

Schnellhefter - a basic, simple tool for gathering, keeping safe and in order of appearances / importance / [insert any chosen word here] – a coloured plastic sheet, folded and paired with a clear front and metal clips: the common A4 folder. Any pupil, student or, well everyone who had to keep things collected and safe will have come across one of them in their life time, and if they haven't, they will at some point during their time on this planet – I'm almost certain.

My story begins with my time back in primary school. I chose this point in time as entering primary school is often seen as a big step in a child's world – but it is not necessarily the first time I came across one of these coveted plastic keep-sakes. My school was a beautiful old building, with really high ceilings, a marble staircase, big heavy wooden doors and awesome large windows. So when you sit in one of these rooms on a small creaky wooden chair, at a pond green Formica covered table with loads of other kids you've never really seen, you really wonder why you are there and not in a massive sandbox playing or finger painting a large roll of wallpaper...well, at least I did... but the teachers have a rather clever way of engaging you (or basically ripping you away from your fantasy world and dropping you in this cold and results-driven daily life) : they give you *homework*.

Yes, homework – the stuff of (almost) every first grader's dreams and every older pupil's nightmares... not really sure when this switch happens, but it does and it's painful, very painful!

Your first tasks might have included colouring in a picture of a teddy bear holding a pen in its paw or painting a bunch of flowers in the brightest colours your acrylics will generate, but you feel like you're actually learning things you didn't know before. And then comes the reading, writing and counting...and now you either fall into the "I'm very keen" or the "I can handle this without anything new" category. If you fall into the latter, by now you begin to think that you don't really need to know all this stuff. I mean, why would you, you survived up to now not being able to read or write and you can continue this life style. And well, if you fall into the first category, you just cannot wait to get started. But my point being, that whatever

group you chose, the teachers are there with their teaching. At my school, we had a colour system to teach us order, organisation and very possibly annoyance. Each lesson was associated with a colour: red for German, blue for Maths, yellow for religion, green for geography and so on, if there are anymore lessons... If I remember correctly, you were allowed to chose the colour for art education....so I think loads of girls had pink or purple while the boys had black or silver or whatever was available. And this is where it gets annoying: all your notebooks and workbooks for each lesson had to be wrapped in the specific associated colour and you had to have a plastic folder for all your hand-outs and loose leafed-in formations. Seriously? Seriously. Those teachers created a colour coordinated system of information and threw all of us into this rather disturbing new world. And at this point I began to dislike blue and red and favour green and yellow.... I can however see now where all these nation stereotypes come into play...And you made sure that you and your newly acquired knowledge fitted into this colour system, because if you had a green folder for let's say Maths (let me remind you the colour is blue – and a dark blue, not one of these fancy lighter blues, no a dark and depressing blue), you received a lecture on how you cannot learn anything from being sloppy and you will need to be organised for the rest of your life and blah bah blah and if it happen more than once, you were handed a polite note to take home to your parents. Cold German primary school reality. And the economy benefited from this categorising as well: what started each autumn and continued until spring time the following year was a mass-flooding, over-populating of coloured plastic folders. Every shop you could buy writing equipment or stationery items, you would find (not too sure how it is these days, but will check next time I'm back in Home'land) you would find a table or corner of shelf specifically designated to the common plastic folders. All kinds, colours and qualities whatever you could imagine... but the most common purchased versions must have been the multi-pack: the dream of very mother/father/primary caregiver. Usually twelve flimsy, but not too cheap looking plastic folders: four red, three blue, three

yellow and two green Schnellhefter. I did however once wonder why there would always be an almost overload of red folders, but then conclude it must be because we all write load in our German lesson and hence we needed four red folders in one of these multi-packs. My idea held up until I found out that in other schools they would use yellow for German lessons and red for Maths and purple for geography and who knew what else ... but by then the cold and harsh school routine had gotten hold of me with those icy and long fingers and I had lost my inspiration to investigate this colour situation further. Thankfully, I got hold of my motivational drives later on in my school career and took charge of situations and explorations again.

However, once the folders were introduced into my life, they stayed with me. Let's talk GCSE's and A-Levels (well, the German equivalent), actual A-Levels (once I moved to the UK), various coursework, general collections of information, undergraduate essays on art and gender, Saussure and Derrida, recipes and notes, well anything in paper form actually. Once you are old and knowledgeable enough, you go to secondary school and quite often, you are allowed to choose your own lesson-organisation-system, as long you can provide evidence of administrative talents, well mostly homework. And once again, the crowds split: you get the rebels that completely throw all the colours out of the window and mix them up, so Maths now is green and German blue and the colour for the new and eagerly awaited lesson: English, become pink and religion white and no one really is able to keep track of them as they often change depending on the mood or the shopping situation on the open market and the spending behaviour of the primary caregiver (if they still give a damn at this point) and you get the nerds that stay with the system "because it works". You might even find a rebel that comes back to Geek'land because they lost any form of organisation, but that is rare, which does not say it never happens, or a nerd that discovers new found radical behaviour, but who are we kidding here....this is just life now and one's own position in the daily routines.

But back to those thin layers of plastic covering piles of paper, holding them together for easier transport, storage or just because, seem to be a powerful part of (my) daily life, even though the mental connection of a red folder and German grammar still exists, or the dislike of blue folders and the disturbing thought of calculators and numbers seems to haunt one from time to time.

And while those boring looking plastic have become filled with knowledge and paper goods, they also have become loaded with stories and histories, both in the physical and mental worlds. Everyone who has come into contact with one of them will have some form of opinion, story, memory or connection to tell and share, be it a long and detailed monologue, a heated debate or a quick comment, any recollection, written down or verbal, "every object has a story".

So next time you see one of these hi/story-loaded things, sit back, stand up, roll around , ... and let it tell its tale.