

## REVIEW ABOUT GIGI FORTE'S BOOK ENTITLED „HUMANITY”

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### A recenzió alapjául szolgáló mű:

Gigi Forte (2021): *Emberség*. Bakháza: Newline Kiadó. ISBN: 978-615-6373-32-8

**Kulcsszavak:** cerebrális bénulás, általános oktatás, fogyatékossgal élők integrációja

**Diszciplína:** pedagógia

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**Discipline:** pedagogy

### Abstract

This book review presents Gigi Forte's autobiographically inspired 458-page book *Humanity*. The heroine of the story is Emma Erős, who was born with cerebral palsy. The author of the book review, Dr. Adrienn Oravecz, who was also born with cerebral palsy, consciously chose the quotes in the review, trusting that they will make the readers think. On the one hand, the book can also be read as a developmental novel, because the reader is involved in the story from the moment of Emma's birth until the end of her university studies. On the other hand, it is also excellent as a characterization, since in the work we get to know many teacher characters and their attitude towards Emma's disability. Quoting the

writer's words the main message is the following: "I hope that Emma's character can serve as an example for my young peers that they can achieve their goals even against the odds, if they believe they can." (Gigi Forte, 2021, 458. ).

### Absztrakt

#### RECENZIO GIGI FORTE (2021) „EMBERSÉG” CÍMŰ KÖNYVÉRŐL

Jelen könyvismertető Gigi Forte önéletrajzi ihletésű *Emberség* című 458 oldalas könyvét mutatja be. A történet hősnője Erős Emma, aki cerebrális parézissel született. A könyv ismertető szerzője Dr. Oravecz Adrienn, aki szintén cerebrális parézissal született, így tudatosan választotta ki a recenzióban szereplő idézeteket, bízva abban, hogy elgondolkodtatásra készíti az olvasókat. A könyv egyrészt fejlődésregényként is olvasható, mert az olvasó Emma születése pillanatától kapcsolódik be a történetbe egészen az egyetemi tanulmányok végéig. Másrészt jellemrajzként is kiváló, hiszen az írásműben megismerhetünk számos pedagóguskaraktert és az ő hozzáállásukat Emma fogyatékoságához. Az írásmű legfőbb üzenete az író szavait idézve: „*Remélem, fiatal sorstársaim számára Emma karaktere példaként szolgálhat arra, hogy még az árral szemben is elérhetik céljaikat, ha elhiszik, hogy képesek rá.*” (Gigi Forte, 2021, 458.)

Gigi Forte's newest book *Humanity or excerpts from the memories of Emma Erős* autobiographically inspired writing that can also be considered as a novel of development, because we can follow the story of the main character Emma Erős from the moment of her birth until the end of her university studies. The unusual story of Emma in the book first starts from the perspective of her mother Laura, which is revealed to the reader in the book's prologue. This episode depicts that an emergency caesarean section is needed because Emma is breech. After hours of despair, the parents decide to help Emma overcome the disadvantages caused by premature birth, supporting her development both physically and mentally.

Then the story is narrated by the protagonist Emma after the prologue, until the end of the book. Since her parents took Emma's limited mobility for granted, it was at the elementary school opening ceremony that Emma realized for the first time that she was different from the other students. Her class teacher put her in front of the gathered crowd and asked her to tell about herself and her illness of cerebral palsy. During the

elementary school period, she makes several friends, including Dénes Kedves, who supports Emma throughout the novel as a heroic knight and as a true friend. But this period also confronts the female protagonist with the fact that she cannot participate in physical education classes or that she learns to write much more slowly than her classmates. In the course of the work, we became aware of the characteristics of her teachers, including her primary school teacher. The novel can also be read as a kind of social sketch, where we get to know different types of teachers and their attitudes towards disability. The main character's primary school teacher is not a likable personality. She has outbursts of anger, is always impatient, and she is especially annoyed by Emma's slowness and clumsiness.

In the series of reminiscences about elementary school, it is worth devoting some time to the chapters on knee surgery and recovery from it. Those who were not born with cerebral palsy, like the reviewer of this book, cannot even imagine the great trials, especially mentally, of such corrective intervention. In such cases, just like Emma in the

novel I always hoped that after such an operation I will get better. I will no longer stand out from my classmates due to my disability. This hope was expressed very touchingly by the narrator: „*The thought that I could run, that I would be able to freely do what other children my age did give me courage... I was optimistic, I wasn't afraid at all. I could see myself running with the others, and I could see my adult self walking down the street in high heels in a pretty dress.*” (Gigi Forte, 2021, 62.)

