

Creativity Talk For All Faiths September 30, 2018

Creativity is one of the many gifts we bring with us each time we are born into a human lifetime. For me, the key to my creativity was my best friend when I was 6. It was the four foot tall floor model Zenith radio in our front room. I got to know it's huge 12-inch diameter, many-handed dial which put all the stations, even the mysterious short wave, at my finger tips. Lying on my back in front of the radio, I listened to nation-wide networks with schedules filled with such as Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy, The Shadow, The Whistler and even some kids programs like the Green Hornet and Let's Pretend where I heard my first song lyrics: *If you go down in the woods today, you'd better go in disguise because every bear that ever there was will gather there for certain because today's the day the teddy bears have their picnic.*

Radio waves were filled with actors announcing, narrating and creating characters by lifting words off their scripts and breathing life into them, supported by music and sound effects. They did this without the help of stages, films or TV pictures. The final, vital ingredient in radio was the listener who, like the reader of a book, supplied her and his own imagination to co-create stories. That's why "books on tape and later on CDs" have become so popular today. *Back Then* it was radio.

I was hooked. I came to feel this was what I wanted to do when I grew up. I began doing it in school for small audiences. In fifth grade I memorized and then read over the school intercom to all classrooms Lincoln's Gettysburg address. It was February 12 back when Lincoln had his own unshared birthday, instead of sharing it with Washington on Presidents Day. Abraham Lincoln was my historical idol. He gave me my first opportunity both to express myself by reading aloud and to honor my hero by speaking his uplifting words.

In the sixth grade, on the stage of the school's gym, I narrated the program of a series of tableaux for a Christmas story titled *Why The Chimes Rang*. Mine was the only speaking part—three single spaced typewritten pages which I had memorized. I found myself acting out the lines as I read them off the printed page. By the end of the performance, my head had grown a size...or two. After the show, my mother was congratulating me when my algebra teacher sidled up and pulled the pin on the grenade she had fashioned out of her beloved algebraic equations. The explosion blew her name from my memory, leaving only her words: "If David would apply his talent for memorization to his algebra class, he would be an 'A' student." It reminded me of an earlier report card entry: "*David would be a good student if he didn't visit so much?*"

Now, I had been found out again, by my algebra teacher, doing what came naturally to me instead of what I was supposed to be doing. I didn't see then that numbers are clear, dependable, certain and, yes, just as beautiful as words. What I did see was the creative gift that I was born with; to read and write and speak words out loud.

Many years later, I ran across the following paragraph:

"For me words have colour, form, character; they have faces, ports, manners, gesticulations; they have moods, humours, eccentricities;--they have tints, tones, personalities. I am affected by the whispering of words, the rustling of the procession of letters . . . the pouting of words, the frowning and fuming of words, the weeping, the raging and racketing and rioting of words, the tenderness or hardness, the dryness or juiciness of words,-- the interchange of values in the gold, the silver, the brass and the copper of words."

That poetic paragraph comes from an Englishman named Lafcadio Hearn. I saw it in the book "Tell Me A Story" written by Charles Laughton, one of my acting heroes. Many years later, I wrote my own...Ode To Creativity.

This simple ode is to recognize the importance of creativity

Including music, art, dance, singing, prose and poetry

Medicine, teaching, gardening and other things of great utility

Whether fiction or non, stories of miracles and mystery.

Whatever your artistic abilities, ground them in simple humility

Unconditional whether ending in poverty or monetary liquidity

Whether inventing the clothespin or discovering what we call gravity

Let your imagination and dreams run wild as you pursue creativity.

Colorado Poet Laureate David Mason talks about what it means to be human. He says "imagination, dreams, spirit, delight, craziness, goofiness, chaos, dance, song--they're all important." And then he says "every gesture goes out into the world and has a life of its own. The carpenter who framed the new windows in my house in Oregon has made a new view possible for my wife and me. Now we can see more. Any kind of making or doing has this potential to give someone a wider view. A poem is a window. (His next statement reminds me of what Wayne Robinson pointed out to us more than once.) "The Super Market clerk's smile is a window." Thanks to people like Wayne Robinson and David Mason.

The importance, and sometimes difficulty finding one's gift of creativity was laid out in a 1999 Time magazine article by Michele Orecklin titled Not Suffering in Silence.

