

Neighbors

Author writes about four L's: love, laugh, limit and live lightness

By Lynn Woike (published in the May 11, 2011 issue of Newington Life)

A goldfinch sitting on a branch, bathed in sunlight, swaying in the breeze filled Ann Ernst with a joyous, bubbly feeling that she "could only describe as lightness of being." Despite, or perhaps because of, feeling overwhelmed and overburdened, she had an epiphany.

Clearing her too-full calendar, she "started writing like crazy" on an easel in her office using colored pencils.

"It was an amazing moment that has stayed with me," she said, crediting her coaching abilities for helping her to "be more open to look deeply at things" and to "recognize moments that ignite a passion."

"We're always so rushed." But this time, she said, "I really stayed with it and developed it."

Over time, she realized she "could call up the lightness by just taking a deep breath, saying lightness and summoning up the bubbly feeling." It felt palpable. It felt sustaining.

A few months later, she wanted to share the experience with the hope it would lead others "to joy and renewed energy and to living as they intended." So she began her journey three years ago to write and publish "The Lightness of Being You."

By "lightness" she conveys the complete range of meaning from illumination to weightlessness.

"I tried to be light about it, not making myself crazy." Speaking from the heart, she found she wasn't nervous and that her message was helping people, "I really had to let go of my ego and not worry about what people would think about my writing or the concept. It was my voice and I really wanted to share it."

"Six people read my first draft. They all said, 'You have something here.'" The positive reception and feedback kept her focused for the two years it took to write a book while working full time at the company she'd begun.

Once the book was in print, Ms. Ernst began doing signings, workshops and speeches as far away as New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada. She recently had a book signing and seminar in Orlando, Fla.

Attendees and readers have been enthusiastic about the lightness approach to dealing with the serious topic of their lives, she said.



For years, she coached clients and colleagues internationally and she is now using her book with clients as are other coaches.

Research made her realize that "to be a speaker and to have these workshops, I needed to have control and not spend years trying to get an agent and a publisher," she said.

Thus began her adventure in self publishing.

"That was a great journey. I met the most wonderful people ... It's been my own light journey," Ms. Ernst said.

The illustrator she hired recommended a book editor, who recommended a book designer. Work was done primarily by phone and email. Other coaches she knew were also supportive.

The result was the 184-page book.

It is available for \$14.95 at amazon.com and through www.thelightnessofbeingyou.com.

The book offers "a way of looking at and reflecting on your life. It gives you a perspective. It's about being more aware of what fills you up and what takes you down ... What makes you feel light? What makes you feel happy?" Ms. Ernst said.

"There's so much chatter all around" and it's easy to "get so bogged down" and not hear "when your heart is feeling wonderful, and being able to call up those feelings as opposed to going through the motions because you reel that you have to do something."

"We're all brought up with certain beliefs that we have to do this and do that. We don't have the courage to limit or eliminate the things that take light away," she said of toxic relationships and activities that weigh down a person and drain away energy.

Ms. Ernst was a mathematics teacher in Springfield, Mass., before staying home to raise her children. She reentered the workforce as a data analyst at Aetna and progressed into management positions. She eventually changed careers — to executive education — within Aetna, overseeing the leadership and strategy education for company executives.

In 1997, she began her own company, Ernst Consulting, assessing organizations, facilitating management meetings and directing business planning. Subsequently, she formed The Foxhill Group to focus more on coaching for which she had become certified.

"On that day with the bird, I was feeling heavy and dark. I was weighed down with things that were taking my energy away." Seeing the lightness of the bird, "I felt buoyed up ... felt that real lightness" and a joy about being creative.

She wrote the book to give others a framework to attain that same state of being. There are characters — 'including a dragon and an imp — to illustrate her four L's: love, laugh, limit and live lightness.

"The love part is not only about loving yourself, it's about loving what you do, loving your flaws, loving your strengths," she said, adding, "The more you open your heart to yourself, the more you open up your heart to other people. It helps to look at yourself through benevolent eyes and it helps you to look at others the same way."

Limiting demands the courage to honor yourself, Ms. Ernst said. "Sometimes you have to take a risk, but it's usually worth it to honor yourself and to honor what you want and what you need. You might have to say no to some things to say yes to others."

She acknowledged that "it's hard for us to do" because of the "old beliefs and pressures people put on us." But to not set limits means there will be little time for what it is you love to do.

"In my coaching practice I meet people who are in positions and places that they don't want to be and who are doing things they don't want to be doing. They are stuck. I see people who, for any number of reasons, are controlled by circumstances that have kept them from moving forward in a well-lived life."

She urges individuals to "be a little selfish" and to give themselves permission to do what brings them lightness and joy.

Helping clients identify their passions, she realized her own passion was ignited; practicing what she preaches has helped her as well.

"The beliefs I live by make a profound difference in my life every day. I consciously choose to look on the bright side, to choose optimism, and to believe that I can limit what zaps the lightness from my life and makes me less than I want to be," said. At long last, she said she is "conscious of what gives me lightness and what takes it away. It is the speed with which I recognize and see or feel the signs of light-taking that helps me to quickly readjust."

Her goal is "to go viral" with her book this year, between book signings and speaking engagements. Workshops and retreats are also in the mix. Then she will begin writing the accompanying workbook.

While the book has some exercises in it, it is not required that they be done. "The workbook will be much more robust," and for use by individual readers as well as for workshop participants.

A 60-year-old home designer and builder in Canada named Barry loved design but found project work made him crazy, Ms. Ernst said, noting that he was more interested in painting and music.

"He called me one afternoon to say he'd read the book three times and was lying on his hammock on his porch and knew what his bliss was ... it was music. He thanked me for helping him turn the light back on," she said. He is now pursuing more opportunities to play and has regular gigs every Friday and Saturday.

Michelle Peters, 40, has also read the book. She's known Ms. Ernst for about five years and was a client for about two of them.

"We created a program and a plan. With Ann I was able to envision precisely what I wanted to do and how to do it," Ms. Peters said. "She helped me see things in a different way, break them down ... [and] focus on manageable goals." At the end of a year of aggressive work, she'd "helped me attain everything on my list. She's a great motivator and she's inspiring."

Ms. Peters said the book makes her slow down her fast-paced life.

"Ann tells antidotes and personal stories throughout the book" and there are spaces for notes, she said. "I can turn to any page and there's some sort of nugget that's going to inspire or reassure or motivate me. It does so much, depending on what you need that day."

She also shared the book with her 63-year-old mother, noting that "while she's in a different place in her life ... she found a lot of inspiration in the book, too. We both loved it."

In addition to workshops, marketing and writing, Ms. Ernst still does organizational consulting and is coaching a handful of executives.

"When you're doing something you love, the passion infuses you with energy, she said.

Ann Ernst is available for speaking engagements, book signings and Living Lightness workshops. Her email is ann@thelightnessofbeingyou.com

