book – the twelfth in the “Just Like That” series, already well-known to readers. It is a slim volume, bearing the title “*Of Wounded Birds (And More Besides)*”. This artistically worked narrative tackles a burning issue that deserves to occupy far more space in professional and artistic literature – the lives of handicapped children and their parents today. Children with special needs are the “wounded birds”, beset by obstacles and pitfalls. In terms of its difficult subject matter, it is almost unique among the many new books published in Slovak (and probably not only in Slovak).

The book takes the form of a collection of (fictionalized) journalistic works: micro-stories, features, reminiscences and reflections. In the preface, author Anton Lauček tells how he based the book on “the events and experiences lived through and acquired by the parents of children with special needs, and their therapists”, which are sensitively recounted and rounded out by Lauček. The various stories are a mirror of our times, largely reflecting the moral state of contemporary society – a society formed increasingly of self-interested individuals who put their own needs above those of others. Often, indifference, selfishness – even ruthlessness – are evident in their decisions and actions, taken with little regard for the impact on others.

At the end of the book is the true account of a father who cares for a disabled child, in which we learn of their hardships and struggles – a never-ending hill which the family must climb anew each day. The father goes to work to provide for his wife and dependants, to keep up the mortgage payments so the family does not end up on the streets. In addition, he takes his son to physiotherapy, and exercises with him at home every day. Meanwhile, society offers little to families in such a position. Living on the brink of poverty, he is left to find whatever help he can get, since the costs of physiotherapy and quality mobility aids can amount to thousands of euros.

The stories in the book are divided into two parts. The first: *"To Think About"*, presents the (mostly negative) experiences of parents, detailing how they contend with the barriers that life with a disabled child throws up in our society (*The Soccer player, Ave Maria, In their own hands, Smile, Hand Surgery, A Mother's Statement ...*). The second part: *"For a Smile"*, consists of tales with a touch of humour, offering the reader some respite – after all, even lives such as these have their funny side (*Gift, Baptism, Ink, On the Carpet to Paradise, The Most Beautiful Word...*), and, according to Anton Lauček, "a smile is free and is sometimes more help than anything else".

Lauček also writes about other people – about us – because commonly, in our pursuit of money, property, titles, success, and plaudits, we forget about handicapped children. He reminds us that if we wish to act nobly, first and foremost we must help those most in need, like "wounded birds".

The cover by Jaroslav Magu, suggesting a child's face, is wonderfully eloquent: on one side of a wooden scales are stones, on the other side only a feather. Yet the lighter load can gradually outweigh the heavier, with just a helping touch...

Author

doc. PaedDr. Vlasta Cabanová, PhD.
Faculty of Public Policies in Opava, Silesian University in Opava
Institute of Pedagogical and Psychological Sciences
Bezručovo nám. 885/14, 746 01 Opava, Czech Republic
vlasta.cabanova@fvp.slu.cz