

OUR VALIANT VOLUNTEERS

These short texts are the story of a week spent in Lampedusa.

These are the impressions of IBBY volunteers who helped us to prepare a territory able to receive a library for the first time.

They are interesting because they tell an exchange of wealth.

They are important because they give meaning to this project whose real intent is to make people more free and more aware.

deborah soria, IBBY Italy

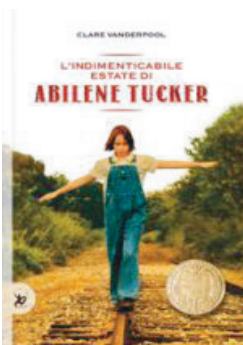


FRANCESCA RIFIUTI

Lampedusa: books and people made of stories.

When I arrived at Lampedusa I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know where I was going, nor where the roads led. I didn't know whom I would have met, nor what glances would have crossed with mine. I didn't know anything, but one thing I did know. From the very first moment, from my first steps on that little world in the middle of the sea, on those rather dusty roads, under that brilliant sun, in the strong gusts of wind, I knew that there were interesting stories there waiting for me. That was what I needed and it was for that reason that I went. In my suitcase I had packed the desire for these stories, the desire to hear completely new voices. And on my arrival they were there waiting for me. I managed to hear them even in the air, in the silence, in the noise of the sea. Persons full of stories, all with the same desire to tell, to share and put together their strengths to create a situation which is coming into being so that these stories never die, and so that there is always somebody to hear them, read them, tell them, colour them, dream of them, play with them. And live them. We have tried to bring to the island the idea that books are important. That if they are not there you know it. Because the smell of printed paper is missing and the sound that the pages make when the wind rustles them; the possibility to lose yourself for a little in different worlds, different lives, exciting adventures which remain with us, the possibility to travel and see the world while remaining where we are – all this is missing. At Lampedusa the children have had a taste of all this and have submerged themselves in the world of the books and the stories. With their smiles, their happiness and their enthusiasm they made us understand that they adore this world. And that from now on they will not be able to do without it.

Francesca Rifiuti



VERONICA BENUZZI

Why did I decide to take part? At the University of Bologna I fell deeply in love with children's literature, with illustrated albums and books without words. As soon as I heard about this project I thought that I would not be able to write a thesis on this literature without personally getting to know the reality of the island, without plunging into it, and so I arrived (and left again) full of enthusiasm.

What did you expect from Lampedusa? I expected an initial diffidence on the part of the population with regard to this project, fearing that it was seen as having been "sent down from above". I expected to work well with other voluntary workers as enthusiastic as myself and to get to know people of the place and gather material for my degree thesis.

What did you bring away from Lampedusa? I brought back with me the scents of its vegetation, the look full of wonder, enthusiasm and hope of a mother who took part in the training with the teachers at the Giglio Marino, I developed a great sense of hope which the words and the glances of the women and the children who worked on the project aroused in me, my eyes were filled with illustrations and magnificent stories. I brought away with me the knowledge of another way to reach objectives, a confirmation of the importance of the relationships between human beings, of the rights of each one of us from childhood. I brought back the vast world of the traveller, and the amount of growth which each journey brings. I hear in my ears and my heart the voices and the looks of the boys and girls of the island who, when you met them in the street, would ask us "Will you be here this evening? And tomorrow?" and their desire to collaborate with us and amongst themselves, through the stories and the pictures. What a thrill!

What does it mean to live far away from books? Hunger.

The arrival of books in a place, in this case a public library being created, together with the relationships between human beings who are listening (not only between institutions) always manages to make an impression, from many points of view: cultural, emotional, scholastic, historical, and as far as the specific case of Lampedusa is concerned, also turistic and urbanistic, opening up never-ending possibilities.



FLORIANA BORGHI

I would never have thought of Lampedusa as a holiday place, or that stretch of sea, afflicted by so much suffering, so many shipwrecked hopes, as a place to go to bathe; then, glancing at a short article in the supplement of a newspaper, I read about the project of IBBY, an organization unknown to me, to create a library there.

A library of books donated by various countries of the world, for all the children there: those who land there, live there, or will set sail from Lampedusa, this arid raft of land surrounded by the clearest, most intense blue and transparent sea I have ever seen.

I found this idea fantastic so I decided to go, even though I did not have any idea yet of the work to be done for the library....