The writer devoted the most attention to Emma's high school years and what happened there. High school years are not easy for an average healthy teenager. Adolescence holds even more challenges for the main character whose first difficulties are caused by separation from her parents and moving to a dormitory. „*I waited for the new school full of sincere enthusiasm, illusions, and hopes. I imagined the fun dormitory life, the laughing girls, and I saw myself among them. I was sure that every year I would become smarter, more skillful, and more independent from my parents; until suddenly I realized that I had grown up... One day all dreams come to an end. The fog that my parents had waded in front of me quickly dissipated from my eyes.*” (Gigi Forte, 2021, 123-124). „*I was usually left out from the team evening games because most of them were sports activities that I could only watch.*” (Gigi Forte, 2021, 129).

In the face of the rejecting and often hurtful behavior of her classmates, Emma Erős, just like me, escapes into learning a foreign language and becomes by far the best in Italian, which is, of course, frowned upon by the majority of the class community. As a language teacher with a disability, I see foreign language knowledge even more important for people with disabilities; because it gives them confidence and courage. I would not have dared to travel abroad with my canes during my PhD studies without my confident knowledge of English.

The next difficulty for her is mastering the mathematics curriculum. In my opinion, this chapter contains one of the key messages of the

author to her reading public „*After my fourth failure on the test, this otherwise nice, albeit slightly eccentric teacher advised us to go to the educational counselor and try to get them to exempt me from the obligation to attend maths classes. My parents took me to the educational counselor. We were in several places, I had to take part in a million examinations, and in the end, it turned out that there was no need to exempt me from mathematics, I just needed to be provided with the possibility of the individual extra lesson and I had to practice a lot... Suddenly, even though the others were less mature, I became the child with special needs in the strictest sense of the word. To put it simply, I was the child with a problem and this knowledge paralyzed me. I think that was the time when I really started to become aware of the fact that I am a disabled person. I understood that my mobility problem will not only mean that I will not be able to go skiing or ice skating with my family. It is not that I can not be a ballet dancer, an actress, or even a long-distance Olympian, but that somehow I will always be at a disadvantage compared to other people in all areas of life. All of this means that it will be harder for me to achieve my goals. When I finally understand this, I realized that the word difficult does not mean impossible.*” (Gigi Forte, 2021, 157-158). Unfortunately, during my studies, just like the main character of the novel, I experienced countless times that the teachers chose the easier way and therefore recommended various subject exemptions for me. Fortunately, my family always stood by me and did not allow me to give up something because I could not do it for the first time. In such cases, they practiced with me for several hours after school. For example, My twin sister regularly helped me with math homework. The more people told me that I could not do this or that, the more motivated I was to prove to the many doubting Thomases around me that I was indeed capable of it. I truly believe that determination and faith always bring the expected success and impossible is always possible in the end.

The third large unit of the book covers the university years. This is the part with the most positive tone, where Emma Erős will be strong

not only in her name but also in her personality. Her life purpose is defined. This is the second most important saying by the author. *“By the time, my purpose in life had expanded: I figured out that I wanted to use my experiences to help children and young adults with a similar fate to mine, setting an example for them, encouraging them to show the world that even people with limited mobility can integrate into the society of the twenty-first century. They are able to learn and achieve remarkable results. They are able to work, take care of their daily routines, and, most importantly, they are able to love their fellow human beings and require the love of others, just like everyone else. I felt that I could achieve that goal just by standing up and working as a teacher since the healthy child whom I would teach for years would already be able to let go of thinking full of prejudices. I did not exclude from the idea of eventually giving sensitizing lectures to healthy children and telling them my story.”* (Gigi Forte, 2021, 399.). I also wanted to realize similar ideas, which I could not succeed as a teacher, but as a researcher, I finally could. During my PhD studies, I gave sensitizing lectures many times here in Hungary

and abroad, mostly in connection with World Cerebral Palsy Day. Certainly, we still have a lot to do here in Hungary regarding equal opportunities for people with disabilities. I think we should make our voices heard more and assert our rights. To stand up for ourselves more courageously in the world of education and work.

I left the recommendation at the end of the book review. To my peers with cerebral palsy and other disabilities, I wish them to draw strength and courage from Gigi Forte's book *Humanity*. I would like to recommend this novel to my colleagues in pedagogy so that they not only see disability, but also try to discover the strengths of students with disabilities and help them develop their talents. There is a germ of divine talent in everyone, even students with disabilities.

Gigi Forte was given the power of words by God to open the frozen heart of mainstream society I trust that love will slowly permeate the reader's heart while reading her novel.