

ON PURPOSE

Opening New Doors

by Barbara L. Hoese

Last May I received an email from a long-time friend asking me if I wanted to go skydiving with her that summer. At the time, I didn't think much about what jumping out of a plane would require of me. I had parasailed a couple of times and loved the sensation of being so high with only a tether to a boat. Skydiving seemed even freer! I asked some friends if they wanted to join us. Much to my surprise, I received responses like, "Are you nuts?" and "Why would you want to do that *ever* in your life?" And the most thought-provoking question, "What do you think you have to prove?"

Hmmm. That question almost convinced me that jumping out of a plane was nuts and no, I didn't need to prove anything. After all, I was happy with my life as it was, wasn't I? Well, maybe my life had gotten too comfortable. Perhaps I did need to prove something to *me*. I wanted to take a risk and open up new doors on my life. And looking at things from two miles above the earth seemed a good way to start.

So in spite of friends' disbelief—or perhaps because of it—I committed to the jump. If I didn't walk through the door of risk, how would I know how far I could go?

The Safety in Risk

In the weeks leading up to the jump it became clear to me that I needed a plan to stay focused on why I was doing this and how I would successfully complete the jump. In spite of my conviction to take the risk, doubts plagued me. Fear is

paralyzing. It would be so easy to back out. But then the point of fear is to warn us of danger—not to make us afraid. With that in mind, what could I do to minimize the danger?

First, I selected a tandem versus a solo skydive. Tandem is when the novice (that's me) is harnessed to a master skydiver and the parachute is rigged to the master. Given my complete lack of knowledge and skill and my strong desire to experience the thrill of free fall as quickly as I could, a tandem dive was a good choice.

In checking out the skydiving center where we were to make our jump, I discovered that Skydive Hutchinson is the largest skydive facility in Minnesota and has a long track record of safety. They have successfully completed thousands of tandem jumps without a serious injury. They even provide tandem jumps for paraplegics. They were professional, competent and understanding about my concerns. I felt confident in *their* abilities to keep me safe in a risky situation. Now I needed to address my own confidence. How could I successfully do this?

Sharing the excitement and the fear of the jump became an essential ingredient to keeping me committed. Becky was my companion, not only on the skydive itself, but during the weeks preceding it. We supported and encouraged each other before the skydive as well as on the big day. About two weeks before the skydive, I called her wanting to back out. She calmed my fears and reminded me why we

agreed to do this—and of our chance to experience flying without wings.

Two days before the jump, I became a source of strength when Becky called me wanting to back out. Relying on each other not only helped us for the skydive, it revitalized our friendship. We now share a very unique bond.

The First Step

Finally, the big day arrived. It was hot—over 100 degrees and the heat was intense. It didn't, however, dampen our excitement. When we reached the skydive center, we walked into a large building with parachutes laid out and divers carefully packing them. Energy and excitement filled the air. This was going to be a special day.

We checked in at the office and were welcomed by Rose, one of the owners of the facility. "First things first," she said. "Let's get the paperwork out of the way." Becky and I were directed to watch a video explaining how the tandem skydive worked and about all the risks involved in participating in skydiving. We then signed numerous release forms.

Signing on the line was sobering. I suddenly understood that in risking, I needed to let go. I had to fully commit myself to a course of action that had no safety net. I had to accept the consequences. In accepting what might go wrong, I felt I could completely focus on how things could go right!

We stepped into our jumpsuits and into the commitment to jump. My tandem master, Jay, explained to me the correct free fall position and how, once you jump, you quickly get into that position. It requires stepping off the end of the plane and doing a flip. I'm sure I looked like a deer caught in headlights as he explained this "flip" thing to me, because he made me practice that first step over and over.

Finally the time came to board the plane. I kept telling myself to stay calm but my doubts were crowding in. During the plane ride, it dawned on me that a good tandem master is more than a highly

skilled technician. Jay was also a master of intuition, anticipating my thoughts and saying the right things to keep me focused.

During take-off, he once again reviewed the procedures of how we would work together: "Jump at 13,500 feet. Get into flip position. Get into free fall position when you feel my tap on your shoulder. Pull the ripcord when the altimeter on your wrist reads between 4,500 and 4,000 feet. Get into the landing position when I tell you."

