

**Program Script for Gultekin Yazgan (Aired on 22 November 2009)**

**Category: Education**

**Location: Izmir**

We don’t see them most of the time. And when we do see them, we pretend we did not. Although they cannot see us, we still try to be invisible to them.

But they do see. They know and feel very well that we are distancing ourselves from them.

They also feel and know when we lend them a hand, when we help them out and become a voice in their lives. Because although we treat them like “others”, they are just like us. They are only deprived of one of their senses, but they swim in a much larger sea than ours.

Maybe you never had a visually impaired friend as a child, but they are also trying to play in the streets and they attend school just like you do. They have to prepare for elementary school and learn how to read and write with the help of their devoted teachers.

Although not from a blackboard, they learn how to solve mathematical problems and to use an alphabet which is way harder than the Latin alphabet.

**There are 16 schools for the blind in Turkey. Only 1,300 out of 50,000 visually impaired persons can attend these schools.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Interview with a visually impaired teacher:**

**Teacher:** “We have this tool which we call a “tablet”. As you can see, there are small squares in each small box. There are six dots in these squares. We use these six dots in different shapes in order to form the letters of our alphabet. Our students first learn how to use this six dots system.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Although it seems hard for visually impaired persons to learn how to read and write, what follows is even harder. Because until very recently, they neither have a library tailored to their needs, nor books that they could read.

However, a hardworking Changemaker came along to break this ill fate of visually impaired persons in Turkey.

\*\*\*\*\*

He was only 11 years old. He had an unfortunate accident on a cold day of February 1939. His life was full of light when he entered the hospital; when he was released, that light was gone.

Gültekin Yazgan writes about those days in his book “Blind Flight”:

**“It was the beginning of April 1939. My mother in my arm, I was leaving the Cerrahpasa Hospital, where I stayed for more than two months. I was not leaving the hospital to go back to my old life, however. I was not going to be able to reunite with the sunshine, my books, notebooks and classmates to whom I could not even say goodbye. Those were all left behind. I was starting a new life; I was starting my “blindflight”**

\*\*\*\*\*

In his own words, that was when he started his “blind flight”. It was people around him who were blind however, not him.

They believed that he cannot achieve anything without his vision, so he was forced to drop out of school.

Although he embraced his blindness, he refused to live without a purpose. He started to learn the English language.

With the support of private instructors, he learnt the English language using the Braille alphabet. While attending the English language school offered by the British Council, he met the head of British Council of Turkey, who gave him a bag full of books, as a present. These books were sent from London, UK. That was the first time Gultekin Yazgan was introduced Braille books.

That was when he started envisioning founding the first library for the blind in Turkey.

He graduated from high school and started to attend the Faculty of Law at University of Ankara. As a student at Ankara University, he founded the Six Dots Association for the Blind with the goal of helping visually impaired persons in their studies.

He graduated from university in 1952 and started working as a Social Sciences and English teacher in the Ankara School for the Blind while working as an intern lawyer.

He did not seem to be bothered by the darkness before his eyes and worked very hard to eliminate all obstacles in his way.

He wanted to prove to everyone that a visually impaired teacher can teach at a regular school and asked for an appointment. When his request was denied, he talked to the

Minister of Education of the time and convinced him to approve his appointment to a vocational institute as a Law teacher.

His dreams were being realized one by one and he kept discovering new paths in his “blind flight”. However, his biggest ambition was to set up a library for the blind and publish audio books and Braille magazines

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with his former student:**

**His former student:** “Gultekin Yazgan was our teacher at the Ankara School for the Blind.

He went to England in 1960 and when he came back, he told us how visually impaired persons were treated there and how they participated in social life. Particularly, he told us about audio books and how they were going to be available one day in Turkey.

We thought that they were going to come immediately, therefore we asked about them every month in our regular meetings. He told us that it was still early to expect them. However, we did not think that they would take this long. We are in 2009, so we have been waiting for audio books for 50 years .”

\*\*\*\*\*

After successfully working as a teacher for 20 years, Gultekin Yazgan retired from this profession. He did not retire from life, however.

He kept on working as an independent lawyer while preparing Braille books for children. And 5 years ago, he realized that it was time to set up the Library for the Visually Impaired.

He was 77 years old when he established the library with the help of 16 of his friends. But his ideals were not entirely fulfilled yet.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with Gultekin Yazgan:**

**Gultekin Yazgan:** “I dreamed about a library for the visually impaired for many years. It was my dream waiting to be realized for a long time.

Being blind is not so bad after all!”

\*\*\*\*\*

This is not a typical library. People do not read books in silence here; on the contrary this library is ruled by sound and hardworking individuals.

