



Raising the Spirit: An Interview with Anne Durrum Robinson

"Youth is not a time of life - it is a state of mind. It is not a matter of red cheeks, red lips and supple knees. It is a temper of the will; a quality of the imagination; a vigor of the emotions. It is a freshness of the deep springs of life. Youth means a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over a life of ease.

Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years; people grow old by deserting their ideals.

Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, doubt, self-distrust, fear and despair - these are the long, long years that bow the head and turn the growing spirit back to dust.

Whether ninety or nineteen, there is in every being's heart a love of wonder; the sweet amazement at the stars and star like things and thoughts; the undaunted challenge of events, the unfailing childlike appetite for what comes next, and the joy in the game of life.

You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear, as young as your hope, as old as your despair.

In the central place of your heart there is a wireless station. So long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, grandeur, courage, and power from the earth, from people and from the Infinite - so long are you young. When the wires are all down and the central places of your heart are covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism, then are you grown old, indeed! "

Samuel Ullman

Introduction

The idea for this interview derived not from wanting to understand how Annie is so creative, innovative or intuitive, but rather something that is characteristic of her - humor. The idea was to find out how she used humor in her work in nonprofits, but as we interviewed her it became obvious that humor was a tool she used in all of her life, not just on a volunteer team or classroom. Humor permeates her life.

We got something unexpected, as you often do with Annie, and absolutely wonderful - the elevation of spirit. The resurrection of the spirit out of the dust. This explains why people love to be with Annie. No matter what her situation is, you leave with an elevated spirit after an interaction.

After the interview, I mused over whether I could find four causes of the reality she creates. Aristotle suggested that for every reality there were four causes that brought that reality into existence - material, formal, efficient and final. The material cause is the building blocks of the new reality. The formal cause shapes the new reality. The efficient cause is what brings the parts together into a form described in the formal cause. The final cause is the purpose of the new reality.

Starting with the final cause that is raising the spirit, her elevator humor.

The efficient or productive cause leading to this type of humor is the fact that she has the seven forms of humor running in her brain as an operating system - plays on words, reverses, triples, incongruent paired elements, exaggeration, understatement and realism.

The formal cause, what shapes the humor and allows it to lift the spirit, is the situation. It's topical and temporal. She talked a lot about the flow - establishing it or reversing it if it's going in the wrong direction. The humor is not directed at someone, but with or for. It's shaped by her intuition.

The material cause is her facile brain and a lifetime of experiences, stories, anecdotes and facts that are the building blocks of what she does.

Annie is a master, a guru, a wise sage, a Delphic oracle, Yoda. And, as such her messages are in the stories she tells and the humor. She always gives you a lot to think about and she's always given you more than you realize. Read the complete interview and you will see how she used humor to teach us how she uses humor to lift the spirit.

"Personality is the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being. It is an act of high courage flung in the face of life, the absolute affirmation of all that constitutes the individual, the most successful adaptation to the universal conditions of existence coupled with the greatest possible freedom for self determination."

Carl Jung

Happy 91st birthday, Annie!

Q: Annie, you have a few themes running through your work: intuition, humor, and creativity?

Yes, they are three different things. I believe that they are intimately linked.

I'm getting ready to do a keynote speech and my client wants me to talk about creativity and they've suggested a title that's not very creative. They gave the speech the title: Unleash Your Creativity, which is a nice title but wouldn't get me to a speech. I asked, "Can we give it a sub-title?" They agreed. My addition: "But Train It to Come Back When You Whistle."

I chose that subtitle because I believe that creativity needs to be turned loose, but not totally out of control. You want to know when you need it, where you

need it, and what kind you need. That is where intuition comes into play. Very often intuition can help you with that. Intuition helps you know where the humor is in a group.

I've known people who have come in and tried to get groups to subtly make fun of somebody else or a situation. And I don't think that's an enjoyable situation for everybody. There is bound to be a scapegoat in there somewhere. Humor must be "with" and not "at." If you can get something that's pertinent to a particular organization (group), it's even more fun.

I wanted to take some a film class at the University, and I was 37 and pregnant. Well, I was a standout – but not in the right way! And they didn't really want me in that class, because it was a group of young men growing mustaches for the first time, and one other woman in the class. She was young, and I was 37. It was an art class. I wasn't an artist, but I just wanted to take the class. I go in, and the instructor puts up a still life and says, "Let's do that in black, white, and two shades of gray." And it was a charcoal class. Well, I ended up black, white, and two shades of gray, because I didn't know we weren't supposed to wipe off with the chamois [makes a wiping motion across her face with her right hand]. I thought it was to wipe me – not to shade the thing. Well, I stood up and this girl behind me said, "Sit down Mrs. Robinson. We can't see through you." I said, "Honey, you'll have to draw me in the picture, because I can't draw sitting down." From then on, they were as nice as could be. I don't know what the big difference was.

