Written by Malika BASSI

**Once upon a time Oran’s “small reader”**

Oran – “The trip to a thousand places starts with a step” is the motto adopted by “Le petit lecteur” (small reader), an association striving, since its creation in 1993 in Oran, to spread the love for reading in children and youths.

In spite of the competition of the educational and leisure programmes broadcast by satellite TV channels, the Internet and its magic world reachable through the click of a mouse, and that of audio and video aids providing a variety of fairylike worlds to children, this association, unique in its kind in the province of Oran, continues its relentless mission of making children love reading.

“Le petit lecteur” is based in Zeddour Brahim Palace of Arts and Culture. Its members want to revive the love of reading, which was threatened to vanish into the air of new multimedia and communication technologies.

With a library of more than 14.000 books, the association welcomes every day children, aged between 4 and 14, seeking to plunge into the world of tales, fairies and princes. These budding readers can read there or borrow books for durations not exceeding 15 days, one of association’s heads pointed out.

In this context, the association which aspires to materialise the principle of “reading for all,” opened annexes through the province’s municipalities. Reading spaces were as such set up a few years ago in Ain El Bya and Gdyel to help their kids revise their lessons and to have a good time turning the pages of fairy tales, said another of its members.

"Le Petit lecteur" has several scientific and cultural workshops, like that dedicated to the environment, tales and reading, heritage and computer technology, to help members develop their knowledge with the contribution of local and national associations.

The various partnership initiatives between this association and its foreign colleagues helped fulfil a certain number of projects, including the opening over a year ago of a library for youths at the heart of the popular district of Sidi Lahouari, thanks to funds from the European Commission within the framework of the MEDA programme of support for associations.

This library has a database of 6,560 books, 50 CD’s and 4.895 documents. The library also counts 7,000 books, a donation made up of 2,219 books in Arabic, 5,315 books in French and 4 in Tamazight. Its members’ will is to fulfil a long lasting dream, that of getting into the publishing market.

In this connection, 20 books have been published, including 15 currently available in bookshops and 6 others published within the framework of the activities of “Djazaïr, Algeria’s year in France.”

Books like “Foulfoul, the small white chick”, “The moon’s wedding” and “The adventures of the small fish,” “help children travel into a magic world made of colours, softness before coming out of it perky, with a light heart and armed with good morals, that which ends the stories that our grandmothers used to tell us when we were kids,” said a member.

Thanks to the funds of support for creation, the association received in 2005 and 2006 a subsidy from the Ministry of Culture for the publication of 13 books. It also managed, thanks to funds provided by the European Commission and Swiss association “Shahrazed,” to translate tales and educational books from French into Arabic, published in 2003, and to publish new books to enrich its own library.

Tireless, "Le Petit lecteur" won’t stop there as it plans, with the assistance of the youth and sports management, to organize in March a festival dedicated to tales and stories for children that always start with “Once upon a time….”

This event, supported by the European Commission and aiming at the promotion of reading, will be the occasion to present about thirty books of tales from Algeria, Europe and Africa. (APS) 26/01/2007

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