

Inspiration

I am tired of talking about “these uncertain economic times.” Every headline announcing another financial upset sears me with outrage that drains my positive energy. Enough already. I am on the search for fresh inspiration.

Have you ever been in one of those small groups with a well-meaning facilitator doing her best to create a moment of reflection? Imagine the scene with me. It is a circle, comfortable chairs or beanbags; the lights are low—perhaps there are candles about; there may even be nondescript, yet oddly comforting, instrumental music playing in the background. And the soft spoken facilitator, always dressed in loose clothing, says in a voice that is easy on the ears, “I want you to think about what inspires you, something you feel comfortable sharing.” Surprisingly, such


moments, designed to foster imaginative thoughts, shut me down cold. Nothing whirs. No images float to the surface. Sweat beads gently form as I imagine what in blazes I will share when it is my turn to speak.

My point is that no one can force us to be inspired. There is no guaranteed font of inspiration or setting in which inspired thoughts are assured; nothing uniform about the process or the outcomes. There is only one truth in the midst of the search: the search itself is imperative and ongoing. Whether one finds inspiration in being out in nature, wandering around art galleries, driving along a country road on a Harley, sipping wine in front of a roaring fire, or some equally delicious delight; one must search. Always.

To find inspiration, it helps to be curious. It is not a coincidence that

this is also a quality for success at Emma. The adaptive reuse construction recently completed on campus is the finest example around of an instance in which challenging the obvious led to an unconventional, yet extraordinary, outcome. It turns out that closing the tunnels has enabled us to create new, visible, community bonds. Who knew? For although the phrase “out of the box thinking” has become hackneyed of late, the concept is more in vogue and necessary than ever. We truly are living in unusual times, inventing strategies for survival as we go. Innovative thinking has become more essential than ever as the world places unexpected challenges in our path.

The recipes for fresh inspiration require that we take “the comfortable” and add “jazz” to ensure the spicy mix necessary for the flow of good thinking. When I was younger, I remember lying on my back on the lawn under the midnight sky to watch the power of the universe twinkle overhead. It was heady stuff to imagine my place in that amazing, vast space. Sad though it is to admit, if I did that today, I would most likely be dead asleep before I could locate the Big Dipper. While I have had to discover new sources of “jazz,” I have never had to search far.

What inspires me? A conversation with a smart person on a topic about which I know nothing. A passionate argument with an individual who sincerely cares about the topic of the debate. A dialogue with someone with whom I have nothing in common. My exchanges with all of you. Your lives, stories, questions—even your criticisms make me think differently. Thinking differently awakens the possible in me. What are you doing to awaken the possible in you in “these uncertain times”? (Email me at head_of_school@emmawillard.org) 

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