"No regular child prodigy, Marshall Ball has had to overcome much to share his gift. The 13-year-old from Austin, Texas, whose recently published book has already gone to No. 4 on Amazon.com's best-seller list, is unable to speak and barely able to move, having been born with a still undiagnosed illness. He composed the poems and thoughts in his "Kiss of God: The Wisdom of a Silent Child" by tapping on a primitive letter board. Ball's tenaciously loving parents read him literature and played him music from the time he was still an infant; by age 9, he was testing at a 12th-grade reading level. He was partial to Tolstoy. Ball offered musings that were often elliptical: He wrote, "I hope to gather thinkers / To give them my thoughts about Love / Love to clean their ideas / That cleaning might loosen the love in their hearts."

Here's an excerpt from a Time magazine article in the year 2000 titled "Coloring Outside The Lines."

"Parents who spend a lot of time encouraging their children while they are playing could be unwittingly doing more harm than good. Researchers at Baldwin-Wallace College expected to find that parents who interacted the most with their kids had the **most creative offspring**, but the opposite was true. If parents are *very involved*, the child often feels she or he is being valued and judged and **that stifles their creativity and originality**. So let children create on their own, and save the enthusiasm for the results."

Speaking of creativity, I considered myself fortunate to have been in the audience at the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall last January for a performance by the Haifa Symphony Orchestra of Israel, on its first ever U.S. tour. The concert opened with the familiar Mozart Symphony No. 40. After intermission we were treated to the exciting Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6. I'll never forget the haunting clarinet solos during this booming work. (Parenthetically, I thought of our own clarinetist, Ed Elrod).

Several of the orchestra members wore yarmulkes, including the white-bearded, stand-out timpanist in whose hands the drum sticks often became a blur of pulsing, pounding power. There's a part when one of the three trombone players lets loose with a long, deep sound that seemed to be coming from another world. Then near the end of the symphony came this deep, sustained note. It took me several seconds to identify its source...the six base violins. It was something...a musical note I had never heard before. And it lasted for several more seconds.

The orchestra's principal guest conductor, Boguslaw Dawidow, underlined *his rapture* with the final note by holding his lifted baton for a good five seconds...with orchestra members watching and waiting...before lowering his baton and accepting the applause.

Then an encore...like nothing by which I'd ever been so moved. It was played in commemoration of the Holocaust. One of the violinists removed his bow tie, came down front nearer to the conductor, and, backed by the orchestra, soloed the theme from the movie "Shindler's List." A musical moment that left a lasting imprint on my soul.

After that...who could have expected a second encore...this especially for the "American audience." The Haifa Symphony Orchestra struck up a rousing rendition of The Stars and Stripes Forever...with the Israeli conductor carefully and insistently leading the Fort Myers audience through the several spirited hand clapping sequences in sync with the music. At its conclusion, the applause--no not just applause--the roar of deep-throated approval was the biggest I've ever experienced from a Barbara B. Mann audience.

Speaking of creativity, I saw a production of "The Wizard of Oz," on the coattails of a SW Florida rip-roaring storm, perhaps like the tornado that swept Dorothy away from her Kansas home. Although I had heard of the symbolic importance of Baum's Oz story, I'd never examined it for that. I now see that "The Wizard of Oz" is full of spiritual lessons and from beginning to end.

Dorothy is swept from her (spiritual) home and separated into another physical lifetime. At the end of the story of Oz, Dorothy (and we) awaken. Here and Our time/space, us/them, sin/guilt existence on earth was a dream whose purpose—the meaning of life—was to return to God or Oneness or All That Is.

The witches represent good and evil, two each. The good witch is there, not to work magic but to *guide* Dorothy and her new friends to find what is important in their lives.

The lion has been born into the body of a creature *that represents courage* but he does not *feel* courageous. The woodman does not feel the way he reasons a person with a heart would feel. The scarecrow senses that he lacks the thinking power that others have. Each of them has progressed to the point of seeing that *something in them is missing*. The wizard was thrust into an authority position by the munchkins who are not yet ready to figure out that they must take charge of their own lives. The Wizard suspects that Dorothy's three friends already possess the God-given powers of courage, love and mind that all humans carry in their eternal souls (or higher selves).

