



Siegfried Grillmeyer

Around the world

Life is a story



Gute Geschichten bessern die Welt.

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story.one – Life is a story



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This booklet is dedicated to all people I have met (not only on my travels) and friends I have made. And my gratitude goes to all those at home who give me the freedom to travel far away and yet let me return to a loving home.

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Around the world ... storytelling

Sometimes it takes a push to get the ball rolling and finally take the path that has long been prepared and pick up speed. On the platform Story.one I found the announcement of a competition for stories of encounters and travels "around the world" and now the opportunity to publish them in English.

And so I finally realized the long-held resolution to tell stories about special people.

Perhaps we travel precisely because of these stories, which we collect along the way and bring with us in our luggage. And at the same time, we know we can't hunt them like shy game, nor gather them like mushrooms. Ultimately, they are gifts when encounters and insights condense into stories that are worth remembering and telling beyond the day.

This is also where the difference between a tourist and a traveler has always been apparent to me. When we take photos or, to enhance au-

thenticity and satisfy the narcissist in us, a selfie, we collect images like trophies. But other than the banal statement that St. Peter's Square, the Eiffel Tower are as real as Victoria Falls and Lake Titicaca, we bring home only individual images, but no stories. Stories emerge when we relate to people and things. As my academic teacher used to say: Experiences without reflection are a waste! When traveling, we are permanently challenged to relate to the unfamiliar environment. And it is only in the foreign country that our own becomes clear to us and we can name it. After all, we take ourselves with us everywhere, and with us in our luggage the stories we have collected so far.

I have learned very simple things, for example, that it makes sense to drink hot drinks even in very hot weather, that you can use water instead of paper to go to the toilet, that you don't necessarily need a bed to sleep in, and that coffee can be prepared in so many ways. But I also learned that there are other ways of life and other ways of making sense of this world, and that despite all the cultural differences, we humans are united by empathy, solidarity, and laughter.

And I also learned that we must tell our sto-

ries to each other. Because just as they shape us personally, they have also shaped us as societies. Especially in a diverse society, immigrants bring their stories with them in their luggage, and the identity of a group, a city, and a country requires, as with the individual, the bringing together of the individual stories into a narrative.

These contributions are about my stories in my luggage ... and even if the competition on Story.one has ended, I will continue to tell them.



Reconciliation between oysters and absinthe

Actually, I just wanted to run the extension cord to our camper, - past the neighbor's car. It was a hot August afternoon and the intense sun was only bearable because of the light breeze coming from the Atlantic. Walking up the small embankment by the pitches, one could enjoy the wonderful blue at the Plage du Fogo and outside the bay one could see the white sails of the boats from the nearby Port du Crouesty dancing on the water. We had already been on the road for a week and the trip became an inner journey into the Franco-German past.

We passed the border near Saarbrücken and marveled at the Gothic cathedrals in Nancy and Metz. Far from the highways, the route led to the graves at Verdun, via the memorial at Douaumont and along the Chemin des Dames in the direction of Reims. And along the way, the path was lined with countless war memorials - white crosses formed rows of hundreds, thousands of individual graves. How would it influence our

attitude to life, I wondered, if we - living in the Hunsrück (Rhineland-Palatinate) or the Oberpfalz (Bavaria) - passed such mass graves every day, reminding us permanently of the First World War, which here in France is simply called la grande guerre. And the closer we got to Normandy, we were reminded of its continuation in World War II, and thus the "30-year war of the 20th century."

Here, too, near the campers, a German fortification had been driven into a Stone Age grave, destroying thousands of years of history. We avoided talking in German so as not to be associated with that people who had twice passed through the country here like a roller, leaving death and destruction in their wake. And so I asked our neighbor in English if I could pull the extension cord behind his car. "Of course, you are welcome" he answered and invited me to an absinthe. What wouldn't anyone do for the German-French friendship, I thought to myself: "Salute!" While we men drank, mother and daughter prepared the meal. I had never eaten oysters before and asked with interest how they were prepared. The 60-something pulled up a chair and so I sat among the French family for dinner. Pierre, I learned, had grown up in a

small village in Lorraine, the bone of contention between the European neighbors Alsace-Lorraine, and love had brought him to Vannes in Brittany. He knew a lot about German history. "A hundred years after the war, we should be reconciled" he said with a grin, opening another bottle of the vermouth known as green fairy. "We need to do more for Europe - we can't let it go to pieces!" Between oysters and baguettes, we told our stories.

That evening in Arzon, Pierre had explained Europe to me through hospitality and absinthe, and taken away my own discomfort as a German in France.

The Name of the Rose in Tambacounda

I had been warned that it would be unbearably hot by February. But I took it as a promise and less as a threat. And so I enjoyed escaping the wet and cold Nuremberg and landing in Dakar in summer temperatures. We spent the first few days in Thiès, not far from the Senegalese capital, and it was an exhilarating feeling to work where others go on vacation. After meetings with "Technicians without Borders" and planning the expansion of a drip irrigation system, we went to Tambacounda for a project visit.

On the dusty roads riddled with potholes, the approximately 400 km became a day-long journey on which the temperature increased with every kilometer. Already at the first break in Kaolack, we felt the absence of the maritime wind at the western tip of Senegal and were greeted with almost forty degrees inland. The next day we visited the plantations located along the river and had long discussions with the representatives of the cooperative about sales op-

portunities, processing and conversion to organic cultivation. When the temperatures of over forty degrees took away all my attention, she appeared and I was suddenly wide awake.

She stepped into the middle of our meeting like an apparition. Perhaps in her mid-twenties or thirties, I estimated the mesmerizing figure before me. She moved gracefully and you could feel the powerful life in that body. Her eyes sparkled and her features and lips reflected the lust for life. Even though I didn't understand a word of Wolof, I hung on her lips and couldn't take my eyes off that body, modeled as if by an artist, which stood out under the T-shirt and work pants. Just as quickly as she had come, she left our circle and for me this aura of strength, lust for life, creative will and beauty remained in the room for a long time. The others were surprised that I wanted to know everything about this visit, which they saw only as a disruption of the meeting. She was one of the unnamed plantation workers. While we were discussing, she had been working for many hours and since she could not read, she had to get the information about the next steps of the work.

In the past, my colleague said on the long dri-