And then one of the fellows said, "Mrs. Robinson, is 'bullshit' one word or two?" And I replied, "I believe that I would hyphenate it." He said, "What do you know about it?" I said, "I'm a Taurus, and my maiden name was Durum. And, I know more about it than anyone in this room."

I learned that there has to be a little acid in self-defense, but if you can make it fun, it'll make it better for everyone. I wouldn't have gone that far over the line if he wouldn't have started it first.

I was doing one training where there was a young fellow from Canada in the group, and he talked, and talked, and talked, and talked. Now I couldn't have done this is if I weren't white-haired, but I went over to him and put my arm around his shoulder and said, "Honey, why don't you and I hush and let the other people talk for a while." He said, "I haven't had a hug since I left Canada." I said, "Why don't we just stand up and hug, and they can just go on with the class." It was all right from then on. That's the kind of humor that I'm talking about. Because I didn't want to call him down, and nobody else was getting a word in. I could say, "Shut up!" or "Be quiet!" or "Let's give someone else a chance." But to fill the void, the hugging worked really well.

Q: To me, with that example you highlighted that creativity supports the development of humor and intuition is important for finding where humor is.

Or where it should come from.

I was working at IBM. We did one of those rings where the people introduced a person, then introduced the next one, and they have to remember the names. We had an older gentleman in the group called Roberto. He was toward the end of the group. I could tell that he was getting nervous and that he was not going to remember the names. I was sitting outside the circle, and when we got to Roberto he twinkles and says, "I don't speak English." I said, "Entonces, Senior, en Espanol, por favor." He laughed, and then he could name everybody around the group. This is one of the three phrases I know in Spanish.

This is a form of humor. You can use all kinds of hu-

mor – as long as they are inclusive of everybody. I think it is the exclusive humor that doesn't get the desired effects.

Q: How about your work with non-profits?

I am a non-profit! [All laugh] No, I used to work with Dovia. I did an annual workshop for them. And I believe in the non-profits, they struggle, and they are in business for somebody else. Even back when I was making a good deal of money, I always donated at least two workshops a year. It's a form of tithing. I just as soon do that. I feel it does a great deal of good. I know that the gift goes where I meant it to go when I give a workshop.

Q: As you have worked with many non-profits over the years, is there a particular angle that you take with them?

No, I allow them to select the subject. Well, I have a given range of subjects that I feel I'm capable of doing them any good on. Usually these are six-hour workshops. All I would have to ask them to furnish would be the materials. Nowadays, I might have to get somebody to underwrite the costs associated with getting me there and back.

I really value non-profits because I believe that they're doing a lot of good with a lot of effort. They are not just struggling with doing what they do, but they have to struggle with underwriting it too now – when everything is non-profit. It's getting to where I don't see how we delineate this from the other – the intentional non-profits from the accidental non-profits.

Q: So you let the non-profits select from your offerings over the years. Is there a pattern in the way that they chose?

A lot of what they wanted was the whole brain creativity type of thing. I have one called "The Seven I's of Creativity." They often chose that because they get help in each of the seven I's – Imagination, Illustration, Ideation, Intuition, Incubation, Illumination, Implementation. I usually start by telling people, "You know you have these two eyes [puts her right thumb and fingers over her eyes]. Some people say that you have a third eye [touches index finger to the center of her forehead]. You have two eyes in the

back of your head – if you haven't noticed. When you have eyes in the back of your head (intuition), you have dozens of eyes."

Back to the humor...I think that so often people consider humor telling a joke, or setting up a situation. I think that an experienced trainer will try to perceive what kind of humor might fit best with that group. I'm better at situational humor – something that arises from what is there. I'm not a good joke teller. If I remember the first line, I can't remember the punch line. If I remember the punch line, I can't remember how to get to it.

Q: As a good trainer, you are already expert at doing audience analysis: giving them a choice of topic, discovering what their needs are. What I'm curious about is, when you are about to go into a situation where you know you will be using situational humor, what is most important to you?

I just keep my eyes and ears open. I have to go on what happens right then and there – try to figure out what's happening.

