

“You thru my eyes”

a date with Laura Giardina

To contribute to the condition of low vision awareness day, Laura Giardina wanted to meet us to tell her story and let us know how she sees the world through her eyes.

Low vision is a reduction of the field of vision that has considerable consequences on one's everyday life. It can be caused by a variety of factors, may them be genetic or after-acquired. Vision can get significantly reduced as a result of pathologies which can damage several ocular structures (cornea, retina and even the optic nerve). Low vision can be associated to diseases such as advanced glaucoma, which damages the optic nerve and eventually ends up in a “tunnel” like vision ; or it could affect the macula , a spot near the centre of the retina, it causes the loss of central vision. Serious low vision can lead to blindness , which can be absolute or partial.



October 15th is the "**White Cane Day**" that is a day dedicated to low vision awareness. The aim is to make people become sensitive to the importance of the white cane for not only blind people, but also for the ones diagnosed with low vision. The white cane helps them achieve independence and greater mobility , allowing them to participate in a more active way in our society.

Thursday, December 5th the editors of "**Detto tra noi – FG info al top**" invited a painter who suffers from low vision: Laura Giardina. The meeting has been organised in order to participate in the consciousness campaign regarding the white cane. The white cane it's a very important device which should be used by both blind people and the ones with low vision to autonomously move around without any problems. Not everyone knows what the conditions of low vision are though, so Laura came to our school to tell us, even better: to show us!

The first thing we did was to watch a film regarding some vision disabilities , created by the "**Swiss National Association of and for the blind**". It was a very interesting experience because we learned that there are different kinds of maladies that can damage the eyes: colour blindness,



The Editorial Staff: 2^F 2^G & teacher Benaglia



scotoma, tunnel vision, eye twitch. They're all rather serious and prevent one from moving around comfortably in either an internal or external environment.

Laura told us that she was born this way, with tunnel vision, but she only realised it when she was 27, after running some tests while pregnant with her first child.

For her, seeing in the way she did, with a narrowed field of vision, was normal, she couldn't imagine that one could see better than that.

After several years Laura discovered the white cane and from that moment on it became her best friend. It helps her locate obstacles (objects, steps, people) and to avoid them.

With the cane she can go out without having to be accompanied all the time, she's free to walk around without fearing to trip or bump into someone or something.

She told us that it hasn't been easy at all to accept her condition, especially for her family, that wouldn't understand her difficulties and she wouldn't admit that she had any, that she couldn't do things at the same pace as people with normal vision do.

We all thought the same : it's hard to imagine the way Laura sees and feels, how could we really understand what she goes through every day if we all see well?

At this point, Laura took out something from a box that she brought in with her: low vision simulators!

In two words they're goggles with special lenses: the simulate a defect in the field of vision, from the least to the most serious. They've been created by **Marshall Flax**, an American man who, with his little company "**Fork in the road**", manufactures these goggles to make low vision understandable for everyone.



Laura Giardina



And so the most interesting part of this meeting began, when we wore the goggles and walked around the classroom with our white canes.

It was very strange, many of us felt uncomfortable, not in balance, insecure and even a little scared to walk into something. We had the feeling that we couldn't move, we couldn't see what was near, around us or in the distance.

Even our teacher Benaglia wanted to try them on but she didn't look comfortable either.

We've also learned how to use the white cane, it is a very handy object, you can fold it up and keep it in your bag, when you need it it's enough to remove the rubber band and it unfolds itself perfectly (better to double check though, just to be sure).

Laura found a way to make us see through her eyes, to feel what she feels. It was very intense, no one would've imagined it would be so.

The second part of the meeting was more fun because Laura had set up a table with all the necessary to make ourselves a snack. There was bread, cheese, ham, Nutella, jam and beverages. There were white, blue and orange plates and cups.

All that to make us understand how important the contrast of colours is to better see and manage to make us our own snack.

We have to admit that not everything went as smoothly as we thought , some accidents occurred (for instance someone spilled his drink, someone dropped his cutlery on the floor thinking he was putting them on the table and so on) but we eventually made it and with great satisfaction! It's pointless to specify that Nutella was the first one to go, together with the beverages.

To end in style we wore our masks (the ones we made during art lessons) and we went to brush our teeth...



Something we do every day, it's true, but always being able to see well and taking for granted that it's something that everyone can do, but we discovered that it's not that easy. What ? You don't believe us? Try it then, and you'll understand what we mean when we say that it's not that easy to do every day life's things when you can't see well. After what we saw we believe that nothing should ever be taken for granted. It depends on one's possibilities and one's will to react to difficulties.

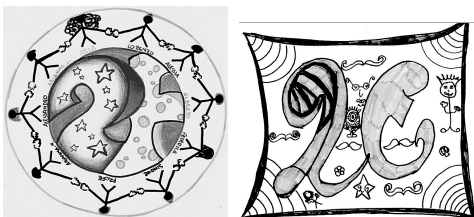
The best thing that Laura taught us is that we need to accept ourselves for what we are and that self-pity doesn't lead to anywhere, you need to respond, you need to find a way to live life to the fullest despite your limits.

And we got to the end to our experience with "You through my eyes", we took some group photos with our masks on, they came out well, didn't they?

Thanks to Laura for being with us and for sharing her vision of the world with our editors.

We'll never forget it.

By the Editorial Staff



The Editorial Staff with Laura Giardina and Barbara Favaro (project manager)

LA STORIA DEL BASTONE BIANCO

Da sempre il bastone, non sempre bianco, è stato utilizzato dai ciechi di ogni tempo per identificare ed evitare gli ostacoli durante il loro cammino. In tal senso numerose sono le testimonianze letterarie nel corso della storia. Il merito di aver compreso l'importanza e l'efficacia della colorazione bianca è rivendicato dagli inglesi, dagli americani, ma soprattutto dai francesi. I primi riferiscono come il fotografo di Bristol James Biggs, nel 1921, dopo aver perso la vista per un incidente stradale, avrebbe deciso di colorare di bianco il proprio bastone allo scopo di renderlo maggiormente appariscente durante gli attraversamenti. La sua intuizione tuttavia non ebbe grande seguito se non a livello locale. Le medesime considerazioni possono valere per l'americano George Bonham il quale, nel 1930, pare si sia attivato per sensibilizzare i LIONS CLUBS sull'opportunità di distribuire bastoni bianchi ai ciechi della città di Peoria nello stato dell'Illinois. Ben di più fece, invece, almeno per la pubblicizzazione dello strumento, la nobildonna parigina Guilly D'Herbemont (1893-1992). Essa pare abbia preso spunto dal colore delle palette utilizzate dai vigili urbani della capitale francese. "Se tutte le auto", pensò, "notano anche da lontano i segnali delle guardie, e li rispettano, sarebbe certamente utile dotare i non vedenti di bastoni bianchi ben evidenti". Così la D'Herbemont realizzò, nel 1931, cinquemila copie dell'ausilio, e li distribuì gratuitamente ad altrettanti ciechi. Il successo fu immediato e l'uso del bastone bianco si diffuse rapidamente in tutto il mondo.