



The Power of Words

DO YOU REMEMBER, FROM WAY BACK IN THE archives of your childhood, the list of big dreams you had for what you wanted to be when you grew up? My list was expansive and covered a large swath of career fields.

After being cast as a bat in my elementary school's production of the Missoula Children's Theater rendition of *Snow White*, I was convinced life on the stage was where my future could be found. Acting classes at the Spokane Civic Theater over spring break followed. It never dawned on my that being cast as a bat – a non-speaking role, requiring nothing more than putting my arms straight out and “flying” between the trees on stage – may not have been the role of someone destined to be a star. I wouldn't have guessed that based on how my parents supported me. I wanted to be an actress? Of course I could do it!

The chef phase came over the summer, when I decided my talents would best be put to use fine-tuning my cooking skills. I spent hours in the kitchen pairing unlikely ingredients in search of that winning recipe that would make my mark in the culinary world. One of my best efforts involved Cheerios, sliced bananas and a few tablespoons of flour, all covered in a heavy dousing of Hershey's Syrup. This was refrigerated and congealed, before I served it to my taste-testing family, most of whom managed to choke down at least one courtesy bite.

After watching the movie *Space Camp*, about kids who are accidentally launched into space while attending a space camp program, I was convinced the sky was the limit –literally. I wanted to be an astronaut. This was around third grade, and I spent much of that spring lying with my back flat on the living room floor, rear end smooshed up against the edge of the couch, with my legs up on the seat cushion, at a 90 degree angle, pretending to be strapped into a space shuttle, awaiting launch. Day after day I did this for hours on end, dreaming about what it would be like to take off and float in space. My passion was fueled even more after a summer vacation to the NASA Ames Research Center at Moffett Field, in California. There, I received a NASA tote bag filled with dehydrated

ice cream and green beans, similar to what astronauts ate in space, and two postcards. One was of the space shuttle at night, ready for liftoff, and the other was an astronaut walking on the moon. Both of those postcards were taped to the inside of my closet, and were never taken down. In fact, if you could look, they are still there, now.

The dream of being an astronaut didn't last, but the postcards did. They were reminders of the power of dreaming.

Actress, chef, astronaut; the list of jobs I dreamed about was pretty ambitious and sophisticated for a gangly, awkward girl whose nose was always in a book, and who chronically had fingerprint smudges on her glasses because she pushed them up by the lenses. Here's the thing, though. Never once in those days when I was on stage dressed as a bat, whipping up inedible creations in the kitchen, nor lying on the living room floor, dreaming of liftoff, did anyone tell me I couldn't do those things, no matter how big of a dream it was. If anyone – especially my parents or a teacher – had spoken words of defeat or negativity for dreaming so big, it would have crushed my dreams right there.

Crushing, indeed, can be the words of an adult to a child. I remember when my parents were out of town, and someone else took my sister and me to our ballet classes. I stood up as straight as possible, dipped as low as I could on my demi-plié, and gave it all I had for my very favorite part of the class, the “run-run-step-leaps.” I felt like a gazelle, leaping through the air, so hopeful to impress my guest. After class, this person complimented my sister on her grace and skill. I could hardly wait for my compliment! They turned and looked at me and said, “And you! You didn't even *try!*” I was shattered. I *had* tried. I had tried my best and been so proud, but those words took all of my hope, my drive and my confidence right out of me. I quit ballet later that year, convinced I wasn't any good at it, and never went back. Those words stole my hope.

I didn't become a ballerina. Nor did I didn't become an actress, a chef or an astronaut. I became a writer! That too was a dream in my heart, one that had lingered longer than the others. I used to hunch over my Grandpa Tim's old 1950s Smith Corona typewriter, in the basement, writing stories just for fun. Then, my senior year in college, my favorite professor, Dr. Greg Spencer, stopped me after Senior Seminar class, looked me in the eye, pointed his finger directly at me and said, “You *need* to write. You are good at it.” Those words validated the fledgling writer within me. They were words that inspired me, gave me hope and gave me encouragement to press on and become a real writer.

It is amazing the power of words in our lives. The words people speak over us, both positive and negative, have the ability to carve a new path for our future, like a river cutting through rock.

As we launch into a new year, let's all pay attention to the words we speak and those we allow to be spoken into our lives. Let's focus on speaking words of encouragement, hope and possibility into our lives and into the lives of others. I never want to have a careless word slip out that lingers, hurts or discourages someone. I want to be a source to build others up, to encourage and fill others with faith and hope, to see the potential within them, and to see the possibilities. That is my goal for both what I speak and what I write. I give you my word.

Happy reading!

Blythe