There was a fellow who came into one of my high-tech company classes. He came in and said, "I just hate like hell to be here." And I said, "Well, that at least makes two of us." Then I said, "Anybody else feel the same way?" Nobody else indicated that they felt that way. We did the clap and rap – I said, "You clap and I'll rap." And I did this rap that ended up with "I'll tell you what, I'm going to set you free. You tell your boss what you just told me." By this time, we're all howling. He's even laughing. It's called the reprimand rap. I said, "Now you're free to go, but remember it's straight to your boss."

Q: What do you think is necessary for somebody to tap into their humor spontaneously, in the situation?

I think that they have to have grown up with the right kind of humor. I was a twin, and our dad had the same trenchant kindly, humor that I've been talking about. He was always funny but he never hurt anybody's feelings. My mother was sweetly funny. My

twin was Achilles' funny heel. You'd be dying laughing and you'd suddenly realize that it was your heel and you were dying laughing. And so we grew up around a lot of humor. After mother died, we moved in with dad's cousins. Everything was kind of funny – through all kinds of depressions and wars, it could have been awful. We didn't have much money. One was divorced; one was never married. We were all scrambling to make a living. But everybody laughed the whole time. People would come and they couldn't get straight how we were kin to one another, so we made a chart and put it on the door.

In college, when you were asked to be a hostess at a meal, the teacups were so heavy that you had to lift them with two hands. When I got home and picked up a china cup of coffee, I just about threw it over my shoulder. Well, this became a joke – we talk about "the company china" and "over the shoulder china."

We had a bridge party in this little bitty town and everybody gets invited. Nobody had any money and we had to have some prizes. Well, I had been in town earlier that day and noticed that the drugstore was giving away goldfish in a bowl. So I brought one home for a prize. One cousin won the goldfish and she didn't want it. She gave it to another and she didn't want it. This went on down the line and nobody wanted it. Finally, the last person got it, and she knew that she was obligated to keep it. In the sickest voice you ever heard, she said, "Ah, goldfish!" Well that became a family joke. When you got something that you didn't want, the family said in chorus, "Ah...goldfish!" We were just reared with this kind of group humor.

Dad was marvelous at this kind of trenchant humor. He could get the point across but never hurt anybody's feelings. And mother was sweet and kindly. I can't tell jokes. I can't remember jokes, and I don't like to make fun of others. I usually go with situational humor. I think it's so helpful – even in crucial situations, health situations.

Once I was in the hospital for about five

weeks when I had a collapsed hip and so on. I don't know why they do this, but they had the women at one table and the men at the other. First of all, I would come into the group and the women would say [bending over, holding her hand to her head and in a sickly voice], "I didn't sleep worth a damn last night." I said, "Let's just face the fact that none of us slept and let's talk about something else. And let's not call each other 525 and 423 – that's your room number. Let's introduce ourselves using our names and not our room numbers." I heard someone laughing in the back. It was my husband. He said, "Even in the hospital she's leading a workshop!" I noticed a man at the other table begin to prick up his ears and join in. I said, "It doesn't matter if it's pertinent or not, just think of something that's fun to tell. When we come to you at the table and you're not yet ready, that's okay, and we'll just come back around. Just think of something that's silly and fun to tell." I said, "When you come in the morning, don't say, 'Hello 525.' It's good morning, Annie! Let's just say our first names. Let's have some stories and let's have something that's fun to be with. Otherwise, I said I don't think I could eat a bite. They were all laughing, all perking up, having fun, and introducing one another.

It doesn't have to be a lot of humor. It has to be the "spirit" of the thing. That doesn't mean that they can't get serious again, or that doesn't mean that I'm not seriously interested in them. But, I mean when nobody sleeps at night, why bring it up? Because then everybody's trying to top everyone's story – "I'll bet you slept better than me...no, I'll bet you slept better."

Q: Can we come back to this idea of you being raised during the depression time, and yet the humor is flourishing. The idea of humor and difficulties are on different planes. You can have humor and sickness, but humor can still operate. Most people don't think you can have humor when you're sick or in pain. How do you get around that ... be

able to move away from that level?

Well, I think it depends on whether you're the person in pain or not for one thing. And then if you're brought up looking for the humor, I think that has a lot to do with it.

I know when I was in the hospital, people kept showing up. I was there from the hip – not the one that broke – but the one that collapsed from the wrong therapy. People would just come up, show up gratuitously, and they wouldn't say anything. They would just stand around. Finally, I said, "Who are these people and what are they in here for?" They said, "They heard you had your own teeth." And I said, "Do you want me to show 'em." I love to be a standout, but that's not really what I'd pick. I said, "I even have all four of my own hairs." I thought this was hilarious, even though I was hurting.

