

INCLUSION

Macedonian Stephen Hawking suffocated in the manacles of non-inclusive society

Honesty and modesty are my paramount principles. To be guided into good deeds it is not important what kind of body shapes up your soul, but what kind of soul fills up your body.

Maja Ravanska

A middle-aged man who has the ability to memorize hundreds of numbers very quickly as soon as he sees them. The person who is the only holder of the title of International correspondence chess master in Macedonia. He has an unpublished 500-page novel behind him, he has written short stories and poetry, but he did not find himself in our closed literacy circles, so he sought a new field of interest- the Internet. He is one of the pioneers of setting up hosting servers in our country. Even though he has not spent a single day in school, his above-average intelligence helps him explore, search for new interests and dedicate himself to different segments of science.

People say he is the Macedonian Stephen Hawking. Our hero in this story, Risto Donev, was born and lives in Skopje. He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy since he was a baby.

- As a consequence of the disease, I have not been able to use my hand nor my leg for 53 years of my life. It makes me totally dependent on the care of my dedicated parents and my brother, who is 11 years younger than me. The examinations of expert medical commissions found me to be 100 percent physically disabled, but have above-average intelligence, Donev says.

As many people present him as the Macedonian Stephen Hawking, I asked him, if this comparison pleases him or he identifies himself with some other genius?

-I simply identify myself with my strong persistence, which makes me try to prove that I can also achieve valuable things in life, regardless of the difficulties I face. Honesty and modesty are my paramount principles and my motto is: To be guided into good deeds it is not important what kind of body shapes up your soul, but what kind of soul fills up your body.

Macedonia is unfortunately a country in which inclusion of people with disabilities and social inclusion in general is poorly developed, Donev says.

-I will tell you about my case, since I have known about myself, no social worker has ever come to visit me, check how and where I live, it is as if I did not exist at all.

Following the advice of a doctor-specialist, I asked the social services that I be exempted from participation fee for medical examinations, but I was rejected with the tragic-comical explanation that my disability does not entitle me to such right. For similar reasons, I am not entitled to a battery operated wheelchair, he says.

He wrote a 500-page novel with one finger

Donev explains that he acquired basic knowledge at home under the care of his parents, and both his ambition and persistence, combined with his above-average intelligence helped him become a well educated person, who in certain areas can be compared with higher education intellectuals. Donev says he could not hold a pencil in his hand, but he had the desire to write.

-Seeing this, my parents bought me a typewriter and my dad made a special grid for its letters. Thus, he adjusted it so I could write in the only possible way, and that is by using just the index finger of my left hand. The happiness that I felt for the opportunity to show my abilities through writing was by far stronger than the difficulty of barely writing with a single finger- Donev says.

He explains that the large number of books he read stimulated his desire to write prose and poetry. He began with songs, short stories and completed a novel of about 500 pages.

-However, I did not have an opportunity to publish any of my works and I sought to occupy myself elsewhere. I have had special affinities to combinatory since I was a child and I constantly figured out my own games with numbers. This led me to creating lottery systems, sports prognosis and other games of chance. It did not take me long to get to the essence of this and find innovative solutions, which I used to make systems remain without the last unnecessary combination, without reducing their guarantees. The fact that they were regularly published in specialized magazines from prominent states in the world speaks of their quality - Donev says.

“Donev Server” among the hosting pioneers in the country

The emergence of computers and the Internet opened up new horizons for him, and he explored this area and moved on independently, introducing his own original solutions. There were only 2-3 hosting companies in Macedonia about 15 years ago and to overcome the deficit of domain registration and web site hosting Donev decided to dedicate himself to this activity.

-My hosting company, "Donev Server", was the first such private company in Macedonia and among the rarest in the world providing services of this kind at the time. I was not afraid of work, and I won the trust of the interested clients with low prices and high quality services, Donev explains and adds that after suffering hacker attacks at the servers he was hosting, he was forced to give up any further hosting. Donev is now working on a new Guinness record in memorizing hundreds of numbers.

-I have the ability to memorize in only 20 minutes hundreds of numbers being written by someone. Then, without seeing them, I can tell them precisely and successively, in all directions literally: from left to right and vice versa, from top to bottom and vice versa, in all diagonals, etc. I plan to improve this ability even more, and if an opportunity arises, make it official by registering it as a Guinness world record.

International correspondence chess master

Chess is his passion, and he is the only man in our country who holds the title of International correspondence chess master. Donev explains that chess requires extraordinary combinatory, so it was not any coincidence that chess attracted him when he was a child.

-I could not hold and move the figures on the chessboard, but my father adjusted them somehow so that I could do it. Even though I learned from chess literature on my own, my progress went very fast and there was another problem soon as I could not compete with anyone else. I was overjoyed when I learned there was an organized competition in correspondence chess, which is played just like the ordinary type, only the moves are sent with letters by mail. I immediately applied for my first tournament, and since then I have had the chance to play with scientists and various artists from around the world, and I was the only one being physically handicapped among all of them— he explains.

He adds that he wrote the moves on a typewriter. He played a total of 10 tournaments, he won seven first places, two second and one third place.

-I was invited and successfully played in the competitions of the national team of my country in correspondence chess. My greatest accomplishment was in the singles championship, when I became the senior state champion and won the right to play at the World Cup for singles. In this World Cup I competed against very strong world-class chess players and had additional motivation to prove my ability, and at the end I won the title of International Correspondence Chess Master – the first and still the only title of this rank in Macedonia - he says.

He did not receive any support from the appropriate structures in Macedonia and, as he says, with heavy heart, he stopped playing correspondence chess.

-I am particularly indignant since the responsible authorities in the Agency of Youth and Sport in Macedonia do not implement the law correctly and do not recognize my chess achievements, avoiding thus to give me the well –deserved sports pension. I have strong evidence of my results which are in compliance with world standards, in addition to the fact that I achieved my results in extraordinary circumstances, as the only physically disabled among all other healthy competitors. This sole fact is regarded by many realistic people as a feat, as if I swam La Manche without hands and legs, Donev explains.

Frame:

Donev in “Pristapnost” (Accessibility)

Donev’s portrait was part of the photo exhibition “**Pristapnost**” (Accessibility), which presented photo stories portraying challenges and successes of people with disabilities in Macedonia and Sweden. The focus of this exhibition, organized by the Swedish Embassy in the country, in cooperation with the Swedish Institute, was on the possibilities of people with special needs and how their disabilities do not prevent them from doing and working what they want. The photos from the Macedonian part of exhibition were taken by Tomislav Georgiev, while Nebojsa Ilijevski from “Holistic” set up the concept and wrote the stories about each of the portrayed people.