

Where Kindred Spirits Flourish

Some of the brightest memories, in my Memory Treasure Box, are of working with a team of people who shared my most fundamental values and vision of a society, where all potential and qualities are recognised, encouraged and flourish in an organic creative environment and there are no hidden agendas.

Now, now, no giggling or raucous outbursts of laughter!...seems a long way off at the moment, I know. Nevertheless, we are less prepared to put up with corruption or follow the 'Way of the Expert' unquestioningly today so it is possible, if we as a society choose it to be. It can be done, if we genuinely put this vision at the core of all our thinking. I've been there; experienced it and I know I'm not alone. It can and will be done, if it is truly our will!

The Joy of Shared Values and Vision

The first time I experienced the joy of shared values and vision in a big way, was when I worked for the GLC in the late 70s until its demise in 1986. Many who worked there will not be surprised that I use the GLC as an example. Of course, there are those at management and policy levels, who may have a different recollection but this is how I experienced it.

When I first took up employment, I largely worked behind the scenes away from the public. Not me at all! My heart sank on my first day but it soon perked up when this seemingly dull job was brought to life by my predecessor, who achieved the impossible. With his training, statistics became pictures; run down tenement buildings, architectural curiosities; fellow pen pushers, actors in a play; and I may have been inputting data but...he was playing music on the keyboard!

In fact, most people were very creative and had external arts or cultural interests. I even decided to marry one. The one who started life as a Butcher's Boy; became an Actor; managed diverse departments from Waste Disposal to Home Ownership whilst writing plays? No longer my husband but fundamentally a Kindred Spirit nevertheless and still very much in my life. Needless to say, after our separation, he became a Publican, an Accountant and today he Tutors children aiming for competitive schools, whilst writing several books. Don't you just love people who constantly re-create themselves?

At the GLC nobody refused to cross the boundaries of their roles, where a particularly vulnerable tenant was concerned. It was not unusual for instance, for a Surveyor to find time to help clear a flat for a removal, if that was a priority need at the time...and believe me, that is not a walk down memory lane you would want me to take you on.



My team was one of many in a section of 90 people, all of whom I knew and whose company I enjoyed. On the last day of its existence as the seat of London, destined for a future in arts and entertainment, a very fitting future given the creativity within its workforce, my bag was stolen as I came out of the bank. Within the forty-five minutes it took me to reach County Hall for its farewell party, I arrived to find that one of my colleagues had spread the word and organised a whip round to replace all of my lost cash. The symbolism of both events did not escape me and has always touched me.

'Can't Kill the Spirit'

I found the same in my last job, before going into business, working with unemployed people for a small charity, also one of the few Collectives left in the country. Set up in the 80s, it managed to survive up until 2000, against a great deal of political opposition, given its management style. It had been under threat within 3 months of my starting work but the enormous commitment and enthusiasm of its workers and certain management committee members, ensured its survival for a further 7 years.

There I met so many shining lights: people of great courage, compassion and understanding of human nature, as well as the system. People who could mobilise individuals and whole communities to develop themselves, by simply listening and providing the resources and services for them to learn and work individually or together in their own unique ways.

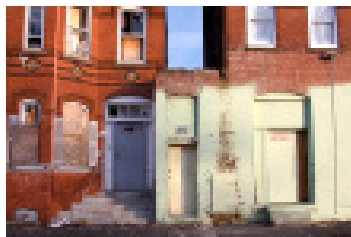
By simply listening and creating an encouraging, validating environment, people moved from their treadmills and towards their aspirations.

All kinds of advice and advocacy needs were met and numerous creative projects sprung from the interests of the Centre Users; music projects that continue to survive today, collaborative creative writing projects working with other projects focussed on homelessness, arts events, opportunities to volunteer in any capacity that related to the work of the centre and many others.

During my time there, somewhere in the region of 10,000 people came through the doors, many of whom crossed my path. In that world, something very beautiful was produced that I consider a privilege to have witnessed and been a part of.

It was here for instance, that I met a co-worker who touched the lives of so many more, with his astounding ability to remain completely authentic and create rapport with people at all levels of society, without adapting his manner in any way. Tom Caldwell, had a rare form of cancer when I first met him, as well as the most enormous amount of energy I have ever seen in one person. He was the link between Centre Users, Funders and Policy Makers, so his knowledge was very diverse. It had to be, to accommodate the diverse emerging projects and ever changing face of the Voluntary Sector. But his main passion was for Youth and Music and he left his legacy in the form of various groups across South East London. In the minds of many, his spirit lives on in the apt phrase 'Can't Kill the Spirit!' associated with one of his projects. When he finally did pass into spirit, they all attended his funeral.

It was also there, that another co-worker gave up half his job, when original funding for my post ended, so that the work could continue. People like that really don't come two a penny!



One of my most treasured memories, is of a particular day, when a community of Kindred Spirits spontaneously developed and gathered in the dingy little drop-in area with threadbare carpets and creaky floorboards, that was part of our 4 roomed home. All were temporarily out of work and had been using other facilities or services in the building.

A meeting of nations and people of all ages and backgrounds; a Photographer, a Teacher, 3 aspiring Entrepreneurs, a Tree Surgeon/aspiring Quantum Physicist, a Musician, a Childcare Worker and four project workers wandering in and out, joining in passing conversation, all crammed into a room not much more than twelve foot square.