As the plane passed through 8,500 feet I started having second thoughts. I wondered to myself, "How many people speak up at this point and say, 'I think I'll just stay here and land with the plane?'" It seemed like a viable alternative. Then I glanced at a woman next to me who asked, "First time?" As I nodded yes, I noticed that she was jumping solo. She went on, "You'll love it! Until you experience free fall, you just can't imagine the adrenaline, the euphoria, and the sense of freedom. I jumped tandem my first few times out; it's a great way to go. You will never regret doing this!" She understood what I was going through. It struck me how, even in an open airplane at 8,500 feet, you can find support from others.

At 10,000 feet, panic set in. I said to myself, "I can't breathe; I'm getting dizzy!" At precisely the same time, Jay tapped me on the shoulder and said nonchalantly, "At about this altitude, the atmosphere is getting thinner, you may have a little difficulty breathing. There are air vents in the side, just turn your head until you've adjusted." Whew! There was a real reason for this feeling—and immediate relief.

At 12,500 feet Jay and I stood up and connected our harnesses. We were a tandem now. I put my complete trust in Jay to keep me safe. Trusting someone else so completely was the most difficult part. I like control in my life too much to lightly let go. But for the next 15 minutes, I let someone else make all the decisions and I did exactly what he said. Relying on someone so completely taught me that I can trust others to be good at what they do. I don't need to do it all alone.

I nervously watched as all the solo jumpers stepped out the back of the plane into space. Jay and I were the first tandem pair out. As we approached the open door, Jay instructed me to “just keep right on walking, don’t pause.” There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” I don’t think that ancient wisdom keeper thought about that first step being more than two and a half miles in the air. It’s a very BIG first step!

As I stepped out, I remembered Jay’s instructions and went into the flip position. The next thing I knew, Jay was tapping my shoulder, letting me know I could get in the free fall position. The flip had happened so quickly that I couldn’t take it in. Once I got into the free fall position, I had to mentally tell myself, “Okay Barb, breathe! Look around you and see what is happening. Don’t forget to enjoy the ride!”

It was breathtaking, every moment of it. I could see so many things! The sky was vividly blue against the lush green of the cornfields surrounding Hutchinson. The river was sparkling off to the side. I even had time to register that at 10,000 feet, it was a beautiful day. Not too hot like it was on the ground! I crammed as much sensation as I could in the fifty to sixty seconds of free falling.

Suddenly Jay was tapping my shoulder and pointing at my altimeter. We had just passed through 4,500 feet and it was time to pull the ripcord. As Jay had put it, “If we reach 4,000 feet and you haven’t pulled the ripcord, I will!” So I reached for the cord and gave it a good yank.

As the chute opened up, we were falling at over 120 miles per hour. It was an abrupt jolt to my body to put the brakes on so quickly and it jerked our tandem harness. Once Jay had readjusted the harness so we were both comfortable, he asked me, “Do you get motion sickness?” When I said no, Jay took me on a lazy ride down to the ground doing circles, swings and dips. We even “flew” parallel to the horizon. I found an unexpected sense of peace and joy in this part of the trip. Without my tandem

master, I would definitely have missed this part of the trip!

Jay yelled, “Get into the landing position.” This means that I bring my knees up toward my chest so that my feet are out of the way and he hits the ground first. Then he quickly parallels my position and we run along the ground, slowing down until the chute is on the ground and we can come to a complete stop. With Jay’s guidance, which involved shouting, “Landing position! Crouch, crouch crouch, run, run, run, walk, walk walk, stand up, stand up, stop!” we came in for a perfect landing. Becky had also just landed and we gave each other a huge hug, both talking about our dives at the same time.

Opening New Doors

It was incredible! It was exciting! It was one of the best experiences of my life! And now as I look back on it, I still experience the thrill of free fall and the quiet peace of sailing gently to earth. I marvel at the insights that continue to subtly influence my everyday life.

