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Learning

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I love to learn. I say that easily...but is it true?

More accurate, I guess, is that I like knowledge. I like knowing things. I like being smart. What I often lack, unfortunately, is the required humility to be a good learner. It's often difficult to be open to instruction. I'm impatient. I want to jump ahead, to already have the information or ability. And, because I *am* pretty smart, am a good reader, have some problem solving skills and artistic ability, I tend to over-estimate what I'm capable of.

I have often walked into classrooms fully expecting simply to show off the knowledge or ability I already possessed. Then, at the first test, submitted paper, or art critique, I've been stunned to realize that I'm not nearly as exceptional as I led myself to believe. After that shock comes defensiveness and false justification. Who or what could I blame for the fact that I'm not as bright as I thought I was? Humility follows, and with that, finally, the ability to learn.

It's not usually easy to get to that point. It feels like a surrender. A failure, somehow. Once there, though, it's a good feeling, to be receptive to new information and to give in to the idea that there is more out there to learn. That, in fact, I don't already know everything.

That's not always the case, of course. There are classes I've taken that were clearly well beyond my realm of knowledge or experience, when I entered knowing that I was a novice, and was fully open to being enlightened. Spanish, for instance. Art History. Geology. And any course involving Mathematics. The experience, then, is like that huge leap from zero to one. That's when learning is most rewarding: offering brand new ideas; opening windows and doors in the mind; and creating pathways for thought and comparison that hadn't existed before. For that feeling of enlightenment, I am a lifelong learner.

Though my instruction comes mainly from books these days, I actively pursue new information and insights. One book leads to another and then another. I became interested in Women's Studies in the 1970s; after reading Greer, Friedan, Daly and other modern authors, I was anxious to know more about the history of the movement. That led even farther back, to the persecution of witches, women's lives in Medieval times, and then back to ancient Greece and Rome. A few years ago, I went down a path on Arctic and Antarctic exploration. They are good books to make our Michigan winters seem mild and quite bearable! Recently, a historical novel set during the French Revolution has spurred me to learn more about that period of time.

I am always striving to be a better – more enlightened, healthy, contented and organized – person. To that end, much of my reading is in the realm of self-help. And, though I could count a dozen books I've read, for instance, on forming good habits, and they often even reference each other, they rarely seem redundant. Part of that stems from my belief that I have a lot to learn. Part of it is because I forget. It seems my memory is not as good as it once was, and I don't retain knowledge the way I used to. That's okay, I guess, as long as I keep giving myself more information. Luckily, I love to learn!