I think looking at the bright side is a lot how you were reared and a lot is habit. We were reared that way.

When we moved in with the cousins, there was a great big upstairs bedroom. They curtained off part of it and made an additional bath. At that point, when the Saturday Evening Post came – see, there's material everywhere – out came this serial called "Behind That Curtain." Well, this became the family motto. Whenever you couldn't find anything it was "behind that curtain." We picked up things and they go on. Like the goldfish. To this day, when I ask my cousin how things are and they aren't going well she says, "Ah, goldfish!" That tells me all I need to know.

Q: Do you have a name for this type of sweet humor? You talked about your father having a way similar to Will Rogers. Do you have a name for this?

It's probably a situational humor. It would be concentric, where everybody zeros in on the center and

keeps it forever. And it doesn't have to be...

I remember my dad sat down at the table. We had a great big round dinner table. He picked up the ham to pass it and at this moment somebody decide to say the blessing. Well, here was dad with this great big plate of ham and he doesn't know what to do. You know you're not supposed to be passing anything around during the blessing. His arm was shaking and everybody was peeking to see what he would do. I can't remember now what he named this. It was 'The Hamstrung Blessing'.

He had this Irish friend who was always saying something Irishly funny. Neither one of them were great church goers and they both had cotton businesses down in the Valley. They both went to church one morning, and they passed the collection plate and passed the collection plate. Pat put in a dollar, and finally he got up and started out. Dad said, "Pat don't leave until they be through with it." And Pat said in a voice so loud you could hear it all over the church, "Oh, Bill, I'm not really going out anywhere. I'm going to just cash a check. I want to see this thing through."

But it's that kind of humor that just helped us out. Of course the whole church was laughing. They all felt the same way.

Q: When you see a moment where you can do situational humor, what does that do for you personally?

I love it. It is nice because I know it's going to bring the whole place up. I think the danger is not to have it take over the workshop. I mean...have, enjoy it, then move right on to whatever you were doing. I workshops, I don't believe in the leader doing too much.

Q: So it's a way to build their participation, but you don't let it run away.

It can lead to somebody making fun of somebody else if you're not careful with it. That's not what you want.

Q: It brings the whole place up?

Yes. It's kind of an "elevator humor." But you want to make sure that the elevator is going in the right direction.

Q: What else does humor lead to?

The right kind of humor leads to learning.

Q: What is the right kind of humor?

It's the kind that's based on something that has somewhere else to go. It helps to make a point and it moves on to something else. It's kind of futuristic humor. It can be about the past, or the present, but it leads on into the future of whatever it is you're trying to get across to the group.

The humor leads on to where you want the group to go. It doesn't cut you too far away from your subject.

Q: You said earlier, this type of humor could be gotten partially through rearing and partly from habit. Could you tell us a little about developing the habit of humor?

I think you begin to get a feel for when humor might be needed. You begin to get a feel for when it shouldn't be used. I think that the habit you need to be aware that you don't get is telling the same thing over, and over, and over. Using the same examples over and over. Look for new examples. Have in your head and heart a library of examples that you can pick from.

Q: You told us how to generate these examples. It's a kind of humor that doesn't make fun, it's the kind that....what does it do instead?

It doesn't make humor against any race or class. It's humor that could be funny to everybody – as much as possible. It elevates.

Even if an African American can tell an African American story and it won't bother anybody, I won't tell one. The same thing about any nationality. I've seen people make these jokes – about women or men.

I don't think humor should have any targets. Avoid targets. That's why I like the situational humor – it fits in.

You don't have to have humor all of the time. You don't need a joke for every kind of thing. When you deal with humor often, you can sense when it's needed and when it's not.

I remember using humor once at the very wrong place. I could have kicked myself!

I was in a workshop being led by Dorothy Sisk. Are you familiar with Dorothy? She was the head of the gifted education for the whole nation at one time. She's now in charge of Creative Education at Lamar University. And she's wonderful. She delivers marvelous narratives, which most people are not good at. I wouldn't do anything like that. We were in this great big room with all these people. And she was doing one of her narratives. She has this young fellow and she's describing his funeral to him through narrative. And he's in the casket, and the people are looking over lovingly, and what is the thing you most want to hear people say about you? Well, he's hemming and hawing around, trying to think of something worthy, and she goes through it all again, and she comes right up to this point again. And before I could stop myself I said, "Don't he look natural."