I learned that taking a risk is not so hard when you have a good friend who will share the experience fully. It’s not so threatening now when I understand all the things that can go wrong in situations and then let go of them to focus on everything that can go right. When risking, second, third and fourth thoughts are normal. But if I look, I’ll find a lot of people who want to see me succeed, like the woman next to me on the plane. I’m relying more on others and slowly learning that it’s okay to trust others to take care of me. In fact, if I let others lead at appropriate times, I can have perfect landings. Mostly, I learned to enjoy experiences while I’m in them, and to take advantage of every twist and turn that comes with it.

Without stepping out the door, I couldn’t have experienced the thrill! And in taking the risk, I’ve opened a new door on my life and opened my mind to new experiences.

Barbara Hoese is a partner with The Inventure Group serving as its Vice President of Learning Solutions. Her purpose is to help organizations create environments that lead to the discovery of personal power, collaboration and risk-taking. She is planning her second skydiving adventure this summer. Barbara can be reached at bhoese@inventuregroup.com.

Lessons from the Harp

by Louise Miner

“Close your eyes once you get downstairs,” my husband invited. It was two days before my 50th birthday. He led me into the living room and there it was, a beautiful Celtic harp. Surprise and Happy Birthday!

I had been talking about playing the harp for years. However, I’d always thought of it as something I would do some day in the future, when I retired, once my life got less busy (whenever I imagined *that* would be). I’d figured out that the harp would fit in the bay window of the living room (requiring a complete overhaul of our tiny living room.) Getting a harp someday, I would reason with myself, could even justify a complete redecoration of our downstairs. As you may surmise, I’d framed “getting a harp” to be some sort of future event, attached to a series of other decisions and events, focused more on the presence of the harp than on its musical properties, and certainly not something that would happen *now* or anytime soon.

So. . .the imagined future had just become the very immediate present!

From the harp I’ve learned. . .

Watch what you wish for. You may well get it. And, there is no time like the present.

Immediately upon touching the harp, I realized that I knew absolutely nothing about this instrument! Though I can sing, play chords on a guitar, and find melodies on the piano, the Celtic harp is not like

anything I have known. Mine was made by a master harpmaker from Duluth, Minnesota, David Kortier, so as soon as I had recovered my composure, I called him on the phone. “What are the names of the strings?” I wanted to know. “Why are some of them colored? How is it tuned? What do those levers do? How should I go about learning to play it?” David Kortier was wonderfully reassuring and gave me a quick 15-minute tutorial. He also recommended that I get a teacher.

From the harp I’ve learned. . .

I don’t know everything, and that sometimes it is important to go into the unknown.

Armed with a few basics, Rob and I set about tuning the harp. Tuning a harp is quite a process, particularly challenging given that this one was a brand new instrument with brand new strings. Literally within minutes, a new harp goes out of tune. It must be re-tuned daily, sometimes even multiple times a day so the strings can become stretched enough to “learn” and retain their pitch. My Celtic harp (also known as a folk harp or a lever harp) has 32 strings!

From the harp I’ve learned. . .

This instrument, like the instrument that is me, must be attended to regularly or it will go out of tune.

With the help of David Kortier and another harp-playing friend, I found a teacher almost right away. This was no mean feat, as there are only a handful of teachers in the Twin Cities and several of them informed me when I called that their studios were already full. The teacher I found would only be temporary. We both knew from the outset that she planned to move out of the country within several months, but she was willing to give me a few lessons to help me get started.

Ah, the challenges of being a rank beginner! The challenges of being dependent on a teacher. The challenges of adapting to someone else’s style and teaching methodology. The challenges of feeling totally incompetent. The challenges of dealing with my own expectations of myself (I should be playing

Bach by the end of the first month, for example) Despite my enthusiasm, I felt somewhat disheartened at all of the elements of learning.

From the harp I've learned. . .

Becoming a beginner and being in “learner mode” gave me a huge insight into what I ask of my students each time I teach a course or a class.

As a typical adult learner, I wanted to apply what I was learning right away. I wanted to play “real music”, as compared to lots of finger exercises. It was quite a jolt, therefore, when I found out that it would take months before I could play anything resembling a song. Even at this writing, two months into the process, I am still working almost exclusively with my thumbs and my first fingers. My need for playing songs has to be satisfied with Happy Birthday and Sleep, Baby, Sleep. When I mentioned that I really wanted to learn the Ashokan Farewell by Jay Ungar, my teacher shook her head and told me it would take me probably two years to get there!

