

3-8-13 Powerful Past Influences

I come from a large family with a wide spectrum of speaking abilities and inclinations, with the Drinans, at least as I knew them, to be more talkative than the Moynihans. The many personalities from both sides were influential; some were just quieter influences. For instance, my father used to say of my quiet mother, "I've learned to respect what I would call woman's intuition. Your mother has it. She watches and she gets a feeling about a person. I have found her feelings to be accurate." My father was logical and initially dismissed this idea of "women's intuition" as unscientific. However, even if he could not understand how it happened, he observed the accuracy of it, time and again. Observations are one way of conducting scientific research, albeit this was not precisely documented. And those observations led to faith; faith in my mother's unscientific ways!

Watching my father's ability to learn from my mother in this way allowed me to see this as one of many possible routes for learning. We can learn from others, even when their methods are not our first choice and may not come naturally to us. We can also develop faith and confidence in others over time.

This process of interacting, observing, and giving others time to function in their own best known ways is an integral part of how we collaborate. Collaboration leads to new ideas and approaches we might not have considered on our own. Even if any particular gathering does not appear to have resulted in any great revelations or new insights, the gathering always reinforces the knowledge of just who is who. Our knowledge of the players' faces and personalities become strengthened. And in a crisis, better the devil you know than the one you don't! We need to maintain that knowledge locally. After that immediate circle, if we can also stay in touch, via trusted connections, with state and national individuals and agencies, that is good; but it does not replace our local bonds. It is our home grown and locally known partnerships and abilities that must be in place, if we are to respond as best we can to emergencies. How do we accomplish that?

I have to admit that I am not a big fan of meetings, as so many of them remind me of something my brother, Ed, once said to me: "Cath, don't you know the definition of a meeting? Meetings are where people gather to get nothing done." I do know that they still serve an important purpose but we have to be allowed to share and collaborate. Open-mindedness is one part of critical thinking. We can't have a meeting of the minds if we aren't willing to have an open mind.

When meetings and gatherings involve listening with open-minds, then it is not only people who have assembled; it is ideas that have been gathered. That shared information can be reviewed. This review of both old and new perspectives is another component of critical thinking. Those ideas can be not only be compared and contrasted but sometimes can even be joined, for they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

When we can work with people we know to achieve a combination of social skills, including empathy, patience and showing respect, with learned skills such as using a chain saw or being adept at a great app on the smart phone, with cognitive abilities, such as observations, memory, and reasoning skills; we have our best shot at arriving at a successful plan for the future. These musings of mine give new meaning to the phrase “survival of the fittest”.

I credit a recent dream of my Aunt Dorothy (a Drinan) with initiating these thoughts. Her high energy, her generosity, her engaging mind, joined with her fast moving speech and well developed vocabulary were all there in the dream as though it was real and recent. How I enjoyed that visit! It gave me ideas and it gave me hope. My parents and aunt may be long gone but they are never forgotten and I am still learning from them.

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