I've heard this in every little town funeral that I've ever gone to in my life. I could have bitten my tongue. Everybody fell out. That is the wrong time. It ruined her whole thing! She just gave it up. And I know she could have killed me, and I wouldn't have blamed her.

I'd never seen that young man before in my life.

When I was leaving, he grasped my hand and said, "Thank you. Thank you. I hear that you live in Austin. My family and I are going to be up there next week. Can I take you to lunch?" I said, "Yes. Yes!"

You have to be aware of the conditioned reflexes – you just can't have them!

Q: You mentioned how important it is to build a library of examples so you don't repeat yourself. Is there any particular brand type of humor or book that you read to build this database?

I just watch for things. For example, I just received a book to review from Barrett-Kohler called "The Tyranny of the Bottom Line." I'm looking through the material and we were trying to get rid of some stuff, and I found this cartoon by Bob Thaves; it featured a fellow on the phone saying, "Can you be a little more explicit about which 'total idiot' you'd like to speak with? Would you like to speak to X or was it the CEO?" Well, I just fell out laughing because this cartoon fit so well.

Q: Annie, what are some of the principles you use when you apply humor as it relates to health?

Well, the first is that you don't make somebody worse by causing resentment. Resentment causes all kinds of poisons in the body.

Q: What are you looking for when you're applying humor to healing?

I'm looking for any lifting of the spirit. I think that stress and negativity kill more people than anything we can catch. I think we're in the middle of a plague right now and don't realize it – it's negativity. Sometimes people say, "You can't laugh this off." I say, "Perhaps, but you can take steps to rise above it or put it in its appropriate place."

For example, when we just had no money, somebody lost a dime in our car and we all got out to look for it, because we knew that she had to have it. We got out the marble hands from our attic – you know the praying hands that you got from Niemans. Well, there was an ad about them in the paper, so

we all put out the hands on our tables. When we got back from searching for the dime, someone had put a quarter in the hands. I said, "Let's leave that for seed money." Every time we'd go by those hands we'd fall out. Sometimes we'd put a penny in there. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. It doesn't change the situation one iota, but it reframes things. And somebody had stolen the quarter out of it and put it back later – loans!

Q: If I were to be with you at the front of an audience while you were using situation humor to raise the spirit, how would I know that the spirit of the audience was rising?

Their expression changes. They begin to take part. I don't think this is all for humor. I think if you're telling anecdotes sometimes you can tell uplifting ones. It doesn't even have to be a belly laugh, a laugh, or even a snicker to raise the spirit.

I was doing something for a residential retirement community. They had hired me to talk about how to raise the spirit and so forth. I said, "Let's just practice some of the forms. Let's do the twinkle [she holds her chin up, raises her eyebrows, has a slight smile on her face, and rapidly blinks her eyelids]." I got six or seven people up twinkling. The next one would demonstrate the eye bat. The next would demonstrate a tentative smile. Then a titter, a chuckle, and we got down to the one who was going to do a belly laugh. She was a tiny woman, but she let out a laugh so loud that you could have heard it from the Capital. I said, "I don't know how you can do that with no belly." I realized after that I had missed an opportunity. I could have given her the "No-Belly Prize." After the belly laugh, we finally had a fellow who was willing to do the fall-down-laughing laugh. And this brings the house down. He was holding his stomach and they were all coming apart. You don't have to do it just for humor, you can do it with anything that lightens or raises the spirit.

You can do it with anything really that lightens or raise the spirit. I've had people do their poems. I love to use haiku's. Pick a subject and do haiku's. One class during early downsizing time, I gave them 30 minutes by themselves or with a partner to write about a problem.

Q: What does it take to raise the spirit?

First you have to believe that raising the spirit can be done. And, you have to believe that people can raise their own spirits. They have to know how to go about that – deep breathing, relaxation, mental picturing and make an honest effort to raise their spirit.

I think chewing on the same problem over and over is very detrimental. You know that it's there. You're trying to find a way to do something about it. To sit there and think about the problem over and over is not advancing anything. So you do what you might do in a brainstorming session. You begin to think of anything, silly, serious or otherwise that could be done. And, some of the silliest ones can be what you'll do.

I consciously act on my intuition about humor when a group needs it. But, not just humor, but raising the spirit especially.

Q: How about raising your own spirit?

I'm an outdoor person. So all I have to do is get outdoors.