The symbolic gifts the Wizard gives to them will help them to understand this and to operate to their potential. The lion, scarecrow and tin man remain in Oz to continue evolving spiritually.

Dorothy feels she is in the wrong place, even though she is among friends whom she has now learned to love *unconditionally*. Dorothy, who feels she has been separated from home (*eternal life with God*), remembers the cue she received from the good witch to just click her heels, and Dorothy returns home *as will we all*. What the good (that is, enlightened) witch knows is that whenever we are ready we can end the illusionary separation from our spiritual selves and *return to our spiritual home* somewhere over the rainbow.

I once watched a 12-minute video about changing oneself to become somebody else. I did that about 9 years ago. It showed me an opportunity to start creating what I'd been wanting to do for at least 20 years. I started using my gift of interpretation and expression to share stories with Shell Point residents through a program I call Listening to the Words. In it I read stories that remind listeners of what they have experienced in their own pasts *and introduce them to possibilities in the present*. I share the work of professional writers as well as non-professionals who are looking for new ways to express themselves. I show both how their written words can be interpreted and shared with others by being spoken out loud. I ask certain of my listeners to read aloud and record their own writing and/or that of others. It is not the first time I have changed or added to my creative career activities. It IS the first time in this lifetime that I am feeling change and challenge with such good results flowing into the lives of those around me.

Part of the beauty of existence is that while each human is unique, groups of them do "think alike" at times based on such as language and culture and where each stands in both physical and spiritual evolution. The best words can do is *point toward* the "wordless, timeless mystery of life"

That's one reason why meditation, which often dispenses with words, is thought to be—how can I say it in words—an effective way of experiencing the mystery or at least getting glimpses of it. It certainly is not the only way.

As for our clunking along with words, I'm reminded of the old saw about Democracy being a flawed way of governing humans but the best way we have. I'm thinking that when I was deciding what tools I would need in this lifetime, I chose words, and I'm having a good time expressing them.

One cannot speak of creativity without including our own Joan Marshall. Once upon a time, Joan was talking about her budding Broadway career. You won't be surprised that I *suggested* that she write something about it that I could include on my program. She did. And I suggested that she record it. She did. Now Joan has agreed to read it aloud. My admonition is "Listen With Your Heart, Not Just Your Ears."

THE AUDITION by Joan Marshall

It was the spring of 1958. I'd been in New York for a year and a half, studying acting with Herbert Bergoff, taking dance classes and voice lessons, performing in workshops and, like hundreds of other young theatre hopefuls, looking for my first big break. I'd spent the past three summers doing summer stock at the Starlight Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri, my hometown, and was hoping to return there to play the role of Cleo in the Frank Loesser musical "Most Happy Fella." But before I could even be considered for the role, I first had to get the approval of Frank Loesser himself.

So it was, that on this windy March day I found myself standing backstage at the Majestic Theatre waiting to audition. I planned to sing Cleo's opening number, "Ooo, My Feet." Cleo, a waitress, was a big-hearted, big-voiced Texan who was anything but shy. When they called my name, I picked up a chair I'd found in the wings, set it down center stage, plopped myself down on it and took off my shoes. Then I belted my heart out as I massaged my aching toes.

At the end of the song, a man stood up from the small group seated in the audience and said, "Where did you come from?"

I grinned and said, "Kansas City."

It was Frank Loesser, himself, and he wanted to know what else I could sing for him, so I picked a lovely soprano ballad...a total contrast to the big belt number I'd just performed...and proceeded to ooze loveliness.

He was perfectly charmed and wanted to hear everything I had brought with me. But my accompanist had another gig and couldn't stay.

I thought that was it...when suddenly – to my astonishment – a man who had been standing in the wings stepped onto the stage and said “I'll play for you.” For the next hour or so I serenaded Frank Loesser. Needless to say, I had his approval.

After the audition, the mystery accompanist who had come to my rescue introduced himself as Milt Lyons and told me he would like me to audition for the theatre where he would be directing that summer.

As it turns out, he was directing for a producer who had two music tents – one in Detroit and one in Flint, Michigan. Milt directed one company and Jay Harnick directed the other. I auditioned for both directors and they offered me a full season of leading roles...ranging from Cleo in “Most Happy Fella” to Anna in “The King and I.”

Not too bad for a 23 year old kid from Kansas City.