For a moment I imagined myself lost on a desert island....and instead I found special new friends, full of enthusiasm, a selection of skills and a contagious desire to act, animate, meet, discuss.

From the boxes piled up in the premises provided by the local council books from every possible place emerged, books which aroused the curiosity of adults and children who allowed themselves to become involved in workshops where their initial shyness transformed itself into a joyful participation and the wish to keep coming back.

So in these two blue rooms, an untidy place of work, with fake seagulls flying overhead (the building until a few hours before had been an office of the Navy) and on the square, in the courtyard and on the main street Via Roma, the library or rather the planning of it, was going ahead.

There were no shelves or catalogues, only books, children and a group of people brought together by the "library of Lampedusa", or by the beginning of this wonderful adventure which, I agree, will go ahead with constant prompting by us, if necessary making a nuisance of ourselves....

What did I bring away from Lampedusa? Above all, the desire to know, to read books to be more prepared to talk about them or suggest them, the wish to make the library into a place for getting together and for meetings between the children of the island and those passing through, and so to establish a relationship between the schools and the reception centre, beginning perhaps with the loan of books.

I would like to see the library helping to bring to light an aspect of the island to which we have not been able to have access.

I do not know how anyone can be without books, I always take them with me even when because of the intensity of the moment there is not much time for reading. Having them gives a sense of security.



ALESSANDRO LUMARE

Why did you decide to take part? I read “La strada di Jella. First stop Monaco” and I fell in love with IBBY (and with Jella Lepman). At the Children’s Book Fair in Bologna I heard about the Lampedusa project and I immediately thought that it was perfectly in line with the pioneering, humanistic and visionary spirit which had inspired the birth of IBBY. I couldn’t miss it!

What did you expect from Lampedusa?

Well... I expected to meet the young migrants whom the silent books are destined for! Only when I arrived did I understand that the link with the reception centre was still to be constructed. At the moment Lampedusa has a wonderful collection of international books for children. The children of Lampedusa showed great interest in these books. The library therefore has a lot of possible future enthusiastic clients. A staff able to make these printed ambassadors of peace function, has to be trained. But I think, as you do, that the international spirit of the project has to be preserved. I dream about a fund to enable educators, librarians and promoters of culture in the poorest countries to come and be trained in the illustrated book as an instrument for the promotion of a culture of peace in Lampedusa..... Papa Francesco, will you think about it?

What did you bring back from Lampedusa?

The picture of a seed planted in the earth. It’s an arid earth, but somebody told me that in Cyprus, a week after a fire which reduced acres of woodland to ash, in that desolate landscape thousands of poppies sprang up. They were seeds which had been waiting to see sunlight for a thousand years!

What does it mean to live far from books?

Waiting like these seeds.



FRANCESCO ORIETTI

Lampedusa has totally entered into my heart. For me, a student, with so many dreams in my mind, so many books always in my hands, so great a desire to do something, this has been, rather than a holiday, a training experience; I learned a lot of things through being in contact with people who worked with the books and who through them make people dream.

I knew what IBBY was, what it does, and I am madly keen on children's literature. This is a collection of things which made this project seem, in my eyes, a cause to take up without even thinking much about it.

Of Lampedusa I expected less than what it actually gave me and this was a huge surprise. Actually I couldn't really say exactly what I was expecting, but I can certainly say that what I did find was a treasure, hidden among the books, our glances and those of the children. Also the people who were so enthusiastic, the teachers, the parents. It was a pity only that there was no meeting with the migrant children, but I hope it will take place in the future.

What I brought away from Lampedusa is a great wish to act and even more a wish to learn and continue on this path. I brought away with me a fantastic experience, the kind that stays with you forever, the kind that moves something inside you and arouses sensations as inexplicable as they are wonderful; they make new ideas blossom in your head, they stimulate you, and activate you.

I returned home with something new inside me, with a new sensitivity, which changed the shape of something inside me.

To live far away from books is impossible for me. I always have at least one on my bedside table, I always carry one in my bag, wherever I go, because you never know.... I simply cannot imagine a life without books.

Having said all this I am always available, I would like to continue this adventure. (At this moment I have a huge smile on my face!)