For example, once when I had gone out to relax, I saw these little birds. And they're all flying south and they've hit Austin and a freeze. They're in a pickle. They're all lined up on a wire. How they sit there with two little bitsy feet on that narrow wire, I don't know. They don't even flap their wings and they still manage to stay on the tiny wire. I think that that is the human condition... All of a sudden, one of the birds flew off and sat by himself. I thought he's just fed up with the whole thing. He doesn't like the bunch and he's going to go off and sulk.

I think a lot of this is habit. It's habitual thinking. You don't downgrade or negate what's happening. You look at it and try your best to figure something out. But, I'm not helping myself by sitting and thinking how miserable I am.

Q: What do you say to yourself instead?

I'm saying, "Look at it the way it is. Look at what you wish it was. And then, try to figure out a way to close that gap." You do not close that gap by being miserable and chewing it over and over. You'll never close the gap and what you will do is run down your defenses.

Q: Is finding what works for you a key element in raising the spirit?

It's like trying on clothes. You just don't put on the black or the white. You try different colors and styles until you find the one that makes you feel good. It'll be different for different people.

Different things work for different people. You can't generalize on what will help.

It's like intuition. Everybody has to keep trying until they find what their intuitive signals are. They're different for everybody and they may be different for the same person at different times.

Q: If something doesn't work with a group, what do you do?

Try something else. You have to have an arsenal of different approaches, or know when to quit.

I was doing this program for a group at Christmas time. I was supposed to do take-offs on some of their people. You know take-offs only work when it's about the popular people. I didn't know it, but they had given me unpopular people. So there I was on this high, lighted stage. I tried several. No reaction. So I laughingly asked the audience if they were still there. A voice came back, "Yes ma'am, we're still here." So I wished them a Merry Christmas and left the stage. It was time to let go.

I was doing this program for a high-tech company. It was early in the morning. The people had just come from shift work. They were sleepy. I passed a bag around for them to enter their names for a door prize. I asked if everyone was in the sack. And a man said, "We wish we were."

Q: When it's working, what's happening?
It's flow. It's what's coming back is equal to what's going out.

Have I told you about flow? I don't mind telling older people the same story because they don't remember anyway.

I have two books on flow and for no known reason at all about six weeks ago I got the books out to look at them again. About two weeks ago, this fellow called me, someone I've never heard of, he was doing a doctorate on flow. He said he'd been told to call me. It was intuition at work. Synchronicity and intuition are all tied together.

Q: Could you tell us a little about the experience of intuition?

I think that coincidence, synchronicity, and intuition are so tightly tied together that you can't tell where one stops and the other one starts.

With flow, what's coming back, equals what's going out. There's lots of mutuality going on. It goes out, and comes back – it's a timeless flow. It's like being in the zone.

Q: What are you noticing in your body?
I just notice it all over. And that's a large territory -- a huge area! [We all crack up!]

Q: What does it feel like?
It just feels wonderful – like everything's all right. Like you could go on forever and they could

go on forever.

It's the way workshops were meant to be – they're going somewhere – they're learning and you're learning.

In water, it's as if the river is flowing into the ocean and the ocean is flowing back into the river. It's flowing in both directions.

Q: What is it that is flowing?

It is harmony and awareness, tranquility, imagination, wisdom, and joy. I think knowledge is flowing. And enjoyment of one another. I'm enjoying the group and they're enjoying me. We're enjoying spending time together.

Q: What do you notice when it's not happening? What is the clue that we might not be in flow?

Or we may never be. It's the changing expressions. It's the tones of voice. Maybe the utter lack of response.

Q: You've said before in many of your workshops that laughter is contagious.

The *right type* of laughter is contagious. I can walk by a group of men, and I can tell by the quality of laughter whether they are telling dirty jokes.

Raising the spirit is not just laughter, it's that everybody's in the same zone. It's that everyone's "clicking." What I'm doing is flowing out to them. What they're doing is flowing back to me and to each other. Everything's going all right. Everything's smooth. Or you might be getting ideas about how it might go better. If you're visiting with somebody, you've had the flow experience. If you're reading something and it's hitting the right spots.

Flow can be almost anything where everything's all right! It's almost entirely a felt sense – you don't even have to see or hear anything. You can have a flow experience in your dreams. Or, I can just sit in here by myself and have a flow experience.

Q: Annie, have you ever come upon a situation where you were feeling kind of ho-hum and the other folks you were relating to were feeling the

same way, and you knew that the situation called for a lifting of the spirits? If so, what did you do raise the spirits?

