

Fragility, a Blessing ?



When I became blind, I followed a course to help me to take up my profession again as a switchboard operator, and in 1984, I learned Braille (a way of reading and writing for those without sight). Learning Braille gave me a freedom and autonomy that I am happy to share today by teaching Braille in my turn. In fact knowing it facilitates everyday life because many directives are written in Braille today, so it enables one not to become isolated, to have a social and professional life, to meet people and to form new friendships.

After 14 years of voluntary work in Toulouse, I am now in my fourth year as a volunteer in Lyon where I teach Braille to people aged from 35 to 81 years. They have lost their sight for reasons of health or old age. Some have painful personal stories to tell and for many it is extremely difficult to live with blindness.

In the first instance training must address people's need to talk and share because for many, Braille is seen as a passage into the world of blindness, so there is revolt and fear. Patience is needed and respect for the emerging story of each one because if the handicap is not « accepted » the person will not be able to make the effort needed to train. My own experience of blindness is an opportunity to understand the plight of my « students»! Training often begins with indispensable discussions before getting down to work. Through this time of sharing stories the reality of being handicapped is faced and also daily encounters with psychological problems. Some aspects of the training are more complicated and it takes time to overcome difficulties but what joy when understanding is « triggered » : students are then proud of themselves, they surpass themselves and rebuild confidence.

I also give lessons to people who are not blind but they want to learn Braille so as to help others : for example a teacher who would like to instruct blind people.

Teaching Braille is a wonderful relational experience, everyone's journey is different. I am truly impressed by people who are endowed with extraordinary will power. What fortitude !

