

DrCre8 (1998)

## "How Has the Study of Creativity Changed Your Life?"

This question was posed to be as the written part of my prelim exam for my doctorate. We have modified it somewhat for the website. When I asked Bud how creativity had changed my life, he said that my study of creativity has given me a life. Thank goodness I have someone who has been willing to go through the changes that have been a result of this journey.

On a recent trip into Houston, I asked my daughter (24) and my two sons (23 and 22) how creativity had changed my life. I thought that perhaps this would be a great place to gain perspective since mine is probably biased. However, I was met with nothing but silence.

"Well?" I questioned. My oldest son answered first, "Mom, I can't think of anything that hasn't changed since you began studying creativity. You are a different person and it's terrific! Your entire focus of life is different."

Tara replied, "I was thinking the same thing. I can't think of any area where creativity hasn't touched your life and ours."

Todd, the youngest, chimed in with, "Mom, if you hadn't taught me how to PIN, I don't know where I would be. You taught us to solve our problems and create the life that we want."

PIN is a problem solving technique. The P represents the Positive; I, the Interesting; and N, the negative. Before I would help the kids with any problem, they knew that they must PIN their problem or situation and bring those three columns of Positive, Interesting, and Negative to me. It helped them learn to think for themselves. PIN has been a great tool for me, too. My toolbox of creative thinking techniques and a change in attitudinal thinking has molded my life into something very different since 1993. I hope I can capture that journey in a somewhat sequential manner in this paper. When I graduated from the University of Texas in 1993 with my bachelor's degree in psychology, I planned to get a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology at UT, as we are very orange-blooded. And, I planned to use my degree to work with serial killers. Fortunately, Dr. Nash wandered into the Café, probably saved my life, and convinced me to take one creativity class to see if I liked it. Although I couldn't conceive of going to Aggieland, after the first summer day of that "Creative Thinking" class in Galveston, I knew that I had found my calling. A whole new world opened up for me and it was as if I was created for this degree just as much as it was created for me.

I learned to conform early in order to stay out of trouble, as most children do. I was kicked out of kindergarten for flushing baby chickens down the toilet because I wanted to stay home and watch Captain Kangaroo—but that spunky child soon went underground. Our generation did not question authority. We learned that there is one right answer for every blank and milk came in vanilla and chocolate. Creativity taught me that it was OK to ask question things, to learn how to play, to dream about possibilities, to stretch for ideas—to live my life out loud.

It didn't take long to realize that I wanted to raise my kids in an environment

where they would feel safe and enjoy tapping into their own individual creativity. Even with a Café that was open five nights a week, we made sure that we had family dinners on Monday nights. Friends were welcome. These times around the table were open discussions about life and philosophy and problems. Nothing was off-limits. I know that these times encouraged my kids to be who they are. Our home environment was extremely nurturing and authoritative. I only wish that I had begun this thinking process when they were younger but, today, they are as different as any kids could be with their own identities. I'm proud that we gave them wings to fly instead of wings that would need mending as they got older. They are certainly not perfect, but they are pretty marvelous. And, now I have a grandchild! What joy to be able to be a part of her life with this different perspective. We will make loads of art and mud pies. We will watch the clouds and Disney movies. We will read Dr. Seuss. I am blessed.

In Dr. Nash's Creative Thinking class, I began writing the cookbook, Royers Round Top Café, A Relational Odyssey. I would have never had the courage to write something without that gentle prodding that led to a beautiful finished product. After that class, life began to take on a sense of urgency that I had never felt before. "Carpe diem" became my mantra. My appetite for learning and for new experiences brought an excitement to each day. I had always been nocturnal but it was difficult to go to sleep when there were so many more new things to learn and experience. I hope that I never lose that fervor.

After that first year in graduate school, I realized that people needed to know all these great tools that I was learning—Mindmapping, CPSI Problem Solving, 5X4, Fluency, Flexibility, Tolerance of Ambiguity, Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats—the world simply must have these tools! So, I wrote and conducted my first "Creative Thinking Seminar" complete with notebook. It was held at a conference room in Round Top. Fifteen people attended. I had never considered myself to be one that would love teaching but that day I found another passion! The seminar has been through several re-writes as it has evolved into something better each time it is presented and it remains one of my most favorite of days. The success of the first seminar led to the writing of a second called "More-on Creativity". I hold the seminars at my house now about twelve times a year. Limiting the group to six people allows for intimacy and trust that cannot be achieved within the context of a large group. The last seminar that I held was with a group of six cancer survivors. None of them knew each other—it was just one of those wonderful times of synchronicity. We spent the day talking about how to live when you only have four months to live. It was a powerful day. But, I realized more than ever after that day that you should live every day of your life. So, I planned and wrote my own funeral. Who else would ever know that a playing of "Honky Tonk Woman" by the Rolling Stones was in perfect order? That purple was the color of the celebration that day? That wonderful hats should be worn? That I wanted people to laugh and to cry with stories of festivity and that I knew just who could tell these stories best? That my eight kindergarten buddies (they completed kindergarten—I joined them in first grade) should be honorary pallbearers and that my tombstone should read—"She Lived Her Life Out Loud" or "1951--???, What was important was the dash"?