I don't try to start on them right away. I think professional "lifter uppers" can really irritate a group. Some people enjoy being miserable for a while. I like to let them get it over with a little bit. If I'm not in charge of the situation, I do differently. If I am in charge of it, I can do various things.

If I'm not in charge of it, I may subtly say something, or have out something.

I met with a group at one of the conferences and we went out to have cocktails. There was one fellow who was causing a lot of dissension. I had this marvelous little book about creativity that was put out by DuPont and Bob Thaves had illustrated it throughout. There was one cartoon where there were two fellas on a seesaw, and one of the guys was on it upside down. We took it up there, and we began to pass it around. We began laughing so hard that they wouldn't sell us a second drink. We'll, soon the troublemaker began laughing. I was sort of glad that they wouldn't serve him a second drink.

Q: Again, how can you tell in this situation that the spirit is lifting?

Well, if you have your people barometer out you can tell.

It's like horses – they know whether the barometer's going up or down. Used to be an old stallion at a stable, when it got cold, he'd wool up. When it got hot, he'd shed. Most of the other horse sat around and waited – not this horse. He'd be shedding, wooling up, shedding, wooling up – like instant replay.

I think you kind of wait to see if the spirit of the group is going to lift itself. I think professional spirit lifters are kind of tiresome. I know people who if you try to lift their spirits "professionally," they will see that that won't happen.

Q: So you do this covertly?

Yes. The word “spirit lifter” is not in my vocabulary. When somebody comes out and says, “I’ll have you laughing!” I’m thinking, “You want a bet?”

You have to be able to feel the group. You have to be able to find out where the problem is coming from. You don’t want to make fun of the problem. On the other hand, you don’t want to wallow in it. You have to find out what it is and where it’s coming from. And find out a way to work with the feeling or diffuse the feeling. You have to find different ways of dealing with it, but you have to find out what it is first.

Q: When you encounter this ‘problem group’, Annie, what do you notice?

It’s the faces – expressions. You can tell if they’re sad, angry, or bored. I can even tell when I get with a group that they don’t like other people.

I remember at IBM once I had go out one time early in the morning, when it was still dark, way out in one of those trailers. I was out there all by myself in this classroom. And this man comes and stands in the door. I say, “Can I help you?” He didn’t say anything. I thought, “He’s going to kill me.” Here I am always the optimist! Then he moved a little closer. I asked if I could help him again. He didn’t respond and moved within a few feet of me. At this point, I abandoned all tact and said, “What do you want?”

He looks a little startled and says, “I guess I didn’t know they’d hire a white-haired woman.” I said, “I’m delighted that you’re wrong, and I’m the teacher. You’ve still got time to go home.” They had never had a white-haired woman teach before. They had white-haired men, but not women.

Q: When you experience flow, what’s going back and forth internally? Expectations and reality?

I’m not sure, but I’ll hazard a guess. It’s among

chakras. It’s an alignment of the chakras. It’s a feeling of total alignment.

Q: Internally we know that you have a relaxed sensation of internal alignment. What sorts of external aspects are there to being in flow? What would your gestures be like, for example?

I’m not a great with gestures because I was in television for a long time. I was taught to keep my hands still. Lots of trainers walk up and down.

When I first was teaching a radio writing class, there was a woman who used to lean as he followed my walking across the class. She was like a sunflower following the sun. I had such a sense of responsibility to keep her upright.

Now I have to be at a table so that I can be near my materials. I like to hand out the materials before the class – have them waiting for the people when they come in. Also, I like to have my teaching materials in an easy-to-reach place, so I don’t spend time looking at them.

I don’t want to invite you over for dinner and be so busy in the kitchen that I don’t have time to look at you.

I think always about the time when Harold, my husband, and Chub, my twin, were going to have a dinner party – there was a woman from NBC down here. And the table was like Christmas, done up like a big package. Harold and I arrived. Chub had two small children – Margaret and David – she rushed out and said, “I burned up the main dish. You got to do something about it.” And she went back to the kids. We didn’t even know what the main dish was. Well, it was chicken that was burned black. I said, “Harold, get in the liquor cabinet, get out everything in there, and pour it all over the chicken.” The woman kept asking for the recipe. It was “finger liquor” good chicken. We just disguised it. Sometimes you have to do that in teaching

as well.

Q: So, you're in this state of flow, what's that like for you?

If you've ever been an actor, it's like having a successful play. The audience has just finished loud, loud clapping, and maybe even standing. Everybody's so pleased. So happy. And you know you've done what you came to do.