The air was absolutely buzzing with positive energy, mutual encouragement, the exchange of ideas, the seeds of new projects and above all, authenticity. No one there on that day, was

prepared to reach for any less than the moon and stars but the system, bless its conditioned heart! decided there was a better way to meet its statistical targets and eventually withdrew funding in 2000.

Some of those Kindred Spirits are still in my life today; even Tom...Can't Kill the Spirit Tom! and together we remember that time, with a strong sense of unity and a loving connection. A very large extended family, a meeting of minds and hearts, congregating in a three bedroom house in the back streets of London, that eventually had to be propped up and underpinned.

So cheers to the 10,000 Kindred Spirits who touched my life, trudging up and down those tired old stairs, exercising their right to express their authenticity and who never gave up, even if it meant planning a future around iron girders. It is a humbling privilege indeed, to have met so many examples of the true spirit of humanity.

For those who think I might have been looking back through rose tinted glasses, no it wasn't all rosy. There were times when all hell broke loose and I used to say, "I'm sure there's a giant finger stirring this place up when things get too easy." But in the scheme of life, its gifts were invaluable. I only hope they got rid of that giant finger when the house was eventually returned to residential use.

Today The Globe is Gripped by a 'Fear of Lack'

In contrast to this 'Utopia', a grossly inflated fear of lack, to quote Neale Donald Walsch, has gripped the Globe. Much of the world is being bombarded with messages of fear - lack of life as a result of terrorism, ethnic cleansing, famine, new diseases, global warming natural disasters, war, financial instability. In Britain today, teenagers are literally capable of sticking the knife into one another and in some other countries, they start earlier.



It seems that there is a global habit of investing a lot of time in highlighting what's wrong with the world, encouraging judgement, taking sides and blaming, which then inevitably creates more victims and more aggressors.

Many in the UK have switched off from the constant squabbling over who can do it better, that goes hand in hand with an adversarial party political system. Oh for the day when party political literature focuses solely on - What We Want To Do and How ~ Interested? In addition, not predominantly on – What They Did Wrong. Oh for the day when the House of Commons no longer sounds like my local school playground at lunch time. It takes a great deal of courage to enter the political world, focus on life changing or saving issues and take on that kind of responsibility. How anyone can do this standing in a school playground, with the din of teasing opposing teams going on in the background, beats me!

There will always be those who say, 'It's gone too far, you can't turn the clock back now!' And in one sense I agree with this. One could never completely replicate a situation, even with the same group of people and who would welcome 'Ground Hog Day' anyway!

But we can recognise the most basic human drive to aspire to higher levels of achievement and give it a chance to succeed, by really giving back the power and recognising the right of the individual to live and contribute to life authentically.

And by that I mean, not just in the form of impressive brochures and promotional materials, plush impersonal offices and high tech systems that talk a good talk. A reinforced three bedroom house was apparently good enough for 10,000 people! What I mean is trusting that there really is enough and creating laws and environments that reflect this. There is no need to worry about a world where everyone fulfils their own dreams and participates because; there is enough stuff to make it happen! and the value of any human life is equal, so what's the problem?

Oh, that simple? I hear some of you say, as you raise your eyebrows and slip down that old familiar neural pathway, expecting chaos when the meek inherit the earth and make their own decisions.

To stop worrying, of course, requires a letting go. A letting go of that fear of lack, which makes some hold on so fiercely to all they have - possessions, people, status and power over others. It is easy for the vast majority of us to get caught up in this fear, to a greater or lesser extent. Why not? It is after all, a conditioned response.

It is also a perfectly rational response to look at the news and be alarmed by the reality of the recession and the level of cruelty out there.

So here we have a choice –

Get swamped by the fear until eventually we can't even remember how to loosen its grip

Or

Make a Better World!

We cannot keep listening and just pretending to do it on paper..., it's time to really do it? Who knows what might have happened if the young man with the knife had been given full reign to express his true potential and the necessary resources from an early age? He might have been an inspiration for others and a catalyst for growth instead of a weapon of destruction.

This basic human drive to aspire to higher levels is about work, whether it be work in the traditional sense, work on the self or work of a more practical nature, such as moving home. What is work anyway? For me, work is about contribution and service and does not always involve payment in the form of money. If I work on myself, I have a greater understanding of how I fit into the world and how I can contribute. If I move home, I clear space, start anew and in doing so I contribute by sharing fresh energy with loved ones and Kindred Spirits who enter my personal space.

What is Work anyway?

Work is by no means, just about doing a job and getting paid. There are armies of people in this country, claiming benefits for a variety of reasons, who are contributing to the world around them in their own way - carers, lone parents, volunteers, good neighbours using highly valuable skills for the sheer joy of giving. Yet we are asked to ignore their contribution in favour of blaming them for their dependence on the system's support (currently £64.30 per week, for a single claimant on Job Seeker's Allowance), when in effect they give their time in return for a minute fraction of its worth.

Thus the system with its hidden agendas built on fear of lack, continues to penalise people because they do not receive a payslip every month and ignore the contribution they do make. Far better to nurture, encourage and resource people, so that they can grow in their own unique way, at a pace that will not cause them to fall at the first hurdle and will strengthen their self-reliance.

There is enough time, there are enough resources to go round, if we just trust in the spirit of humanity. We've given blame a pretty long run and it doesn't work. Let's give trust a chance now. What have we got to lose?



So, can we create a society where Kindred Spirits inspire mutual trust and encourage each other to reach for the moon and stars? I say, if we did it once in some small pocket of the world, we can do it again.

Let me see now...I've known upwards of 10,000 people who are willing to try, how about you? Yep! Sounds possible to me.