From the harp I've learned. . .

It's easy to forget that learning is a process; it is essential to keep my eyes on the big picture, to remember the vision of why I am doing this.

My teacher's style was difficult for me to adjust to. She is an international concert harpist and performs everywhere. An expert in her field, she has a yes / no / right / wrong approach, which I found challenging to work with. She has strong opinions on everything, even things unrelated to the harp. She sometimes responded to my questions with scorn, as if the answers to those questions were obvious. I, of course, came with opinions and ideas of my own, some of which differed from hers. Regretfully, she didn't acknowledge any of my musical experience (singing, guitar and piano) and, rather than a pleasant, collegial relationship, ours clearly had a regularly affirmed power struggle.

From the harp I've learned. . .

Adult learners are different. They are experts in their own right and they deserve respect for what they know.

With the help of my first harp teacher, I found a second teacher. Her approach was very different and much more compatible with my personal style. My lessons immediately became less tense and more enjoyable. I observed that she “offered” ideas, suggestions, and built upon what I already knew.

From the harp I've learned. . .

Each of us has our own, unique way of learning. Not every teacher will be successful with every student.

Louise Miner is passionate about helping organizations achieve their highest aspirations. To that end, a major focus of her consulting work is to increase the effectiveness of leadership teams. She is committed to a life of discovery for herself and others. Her harp lessons are continuing. To reach Louise, email her at lmminer@mironet.com

Leider Receives Prestigious Jules Kerlan Award

The May internationally renowned speaker Richard Leider found himself speechless for the first time in a long time. Leider, who was attending a conference honoring him and nine of his colleagues in the career development field, learned that he was also the sole recipient of the Jules Kerlan Outstanding Achievement Award.

The Minnesota Career Development Association presents the award based on nominations from association members. It signifies a lifetime of professional achievement in the areas of career guidance, counseling and development, which have endured and had widespread impact on theory and/or practice. Bruce Roselle, of Roselle & Associates, nominated Leider for his continuing support of and contributions to MCDA and its many members.

“In spite of his international fame in the career development field, he [Leider] continues to provide his perspective to us locally,” Roselle said. “He has always had a special place in his heart and mind for our organization, and I believe we should honor him for that and for his steadfastness in the field of career development.”

MCDA also released its 50th anniversary anthology, *Past Reflections/Future Vision: Career Development Perspective from Minnesota’s Best Known Experts*. The book contains articles from the award-winning professionals, who discuss what they feel have been their greatest contributions to the field of career development. They also anticipate what kinds of new knowledge will be required in the next century. Following is an excerpt from Leider’s article, *Becoming a Lover of Questions*.

EXCERPT

Authentic vocation requires becoming a lover of questions. It means not resting easy with easy answers. I was in my thirties when I began, literally, to wake up to my own deep, spiritual questions. By societal standards, things were going well. But I was living from the outside in, not the inside out. I had found a great way to make a living that was not my own.

When Carl Jung pointed out that a person in his middle years without a purpose beyond himself was destined to be neurotic, he was pointing at me. For years, we can pursue money, power or recognition, but there comes a time when all that no longer matters. At such a time, we must look inside [ourselves] and discover our identity (who am I?), our direction (where am I going?), and our purpose (why am I going there?).

Something natural drives most of us, eventually beyond the missing questions of our upbringing and culture. Old answers make us restless. They bind us to lives of repeated or secondhand experience. They create a living death.

There are millions of vocationally joyless people in the world, thousands of whom have written or spoken to me, who are deaf to the voice that calls within them. They think they want answers. But, in truth, they want questions, the aliveness that comes from discovery. When we dare to ask them, we get our clearest clues for how to work joyfully. As Rainer Maria Rilke observed, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. . .Live the questions now.”

Inventure Coach

If you would like an Inventure Coach to answer your questions, write or e-mail us at info@inventuregroup.com. We will select a letter each issue and invite a professional career coach to respond. This issue’s coach is Richard Leider, editor of *On Purpose*.

In this issue of *Inventure Coach*, Richard Leider shares some advice on writing for publication. The column was inspired by Kate Hagfors, who approached Leider with her desire to create and publish a book of her personal journal entries and poetry. A sample of Kate’s work can be found below.

