

Editorial: Bon Voyage

March 21st, 2003 by [Jo-Anne Corbeil](#) Espritedu Publications © Jo-Anne Corbeil

I woke up one morning with an image in my mind of a spider weaving a silk thread from my heart through to the hearts of my Esprit colleagues. I reflected on the meaning of this image for awhile and decided that I wanted to write the introduction to our March publication. I would read the rough drafts of their stories and essays and introduce each of them through my heartfelt responses. I proposed my idea at our next meeting and everyone was enthusiastic, even moved. My second decision was that I would work in the airport and on the plane ride to Thunder Bay because I am sometimes quite scared of flying. Since I carry each one of my Esprit sisters so dearly and tenderly in my heart I imagined that this work could act as a gentle balm on my own heart and would keep it beating at a normal rate.

When I first arrived at the airport carrying all my files and my computer I felt "professional", an independent woman much too taken up by her work to show her fear of flying. I looked like a businesswoman on the go! I arrived early and went to my gate. I sat, opened my brief case, took out the rough drafts and with highlighter in one hand and fountain pen in the other I started working. I read one sentence or two and my mind wandered to what I would look like when the plane would dive, crashing into Lake Superior. I ordered my mind to get back to Judy's story. Don't get me wrong, when I focused on the words and meanings, my heart was engaged. But then I heard an announcement that the flight was delayed. Why was it delayed? Was there something wrong with the engine, I wondered? Well if there was, then it was a good thing that we were delayed, I thought to myself! Then I fantasized about what would be written in the Toronto Sun the next morning. "There was a mechanical problem they thought had been repaired but, alas, the plane crashed and all perished. (Please see Crash, on p. 9)". OK Jo, I thought, get back to the flow of Judy's story: she is talking about living in the flow of life after all.

We were moved to three different gates and at each gate there was no aircraft to take us to Thunder Bay. We finally left hours later, near midnight, on a small plane the size of my fist. I managed to read everything, in between goodness knows how many panic attacks (which have come back into my life due to menopausal surges in hormones) and fantasies of my daughter crying at her mother's funeral. I also spent much of the time berating myself because it seemed to me that I could not connect to my own heart never mind any of my friends' stories.

But upon reflection, their stories were in fact with me all along and I realize that I observed many of my friends' thoughts and ideas being played out in the airport and on the plane.

I saw similarities in an older gentleman of the type of man who was Isabel's manager in her essay, *My Working Life: My Experience of Two Leaders*. This man had been up since 4 a.m. to fly from Nanaimo to Vancouver and then on to Toronto to take a final connecting flight to Thunder Bay.

He travelled all this way because a friend of his had just lost her husband and he just thought it would be decent to go to the funeral to help her out a little. This older man's shaking body carried all of his integrity, kindness and gentle humour even though it was well past midnight when we were finally in the air. He was so happy to converse with everyone, young and old alike.

Judy's essay, *From the Rigidity of Compartments to the Flow of Life* was in my heart when a middle-aged couple approached the desk at the final gate and spoke with much anger at the young captain who was there all by himself. It was so late that all ground crew had gone home and there was still no aircraft for him to fly. They demanded that the flight be cancelled and that they be put up in a hotel. I could see just barely below their anger, the terror in their body over, I believe, the realisation that they could absolutely not control or influence events. It was hard for them to flow from one experience of change to another, as the situation was demanding of all of us. Luckily for them the young pilot spoke calmly and with empathy. He then informed them that he had no authority over these kinds of decisions and that his job was, should they chose to board his plane, to get them from Toronto to Thunder Bay as safely as possible (music to my ears!) Their terror was met with both empathy and loving boundaries. From there they were able to settle into the humour and flow of the unfolding events. However, once in the air, their terror rose again in the guise of irritation aimed at our flight attendant, a young Francophone woman from Timmins. She embodied all of the qualities that Barb speaks about in her essay *Guardian of our Spirit through Mentorship*. The couple, whose anger now barely covered their terror, started an argument with her because their carry-on bag did not quite fit under their seat (it was a tiny plane). They insisted that it always had on previous occasions. Without an ounce of martyrdom the flight attendant explained that she was tired because she had been on the job since 9:00 a.m. and that she actually broke her contract to fly us to Thunder Bay (flight attendants are only allowed to fly a certain amount of hours in a day). She did so because she felt it had been unfair that we had been required to wait for so long. The couple then replied that they wished she had not broken her contract because then the flight would have been cancelled and they could have stayed overnight in a hotel. The flight attendant kept the dialogue going hearing them out and continually sharing her own experience. The dance went back and forth until the couple finally understood the equity of the situation. It was astonishing to watch and listen because "at one moment the learner was the teacher and at another moment the teacher was the learner. The dance back and forth was such a smooth waltz that it was clear to me, as Barb describes in her essay, how the "roles within interdependency" are "constantly changing and evolving".

There was a woman who reminded me of Mary's essay, *Adaptation*. She approached the desk mid way through our evening frustrated and scared because she had a meeting outside Thunder Bay the next morning at 8:00 a.m. She had been attending these meetings on a weekly basis for years, taking the 7:35 p.m. flight to Thunder Bay, renting a car, driving to and from the meeting and

then flying right back to Toronto. You saw very quickly that she lived an 'A to Z' existence which Mary speaks about. She was an independent woman who had been attending these meetings at the last minute this way for a long time. She was genuinely flooded with feelings knowing the delay would mean she might miss her meeting and that her absence might have a profound affect on others. She had been so set in her way of doing things independently that she had forgotten her interdependence. The middle process had not been absorbed. She is the only one in the group who opted to leave and not take her chance on a later flight.

In her essay on Generative Leadership, Sandy says "our bodies can only survive in connection to and in relationship with nature and with each other." As we waited for the outcome of our evening, we shared stories, meals, smiles and a lot of good humour. Sandy was with me as I looked at all 60 of us. A diverse population, coming from all different places, going to a destination for different reasons. We "tribed" very quickly and the great majority of us did it in a way that included compassion, not just for each other and our stories but also for the ground and air crew of Air Canada. We were all in a vulnerable situation; we connected with each other's vulnerabilities and had the courage to stay with each other while keeping our individual integrity intact. I thought we could really declare that everyone in that waiting room carried the qualities and attributes of Generative Leadership.

The essay I have chosen to write for this publication is on play. And as fate would have it, when the plane was descending and I was starting to see the lights of Thunder Bay, I remembered that my niece had given me a rolled piece of paper for my birthday and had asked me to open it on the plane. As I unrolled the sheet of paper I saw a black and white photograph of my late sister Carole and I playing together in our living room. So in essence, I was struck once more by how interconnected everyone and everything really is. My long flight to Thunder Bay helped me to connect not only to each of my Esprit colleagues but also to see their stories reflected in the passengers and crew during my journey. This is a reminder that we really are, all of us together, on the same journey after all.