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## Inspire

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## Inspire

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Writing about inspiration is a daunting task, not the least because the word itself has been overused to the point of oblivion. The temptation to include wonderful anecdotes of kind acts is great, but seems somehow to just borrow others' inspiration. Works of art, music and literature are described as "inspired," as are our responses to them. Clothiers, the auto industry, even furnishing gurus claim inspiration as their products' genesis. Even broadcast news is compelled to include inspiring moments for their viewers by highlighting members of the community (or the nation or globe) who have done more, shared more, given more of themselves in an uncommon manner or for an unusual cause. These can bring a tear or a smile, but rarely do they truly inspire, in the sense of prompting similar action or commitment. Is this the true significance of the word, or has that been thoroughly obfuscated by its easy application to those caught in the midst of any emotional situation?"

**INSPIRATIONAL  
THOUGHTS**



## INSPIRE

Writing about inspiration is a daunting task, not the least because the word itself has been overused to the point of oblivion. The temptation to include wonderful anecdotes of kind acts is great, but seems somehow to just borrow others' inspiration. Works of art, music and literature are described as "inspired," as are our responses to them. Clothiers, the auto industry, even furnishing gurus claim inspiration as their products' genesis. Even broadcast news is compelled to include inspiring moments for their viewers by highlighting members of the community (or the nation or globe) who have done more, shared more, given more of themselves in an uncommon manner or for an unusual cause. These can bring a tear or a smile, but rarely do they truly *inspire*, in the sense of prompting similar action or commitment. Is this the true significance of the word, or has that been thoroughly obfuscated by its easy application to those caught in the midst of any emotional situation?

Those who know me best know that I consider my three dogs to be smarter than a large percentage of the general population, and their unconditional love for their people is a constant amazement to me. However, while they may have many superior qualities, it is hard to promote them as "inspiring," no matter how talented they are. And that is because their range of choices is severely limited; their goodness is somewhat inherent in their natures and does not come from outside inspiration. Fundamentally, inspiration is an internal event, while recognition of it is an affirmation of faith, a proclamation of belief in the best in each of us. And, in its truest sense, inspiration is also an assertion of the divine source of those qualities.

The word *inspiration* like so much of our language has Latin and Greek roots, and has a religious basis to its definition and use. Literally it means "God-breathed," focusing on the connotation of exhaling or breathing out. Not only does it appear in scripture, some teachings tell us that, "[A]ll scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim.16-17). In some translations, the emphasis is on the word's connotation as "divinely breathed into," while more modern English translations use "God-breathed" or "breathed out by God." Whatever the emphasis, inspiration avows the presence of a source greater than ourselves that calls us to be more, do more, give more than we thought we could. It is the essence of our human nature that we can be inspired, again and again. Whatever the tragedy, whatever the hardship, we have an inner resilience that pushes us to move beyond, to find

what is better. This ability to both inspire and be inspired is ours, a great gift of the human spirit that is meant to be shared.

I could go on, but temptation is too strong. Let me leave you with two inspiring stories that teach important life lessons. The first inspires us not to pre-judge our fellow humans, while the second calls us to always acknowledge the service of each of us.

One night, at 11:30 p.m., an older African American woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway trying to endure a lashing rain storm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet she decided to flag down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her, generally unheard of in those conflict-filled '60s. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance and put her into a taxicab. She seemed to be in a big hurry, but wrote down his address and thanked him. Seven days went by and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise, a giant console color TV was delivered to his home. A special note was attached. It read:

"Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes, but also my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside before he passed away... God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others. Sincerely, Mrs. Nat King Cole."

(If you don't know who Nat King Cole was, google and discover.)

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" he asked. "Fifty cents," replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. "Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he inquired. By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she brusquely replied. The little boy again counted his coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped down the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies.

You see, he couldn't have the sundae, because he had to have enough left to leave her a tip.

I hope you are sufficiently inspired to take a deep breath and make the most of the upcoming holiday season. May it be spiritually rewarding, and may you find a way to inspire others.

**Carolyn S. Vacca, Ph.D.**