

Why Having A Voice Matters

The only way I know to get my power and to know what I feel is to talk about what is going on. As Dana Jack says *In Silencing the Self*, “Through voice, we locate ourselves in the world.” She explains how we do not find our identity in isolation but from being heard. Her model about personal wellbeing focuses on relatedness as opposed to self-sufficiency.

We, the people, can create a new world, but not separately. We need community to heal, to be heard in safety and courage no matter what the circumstances.

Freedom of speech is easier said than done. It requires resilience because we are not always met with agreement or without judgment. Ideally, an inner core of self-love helps so that we can be like a bouncing hairball! To stay in the ballgame of life, not give up and keep the conversation going is the beginning of change.

It’s not easy to listen well or respectfully or to speak up. I ask myself “Should I bring it up?” or I wonder if what I have to say might be too hurtful. Sometimes I go home wondering what was really said, what did they mean, what I could have clarified or what was I thinking by saying what I said?

There are many reasons not to speak up but knowing our true intention and stating it helps clarify that. It is also very helpful to make “I” statements so as not to blame and to state your needs. I know I have talked about all of this in the book, already, but I can’t help to draw a final synopsis. In other words constructive conversations could change the world.

Real conversations can occur in tiny moments each day, in thick spaces of tension when we know what is not being said, but we brave saying it, or in larger arenas when we take a deep breath and stand up for what we believe in. The other day I gulped , in the middle of lunch with an old friend and said, “ I recall feeling tension between us a year ago. “ She heaved a big sigh and thanked me and so we cleared the way.” It just takes a second,(and courage) but we were both relieved.

We need to talk to each other more than ever before.No one wants to go to jail for speaking, lose a marriage, a friendship, or a job. So, what to do? Conversation simply needs to be valued. We might find answers to big questions if we hung in there together, without the constant use of machines and technology. In large groupings or small, in neighborhoods, within the United Nations and everywhere, hairballs for days! The big world ball depends on us.

But the fear of sharing is real. Shame lurks close by when I speak up. One night, out with friends, I mentioned the name of a book and was corrected abruptly. I mispronounced the title. I was quiet for the rest of the evening, wrestling with my inner “bun lady “(the critic.) “Did I sound silly? Was I too loud? Was my excitement out of place?”

Sometimes we’re resentful, paranoid or confused. Recently with an old acquaintance, I blurted out; “I’d like to clear up our misunderstandings.” That’s all it took. In that one moment, we

opened a new relationship and grew closer again. Inside, I heard” don’t rock the boat.” But, I carried my hairball down the field, taking a deep breath and it paid off.

I believe that boundaries are a substitute for soul. Often, we put up walls when we are afraid to talk to one another .The national defense is not different than our own armor. Isn’t it time to drop it and do something else? Yes, there are times to say “no” and step out of harmful situations, but we also have to learn as a species to dialogue in conflict. If we are going to change a world that is full of huge hairballs, can we be pro-active?

Here’s where the personal becomes political. If we don’t learn to deal with our differences daily and speak up for our values, will we have the power and strength to deal wisely with global issues?

Maybe you say it’s not enough. The problems are too big. Or, you could argue that talking isn’t going anywhere, we have to “do “something. Yes, we do. But, **I believe that moving forwards with vision emerges from deep dialogue.** What we have not done, collectively, is come together and put our cards on the table. It is only out of brainstorming and sharing that we unify. Safety is built from the ground up, as we speak “our peace.”

As journalist Tom Hodgkinson says so well, in *How to be Idle*, “The idler’s love of chat, sadly, is demonized by a society that prizes action above all else. “Don’t talk about it - do it!” is the modern mantra. To which I reply, don’t do it, talk about it. If the thing talked about is worth doing, then it will get done in its own time.” I am not saying that we should talk on and on forever. It’s just that hairballs do matter. Embarrassing as they can be.

I often think about the way ants carry a bread crumb up a hill. Odd that insects work together better than we, the people. Couldn’t more conversations produce new systems, new ways of being, create a world for the common good?

As this book ends, for the moment, let’s please keep speaking up for the voiceless ones, the earth, the animals and children who need our words to protect them and provide for a future.

It is my contention that conversation can change the world.