Bicherhaischen: 20 Years in the Service of Young Readers

For almost 20 years, Bicherhaischen has been an integral part of community life in Niederanven. What began in 2006 as a committed idea has grown over the years into a well-established destination for children, teenagers, parents and schools from across the country. Behind this success stands Laurence Hilger-Weber, who turned her passion for books into her profession and can now look back on two decades filled with stories, encounters and memorable moments.

For Laurence, the magic of a good children's book begins at first sight. Illustrations, an attractive design and a cover that invites readers to start browsing are just as important as the content itself. "You need to feel the urge to keep reading. A book has to draw you into its world," she explains. In her view, that is exactly what makes a good book: a story you simply do not want to put down.

Sometimes the best ideas emerge from a very specific need. That was also the case with Bicherhaischen. After studying in Spain and completing training in administration and finance, Laurence Hilger-Weber knew that she wanted to become self-employed. As she repeatedly heard from friends and family that there were very few specialised bookshops for children and young people in the area, an idea gradually took shape: a bookshop entirely dedicated to young readers.

When the shop opened its doors in December 2006, the response was immediately positive. The commune, its residents and the first customers welcomed the project with great enthusiasm. Although the number of books has remained relatively stable over the years, the range on offer has changed considerably. Demand for Luxembourgish books has increased significantly. Works in the Luxembourgish language have become increasingly important, and many parents appreciate being able to read bedtime stories to their children without having to translate them.

Over the years, Bicherhaischen continued to grow. In 2010, a second world opened its doors with the addition of "Spillgezei". The idea came directly from customers who were looking not only for exciting books but also for quality toys. At the same time, the shop had simply become too small. The extension therefore not only broadened the offer but also provided additional space for storage and logistics.

In 2016, another project close to Laurence's heart was launched with "Editioun Bicherhaischen®". The idea arose during a conversation with her mother-in-law and her mother-in-law's best friend, who had written and recorded children's songs together in the 1970s. This creative heritage inspired the first book published by Laurence's own publishing house. The volume featured a selection of children's songs recorded with two children's choirs and illustrated by a friend from her student days. The response was so enthusiastic that a second edition was needed very quickly. It remains a cherished memory for Laurence to this day. Although publishing activities have become quieter in recent years, the books that were published continue to sell well.

Behind the scenes, running a bookshop involves far more work than many people imagine. Stocktaking, orders, themed displays, seasonal campaigns and preparations for new releases occupy a large part of every day. With a smile, Laurence says: “People sometimes think that I sit behind the cash desk and read all day, but that’s not the case.”

Personal advice is one of the cornerstones of Bicherhaischen. Laurence and her colleague take the time to find the right book for every child. Their extensive experience, combined with close relationships with customers, helps them do just that. Many families have been visiting the shop for years, and it is not uncommon for former young customers to return with children of their own.

These personal connections are also what anchor Bicherhaischen within the commune. As a native of Niederanven, Laurence never considered opening her shop anywhere else. Over the years, she has organised readings, brought authors to Luxembourg and worked closely with schools and the cultural centre. One particularly memorable highlight was the visit of German children’s author Ingo Siegner, whose reading session delighted countless young listeners. Supporting Luxembourgish literature is also a major priority. For Laurence, it is essential that children can discover stories in their mother tongue. That is why Bicherhaischen offers not only a wide range of original Luxembourgish works, but also an increasing number of high-quality translations.

Its 20th anniversary therefore holds special significance for her. When she started the project, no one could have known whether it would still exist two decades later. Despite an increasingly digital world, she remains convinced that books will keep their place. Children in particular continue to enjoy holding, browsing and discovering a real book.

Looking to the future, Laurence has one main wish: that everything continues as it has so far, with loyal customers, countless fascinating stories and new generations of readers. For her, the success of Bicherhaischen is above all thanks to the people who have supported the bookshop over the past twenty years. As she puts it herself: “The success of Bicherhaischen lies with its customers.” A beautiful statement that perfectly sums up what Bicherhaischen is today: much more than just a bookshop. A place filled with stories, enthusiasm and human connections.