In this library, they prepare magazines and read books and prepare audio CDs for the visually impaired, and these materials get sent to their addresses free of charge.

This library, which is entirely run by volunteers, has different sections. In the audio books section, literature classics, poems and spelling books are read out and recorded as audio files. Afterwards, these audio files get transferred into audio CDs and these CDs get mailed to visually impaired persons.

There are 65 thousand audio books in their archives at the moment.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with a dubbing artist:**

**Dubbing artist:** “We do not only read out books here. We also read out magazine articles that are provided to us by the Library for the Visually Impaired. We follow a program decided by the Library.

We read out wellknown poems. We also read out spelling books for the Turkish language, which is I consider as crucially important.

It is our duty to help out organizations as such. Because I believe that we should be concerned about the problems of our society rather than only dealing with our personal problems.”

\*\*\*\*\*

In the other section of the library, volunteers are preparing Braille books and magazines. The Library has been publishing 2 monthly magazines since 2004. Since then, “Friend” and “Honeybee” magazines were mailed to 105,000 visually impaired persons free of charge.

And although every new issue is still being sent to subscribers free of charge, the Library still has to depend on donations as it was unable to find a shipping sponsor to this day.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with Derya, a visually impaired university student**

**Derya:** “I try to read novels. We ask the Library for the Visually Impaired to prepare our novels in Braille and they do the best they can to help us.

I was first admitted to the History program at Ege University. They printed my English books in Braille.

Afterwards, I was admitted to Dokuz Eylul University to study English. They printed my grammar textbooks, which was very important for the class. I could not have understood it properly if it was read out to me. I could have failed if I did not have that grammar textbook.

We can listen to novels, we have access to almost every novel. They provide CDs to help out visually impaired persons with the public personnel selection examination. They print books for us. They publish “Honeybee” and “Baby Honeybee” magazines for children. These magazines feature poems, short stories and information about famous authors.

We are provided with everything we need access to.”

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Interview with Damla, a visually impaired child:**

**Damla:** “I read with my hands. There are different letters here, that’s how I read. Our letters are formed by six dots. All 29 letters of our alphabet are formed by six dots.

It was very hard for me to learn it at the beginning. I thought it was impossible for me to learn it when I first started. But I did learn it. My teachers taught me. I’m reading “The Little Prince” now. Once I’m done, I will read “My Sweet Orange Tree”.

\*\*\*\*\*

In one of the sections of the library, visually impaired persons are given computer classes. The aim is to help them learn how to use a computer with the help of an audio assistance system. Thereby, their chances of finding jobs increase greatly.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Interview with a computer course attendee:**

**Course attendee:** “I had a monotone life before attending this course. I was not coming to Izmir very often, my self-confidence level was very low. Now, I have more friends and I am also aware of opportunities that are provided to us. I am looking for a job currently and I come here whenever I find the time. I see my friends here. I enrolled in an distance learning program at high school. These are the changes I experienced after coming here.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Gultekin Yazgan never gave up when faced with difficulties. He achieved so many great things; things that even people who are able to see may hesitate to dare trying.

He is a great hero in the eyes of many visually impaired persons. And therefore, a famous author from Turkey, Dogan Cuceloglu, wrote about the Changemaking story of Gultekin Yazgan and his wife in his latest book.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with Doğan Cüceloğlu:**

**Doğan Cüceloğlu:** “You can feel the love in their story. They have a strong sense of love. They love living and being productive. They cling to life and strive to become the best they can. And they do this with a great deal of enthusiasm. They are unsung heroes and they want to change our understanding of what a real hero should be like.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Gultekin Yazgan and his wife, Tulay Yazgan were also caring parents. They raised Yanki Yazgan, a wellknown psychologist in Turkey and Cagri Yazgan, again a wellknown psychiatrist. Moreover, they strived to be the parents of thousands of visually impaired persons from all across Turkey.

Today, the library they have set up with the help of 16 friends of theirs serves around 3,000 people. Run entirely by hardworking volunteers, this library enlightens the world of these visually impaired persons.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Interview with Gultekin Yazgan:**

**Gultekin Yazgan:** “We want to publish more magazines. Our library, the Library for the Visually Impaired, does not only consist of a pile of books. We are a library that produces books and CDs and sends these materials to all across Turkey and the world.

We want to set up a material borrowing system. We want readers to borrow books available in our library for a certain amount of time. We did not achieve this yet, however.”

\*\*\*\*\*

**Gultekin Yazgan was never left in the dark in his “blindflight” he started when he was 11. He believed that it was only his vision that were darkened, not his life in general.**

**Instead of giving up on life, he embraced his blindness and started a struggle. He made a huge difference in the lives of visually impaired persons of his generation and of many generations to come.**