

THE GIFT OF YOU

by Deb Elkin, LPC

Martha Graham, a modern dancer and choreographer, was a wonderful example of “living out your dreams.” Born in 1894, she was prevented by her very strict father from going to dance school. So she waited until after he died, then enrolled in dance school in Los Angeles in 1916, at the age of 22. She made her professional debut four years later and went on to develop her own approach to dance. By the 1950’s she was internationally recognized as the leading American choreographer of interpretive dance. She danced until she was 75 years old and taught and choreographed almost until her death at the ripe old age of 97!

The following is a quote of hers from Dance to the Piper, a book written in 1952 by Agnes de Mille, another preeminent 20th century American choreographer. It speaks to the very specialness of each and every one of us.

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy,
A quickening
That is translated through you into action,
and because there is only one of you
in all of time
this expression is unique.

And if you block it, it will never exist
Through any other medium,
And will be lost.
The world will not have it.

It is not your business to determine
How good it is, nor how valuable,
Nor how it compares with other expressions.

It is your business to keep it yours
Clearly and directly,
To stay open and aware
To the urges that motivate you.

Keep the channel open.”

This is not just about dancers and about art. It is about all of us. It is about living. It is about being. It is about sharing yourself with the world. What a challenge it is to live from that place, to live from the belief that if you do not share yourself with the world, the gift of you will be lost and the world will not have it! How many of you actually get what a gift you are? Just because you exist, you are a gift! Wouldn’t it be exciting to live in the world thinking, knowing, that you are a gift. Imagine how different your life would be!

Everyone of us brings our own unique self and our own unique talents to this world. And please know that “talents” doesn’t have to mean you are gifted in some special arena. Your talent may be your inner qualities – your nurturing abilities, your listening abilities, your honesty and trustworthiness. It may be your ability to solve problems, to organize, or to make things happen. It may be your ability to make people laugh, to tell wonderful stories, or to create a warm, loving home environment. These are all gifts. It is important for us to expand our definition of what our gifts and talents may look like. In doing so, we may be able to more easily see and claim what are gifts are.

So the first challenge is to recognize what your gifts are.

- Take some time to reflect and journal on what your special talents are.
- Ask your family what they see as your special gifts.
- Ask your friends what they see as your special gifts.

Often we need to go outside of ourselves for feedback because we don’t see as easily what others might see in us.

Next, we need to claim these gifts as our own.

- Take time to really acknowledge them. (Hey, I AM a really good listener, I AM a great cook, I AM a good organizer, I AM.....)
- Let yourself really take it in. These are the things that make you special. They are the things that make you who you are.
- Be proud of these things! Feel your energy swell and get bigger as you claim them. Imagine yourself living in the world from this place!

And finally, live them out loud.

- If they are your gift, you are supposed to be sharing them with the world. Do it!
- Watch people become more attracted to you as you share your gifts.
- Feel yourself enjoy life more as you live from this place of claiming yourself out loud.

So, I invite you, as Martha Graham says, to “keep your channel open.”

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