

You are now

A reading child becomes a reading adult. A reading child learns. A reading child is an investment. A reading child *becomes* a reading adult.

Whenever the reason to why children should read is discussed, we often hear that if we don't have any reading children today, then we won't have any reading adults tomorrow. We hear that children are supposed to read in order to become something that they yet not are. I would like to take this moment – with you – to talk about another point of view.

The adult person reads for joy. The adult person treats her- or himself with a good story because a good story tickles the mind, puts its reader out on an adventure. Reading gives joy. Reading gives pleasure.

Why shouldn't a child read for the same reason? Why does the burden to change lie so heavy on the child? I think it is because of how most of us look at childhood: We see it as a preamble and nothing more.

When I write a speech to the children in Berlin, I think about the room that they live in. The room were they will be allowed to linger for a little bit longer, some more years. The room were I once lived too, a long time ago. When I was a child.

That room has a blue wallpaper with angels on it. It has a doll house with a red roof and a broken chimney. It has a painting over the bed of a small girl, a princess, sitting on her knees by a lake, looking at her reflection in the black water.

But this room does not end there. It's walls can fall and worlds will reveal themselves. I can be anyone, anywhere. I can carry a crown on my head, a sword in my hand.

Some children – perhaps even some of you - might say about childhood: 'Oh I long for the day when I am no longer a child. When I can make all the decisions. When I can do what ever I want. Being a child is boring.'

For me childhood was a time of strength. I was strong. I had power. I *could* do whatever I wanted and in everything I took on – I succeeded.

How could that be?

Because I was lucky enough to have a mother and a father who knew how to value playing. I was allowed to play – and they didn't worry. They didn't ask themselves: I wonder if playing will lead to anything useful in this poor girl's life? They didnt drag me out of my adventures and tug the sword out of my hand and said: listen, trust us, if you want to make it in life, you need to skip the nonsense and learn how to do things for real.

My latest book released in Sweden is called The fine sword. It tells the story about a boy named Sasja. His mother is dying. And when she does, when Death comes with his big ship to get her, Sasja will simply not accept it. He wants to outsmart Death and take his mother back. So he steals his neighbors rowing boat and goes after

them. And on his long journey through The kingdom of death Sasja learns a great deal about death – but he learns even more about life. Mr Death is not a very pleasant person. He is self loving. A superstar and allmighty. But the is also well experienced. He has seen everything there is to see of human nature – he knows us.

And he has a nice garden with apple trees and raspberry bushes. Sajsja likes to play there with the friends that he has made on his journey. They fight with sticks that they found on the ground and they make believe that the sticks are swords. Death likes to look at them when they play. Why? Well, he calls Sasja and his friends to come and sit with him and he tells them:

Listen, there is a place where the children are in such a hurry.

To do what? they ask.

To stop being children. And that place – that place is the one that you come from, Sasja. (And of course by this he means the world of humans.) He continues: It isn't really their fault, no, most of the time it's the parents that help them to hurry. The parents, you see, it's them that ask the children: *What are you going be?* Get ready, they say. Soon, very soon, adulthood will come, and how will a make believe sword help you then? If you are a princess, take up a real sword. If you are small and incompetent, at least learn how to do the dishes. If you are a boy, look at your father. Be like your father to prepare. The time when children are children is very short. It's a matter of an instant really, and still they need to hurry through it. Humans, they raise their children as if they *aren't* anything, but *will be*.

I will stop quoting mr Death now, because this guy can go on for hours – but the has a point. The way we look at childhood isn't always a respectful way. We, the parents, we so much want to help our children to change, to improve. We put you in school, we put you in dancing classes, guitarr classes, fotball classes, writing classes, we want to measure you, see you take the next step: 'What did you learn today? What good will it lead to?'

It is my opinion that nothing can be more educational to a child than playing. And nothing is more important for her or his self confidence. As I played I was king. I set the rules, I made the plans – and everything went my way. When playing was at it's end and I left – I left as a winner.

Playing also taught me empathy. Because I took the skin of so many different beings. Not only the skin of a king, no – I took the skin of a slave, the skin of a beggar, an orphan child. I took the skin of a murderer. And I learned perspective.

Most of us see adulthood as the time in life when we are ready: 'Ok, so I'm an adult now and this is how I became. This is my ready me. Then in a few years comes old age and that's when I will start to break down and eventually will become ruined.'

But what if we are our actual *us* in a different period?

Try for a moment to see childhood as the "the golden age" in life. Imagine that the time when we are children is the time when we are most complete, most perfected. **Imagine that childhood is the flower and not the seed.** And everything that comes after is just time that breaks us down, ruins what was once perfect.

If we try to think a bit like this, then we will learn how to better value playing – value it just as much as my parents did. And we will learn that children shall NOT read in order to *become* something.

Don't get me wrong, I'm sure your future adult lives have all the possibilities to become golden as well. You have to realise; you are listening to a person who is hopelessly stuck in her own childhood. Sometimes I even say to myself: 'Being an adult is boring. Oh I long for the day when I am a child again.' Then I think about it for a few seconds and I have tell myself: Who am I trying to fool? That day will never come. It passed. My room with the blue wallpaper with angels on it is gone.

So what do I do in order to cling on to childhood? Well, I write. To you. From me. From the child that I was. I stretch out a hand ... and I try to reach the doors that lead into your rooms. So I can open them, just a tiny bit and have a glimpse. Because I envy you. And the last thing that I want to say to everyone of you, as you sit here before me, is this:

Don't hurry. Linger were you are. You've got time. You'll get there: adulthood. Make sure that you play as much as you can – make sure that you as seldom as you can ask yourself: What am I going to be? **You. Are. Now.** And at the end of the day – when you are done playing, and you need a bit of rest: read a book. Because why shouldn't you – when you are at the height of your life – every now and then treat yourself with a good story?

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