CECILA SANTI

Why did you decide to take part? I have known this island since 2011, and I have been able to know many of the things which have been discussed in the organized institutional meetings, but when I saw the exhibition at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome of the books without words (all beautiful and of great value) I thought that it could be useful for the island, and also for me, to go back not only as a tourist but also as a person who together with others is trying to change the state of things, and doing it starting from something which from a strictly economical point of view could seem superfluous or useless considering the enormous material needs of the islanders and of the migrants but which represents, in the books and the library, the possibility for an opening-up of the mind, confrontation, meeting with other cultures and other ways of being and thinking, a chance for development of fantasy and personal growth.

What did you expect from Lampedusa? I answer this with Alessandro's beautiful image: I expect that the poppies will flower and will be watered for their growth by everyone, and polemically I add, also by the journalists who often tell partial and useless truths.

What did you bring away from Lampedusa? What I always bring away: the sun, the sea, the human warmth of the people who, in the midst of great difficulties, live there. But this time there was the meeting with all of you.

It is the proof once again that human beings are born and for the most part are, fundamentally sane, even those who migrate from their country of origin.

What does it mean to live far from books? Ignorance, stupidity, fatuousness.

Book read in Lampedusa: "Il portiere e lo straniero" by Emanuele Santi (no relation to me!) ed. l'Asino d'Oro.



ROSI ROBERTAZZI

Why did you decide to take part? When Deborah spoke to me about the project, to construct a library in Lampedusa, I was enthusiastic. Everything she told me after her first visit, affected me very much – hearing how welcoming the population is to the ship-wrecked people (quite different from the information which is given by the media), changed my opinion completely. I didn't know that at Lampedusa there was no library which is absurd, a real injustice! How can one grow, travel, dream, know oneself, open the thresholds of the soul, without books? How can the welcoming words be created? How can one meet the children of Lampedusa and the little ship-wrecked children?

What did you expect of Lampedusa? I didn't know what to expect of Lampedusa; I wanted to discover it there on the spot, without preconceived ideas. I only knew that I would have met the children of Lampedusa and maybe also the children who had arrived in the latest landings, that I would have worked with the teachers and that it would not be easy to enter into an island community. So with enthusiasm I prepared material for the workshops, feeling open to all possibilities.

What did you bring away from Lampedusa? I brought away the image of the children's eyes, astonished, curious, hungry, enthusiastic; they arrived two hours early for our daily appointment asking joyfully: "What are you going to read to us today?" The picture of the children lying on the benches with a book in their hands, and the amazement of their parents at seeing them so absorbed. I brought away the joy and enthusiasm of the volunteers, the satisfaction of a work accomplished together harmoniously, the relieved and incredulous sighs of some of the teachers, the maestrale wind, the faces of the people who got a taste of the wonderful opportunity the library is bringing (not only to the children), the fantastic colours of the island and the question asked all the time: "Are you coming back?"

What does it mean to live far from books? To live without books means for me living in the isolation of one's own thoughts, living in black and white without the countless shades of the words, without the silent tale of images which allow you to fly away from it all.

Tell us about a book you read in Lampedusa: "Storie di insospettabili giardinieri" by Delfina Rattazzi.



MARIELLA BERTELLI

Why did you decide to take part? Children, books, an island, the sea, a library – a place bound together by reading; people who come and go and people who want and believe they can change things. IBBY. The essence of the meaning of Jella Lepman. How could I refuse?

What did you expect of Lampedusa? I didn't have any great expectations, I just wanted to actually be there, and to see and live Lampedusa, and to try to understand its situation. I wanted to really help to create a space, imaginary and physical for a library as a public place to read and get to know books and everything books can give. A place which breaks through boundaries without prejudices, which can also be for those who come from far away to search for a better life.

What did you bring away from Lampedusa?

Beautiful faces of children, their intense glances, ready to listen to a story or look at a book; the warmth of the people – adults and teachers – happy to meet other people and interested in the exchange. Trust, hope, solidarity, respect, new friendships and human warmth. Perplexity in the face of the reality of the island and all its inhabitants: the people of Lampedusa, the migrants and the tourists. Clear images of the sea, the bright light, the wind, the boats. The desire to continue to build a library for all the children of the island, including the shipwrecked ones. The knowledge that this objective is the most difficult to reach. The confidence that we will succeed. I left a piece of my heart in Lampedusa.

What does it mean to live far from books? Far from books – everything becomes more difficult, less easy to accomplish. Books help us to know other people, other worlds and other ways of being. They help to create internal places for reflection and imagination. They open our minds, stimulate our spirits and make us listen with our hearts.

Without books we are all poorer.



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