The contacts made through the seminars opened up the venue of public speaking. Although I enjoy the closeness of the small creativity groups, I have enjoyed the speaking opportunities to larger audiences that have come my way. I am a tad more selective with

where I speak now. For instance, I have learned that no matter how much they pay you, it just isn't a good idea to try to teach creativity to the military. But, it has been a good idea to speak to companies like Shell Oil, Double D Ranchwear, Houston Community College, Expo Chemical, Homestead, Texas A&M Extension Services and others.

In 1997, Dr. Nash asked me to teach the "Advanced Creative Thinking Class" at the Galveston ICE Workshop. Imagine getting to teach your favorite subject for a whole week! I had never been happier and look forward to that time every year. That week we work on personal creativity because I believe that if you work on your own creativity, it can't help but overflow to the classroom.

We use the creativity problem solving methods in our business daily. I don't know where we would be without them because we always end up someplace that we never expected. We know that there is more than one way to solve a problem and look for the best solution. Last year was a time in which we worked through our failure at the Café in College Station. Although it was difficult, we have learned through that disappointment that failure is a great wellspring of creativity if you don't allow yourself to stay in the negativity. We learned more about who we are and where our focus should be. That focus has been realized this year with a six-page, sixteen picture feature story in the April issue of Country Living Magazine. We were also mentioned with the greater Round Top area in the April issues of Country Home and Southern Living. Texas Monthly Biz just named our website as one of the top 100 e-commerce sites in the state of Texas. It has been a great year so far.

There have been other overhauls of major significance. My great five-story house was painted taupe when we moved in. Now, every floor is a different color with many faux-finishes that I have learned to do. It's great therapy. The house is filled with memorable things from the Round Top area and from our travels. It is my house of memories and there is always the linger of laughter in the walls. My kids have often said, "Be careful. If she likes you, she will frame you and hang you on the wall." I used to be driven by "What will people think?" Who cares?

For several years, I have worked on "A Fear a Year." Every October I would begin thinking about what fear needing conquering that next year. One year I worked on my fear of flying. Did you know that if you yell, "Stop the plane!" as the plane is taxiing down the runway that they will? Except that they rather throw you out on the tarmac and you don't get your money back. It needed some work. So that year, I cashed in all our frequent flyer miles and flew everywhere. I've gotten to know the cockpit a little as one pilot walked through the cabin and noticed me foaming at the mouth. He took me to the cockpit and explained instrumentation. It helped but a glass of wine and a book good are the best remedies.

Last year, I begin to search for more alternative medicine for my migraine headaches and bulging disc problem in my neck that aggravates them. I do the traditional medicine because I have found a very open-minded neurologist. While this may seem like an oxymoron, he has suggested some magnificent alternatives. This led me to acupuncture and herbal remedies that have worked well. Yoga and massage therapy were already a part of my regiment. If I had not learned to look for new ways of doing things with open-mindedness, I never would have tried my latest great find which is botox injections. The doctor injects a small amount of botulism into the affected muscles. It has worked so well that I'm going back for another round of shots for the other side.

This year, I focused more on Living on the Creative Edge and put together a program to work on my personal creativity. My focus has shifted to writing and art as I realized that I have spent so much time studying about creativity and little time daring to be the artist that is within me. A couple of years ago, I wrote a little book called Random Thoughts and it has gone through two printings. I have plans to expand it further and find an agent. The first of the year, I enrolled in a writing class at the Jungian Center in Houston. It has been the impetus that I needed to see myself as a writer. With a non-judgmental air about the class and Anne Lamott's Bird by Bird, I am beginning to find my writer's voice. I have worked on a book called Life Lessons from Royers Café (see Appendix). It contains 365 one-liners that are truisms that we have learned from the Café. The View from Five Stories Up and Fifty Miles Out is another book in progress. It focuses on short stories that have occurred while living life in the country. I've also begun painting. My daughter, daughter-in-love, and I have begun making collages of memories that has launched a new business. People gather their memories from significant events in their life and send them to us—napkins, plane tickets, pictures, programs, theater tickets, dried flowers or whatever—and we render them into a large framed scrapbook to hang.

This past Antique Week, I had dinner with the editors of Country Living Magazine at the Café. They had requested the dinner meeting to discuss possibilities of doing a feature article on creativity and me. I was astounded! It was a surreal evening and one that would never have happened prior to my study of creativity. I just wouldn't have been bold enough to honor the request for dinner. At the same time, Lyle Lovett and his entourage were sitting at the next table. I couldn't help but reflect on how good life is at this moment. I was autographing copies of Country Living for customers while Lyle was autographing napkins. What an irony filled moment!

Creativity has given me courage and strength. It has given me a confidence in my purpose and my being. It has given me joy unspeakable. I've learned that Play-doh can be a great problem-solving tool. Creativity has given me friendships with people that I would never have chosen prior to this journey. It has made me believe in me. I've learned to tolerate ambiguity even though I don't particularly like it. I trust me. I couldn't say any of before that first creativity class.

Perhaps this anonymous bit of prose says it best: "The most visible creators I know of are those artist whose medium is life itself. The ones who express the inexpressible—without brush, hammer, clay or guitar. They neither paint nor sculpt—their medium is being. Whatever their presence touches has increased life. They see and they don't have to draw. They are the artists of being alive." I want to be an artist of being alive.