I imagine that expert cooks get this when they serve a very delicious, well-received dish – like finger-liquor chicken! I think painters get that when they've finished a really nice work. It's total harmony with everything.

Q: A musician who has played a piece wonderfully.

It's not just that the person has performed well. It's the interchange between the audience and performer. It's the flow between them, the exchange. They've gotten a lot from you; you've gotten a lot from them.

A poem, for example, that has something in it that people can relate to. I just wrote a poem about growing older creatively. At the end of the poem, it says, "So let's roll." So everything is right where it's supposed to be – having done what you were supposed to have done. There's total harmony. You've fulfilled your purpose and you've met your own expectations as well as others. Harmony.

Q: What is the question that drives you?

Am I giving them value - the best they should get? Am I giving them enough? Am I giving them too much? Am I giving them enough time? Am I giving them something that will lead them on to more of something? What do they, themselves need to get?

Q: Is there anything we didn't ask?

We didn't ask much past the range of humor and flow. I think there are many things that I'm interested in like accelerated learning, like the whole brain-mind activity. We talked a little about intuition. We didn't talk much about the rest of the I's – nobody really knows the value of illustration. We didn't talk about implementation. People have all these

great ideas but they don't do much with them. Problem solving – ways of actually taking hold of problems and trying to solve them. That is opposed to "problem sobbing." That is utterly a whole different thing. I do different workshops on these. People waste so much time on sobbing.

At NBC, they used to come in, holding their heads. I finally told one fellow, "Have you ever thought about going back to your desk and trying to do something about it?" I'm happy to listen to it – but every morning from the same person. I feel that way sometimes about my older friends who like to tell me about their ailments. To tell me the same ailment....they're not doing anything about it, and I can't do anything about it.

All of these things are about freeing spirit to realize itself fully. The actual solutions can come from a higher source. That's what our minds do every night. The way of the deliberative intuitive mode is to put everything you know about the problem out there, then you send the conscious mind to sleep. The subconscious mind searches all its bases – goes to other minds, higher minds (the God Mind, or whatever you want to call it). If you put that in as you're going to sleep you may get the answer. We don't use that much. I use that a lot. I've always used that.

Q: How do you do that?

Put in everything you know when you are in Alpha state.

Then you pose the questions you have.

Then you get the ideas.

You get the conscious mind out of it. The conscious mind doesn't have the resources of the unconscious mind. As you come out of natural Alpha state. I would recommend that you keep a pad and pen by the bed when you come out of sleep.

I usually, have my answers when I wake up at 4 or 5 in the morning, come down to make breakfast, and I look up this hill.

You handle it like any good problem-solving processes. You make separate assignments for each of the problems.

Q: What about your central purpose for raising the spirit?

Not only raise the spirit, but give it something to do.

Q: Can you articulate principles or values of raising the spirit?

It puts you on a higher of plane of thinking. It temporarily erases the negativity that says, "I'll never be able to do this, or I can't do this." It helps you look over the wall and get a future perspective that's hopeful and helpful. It may even show you a different place that you want to go or thought to go.

We used to do an exercise where we examined our career. We took off the first five years, and then we divided the remainder in thirds. For each division we would ask two questions:

1. What were two things that happened?
2. What was the payoff?

In doing this exercise, you'll discover that sometimes people are getting the same payoff, but that's not what they want anymore. They have changed payoffs in their mind, but they are still going for the money or going for the fame.

My payoff has changed completely. My payoff is trying to see that you do the most you can do. I do everything you can think of to get you at your highest potential. That wasn't what I started with.

We've found that people are still working at making more money when that is not their payoff. Getting more fame, and that's not their payoff. They are still not changing their effort when they have totally changed their payoff.

I learned this in the first grade. I was an identical twin. There was the cutest little boy. His name was Robert, and he ran up to me at recess and he had these wine balls, which were these little red candy balls. Robert Grant ran up to me and gave me a sack of wine balls. I

was beside myself. I said, "Oh, Robert. Thank you. And don't tell Marye where I am." He said, "You're not Marye?" I said, "No." He said, "Give me back the wine balls."

It should have crushed me. Instead, for the first time in my life, I found that I had a different identity. It was the first time anybody had not called me the Durrum Twins.

I should have been killed. I was gleeful! See, our payoffs change. From then on, I didn't care if they called us the Durrum Twins; I knew I wasn't the same gal - we weren't even Siamese.

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