Should Your Book Be Published?

Dear Kate:

Thank you for sharing your heartfelt work with me and my colleagues at The Inventure Group. We recognize the courage it takes to put your deepest personal thoughts in the hands of others for evaluation. We wish to recognize the risk you took in sharing your work of *Hearing The Silent Teachers*.

Many of us rarely take the time to get to know ourselves in the ways you have, such as writing, journaling, solitary walks or trips taken alone. Our hidden gifts stay buried; our inner voice lies dormant. The poetry and insights you have written

in *Hearing The Silent Teachers* reveal a powerful voice.

Realizing that you want to send your work to a publisher, I suggest that you consider your work as a self-help tool for the development of others. Weaving together your work into three segments—insights, poetry, and the journaling process itself will create a new medium in literature.

There are no formulas. Every publishing story is unique, and it's wise to get an overview of the four steps in the publishing process:

The first step is putting pen to paper (or fingers to the keyboard) and writing the manuscript.

The second step is understanding the realities of publishing. There are about 750,000 manuscripts written every year and only 55,000 get published. 695,000 of them remain unpublished. A brief projection of where one's book statistically might fit into the scheme of things brings home the reality of publishing a book.

The third step is understanding the realities of distribution. A first printing for a poetry book is under 5,000 copies. (A first printing of a business book is about 10,000 copies.) With less than 5,000 bookstores in the country, that's one per bookstore. Distribution today is difficult.

Fourth, the key to publishing success is marketing. Who is the chief marketer? The author. You must be willing to assume 100 percent responsibility for the success of your book. You have to write it and you have to sell it! This responsibility entails a deep commitment of time, resources and energy.

Awakening

By Kate Hagfors

I now understand why we have not yet rejoined
I needed time alone to taste the stale water of life,
to brush across the prickly growth of that average day,
and to fall drowsily into sleep
alone in a bed of frightening ambiguity

So what's an aspiring author to do when embarking down the publishing path?

- Subscribe to *Publishers Weekly* (or get it at the library) to get a touch and feel for the pulse of the industry.
- Talk with a lot of authors about their own experiences with the publishing process.
- Consider self-publishing your work; book packagers work with authors who have not found publishers. Read *The Self-Publishers Manual* by Dan Poynter (Para Publishing).
- Write a dynamic 30-second "elevator speech" about your book answering the question: "Why should I read this book?" Clarify your audience! Read *101 Ways To Market Your Books: For Publishers and Authors*.
- Approach a prospective publisher with something focused and unique or you don't have a chance. A good editor receives 3-5 proposals a day!

The writing spirit lurks in the psyche of many of us. Writing rekindles the sense of wonder and learning in our lives, challenging us to heed our calling. Writing is taking steps towards the authentic you, your own voice. Undeniably you have grown through your experiences in writing. By taking the risk to share your work with us you have created your own challenges and options instead of waiting for them to show themselves. The risks you have taken will also provide inspiration for others struggling to find their voice in the world.

It was there that I realized you were giving me time
you were gifting me with the very lesson for which I was thirsting
I wandered to the doorway to catch a glimpse of your inspiring image
the sounds of night life, lonely crickets and prowling cats,
told me you were hiding behind the clouds

Overcome, I floated in the melodies of the trumpet in the background
the artist telling of love evaporating into rhythmic tones
they were minor and mournful to my heart

The richness of your presence has been so hampered by the city life in which I
indulge
how callused I have become to the fences and briars placed around my society
screens that shadow the luminescence of your being
facades that dull the meaning of your enlightenment

mirror of tenderness and power I adore
you knew I would learn some sad and honest truths
as I lingered over them tonight
my heart was gripped with disappointment

so long I have tread the average path
can this be what is intended?
how must I feel through this stage of wandering?
is this life itself?
or is life's meaning the way in which I hold it
carefully cradled in my hand?
this may be the difference, may be what I am intended to bring.

Kate Hagfors is presently the Director of Training and Organization Development for a high-profile telecommunications company. She has worked in a variety of industries, dedicating her career to the development of individuals and teams to bring excellent business results to corporations. Her work is centered on guidance and leadership of others to bring about self-discovery and fulfillment.

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