

## Turning Your Passion into Action

It is truly a great honor to be asked to speak before my friends and neighbors about The Panda Who Would Not Eat. Christy Wilson asked me to speak to you because I gave the royalties of the book to Quail Botanical Gardens and the new Children's Garden that is going to be built there. She feels that there are many ways for us to use our talents and time for philanthropy as well as giving funds. She also wanted me to speak to you about how an internist and geriatrician became a children's book author and illustrator. I've wondered about that too!!! Christy and Debbie Anderson asked me to speak on "Turning Your Passion into Action".

As I thought about the title and prepared this talk, I tried to think of wise words to say about turning our passions into action. I know all of you have passions that you are developing. I'm certain you have thought of all of these ideas, but I believe it is helpful to review them from time to time.

Here is my list for turning passions into action—

1. Assess your passions and your strengths. Try to make this a short list so you are not spread too thin. I have to be very firm with myself on this! So many things are interesting to me. I've finally realized that as much as I'd like to, I cannot become an expert orchid hybridizer or make my own paper or create large, illuminated manuscripts at this stage of my life without compromising the areas upon which I've decided to focus.

2. Try to set a goal. Some things like becoming a better painter are life goals while some projects may be given a deadline.

2. Spend time on your passions—This is probably the most difficult task. It's so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day nuts and bolts of modern life and family and home responsibilities. We've all heard that despite our modern conveniences, we have less free time than previous generations. I've discussed this issue with a number of my friends over the years. I personally long for the days of literary salons and quilting bees. But, since this is our time....

Try to set aside some blocks of time each week for your passions. I find this difficult at home. When I was working, it was easy to work undisturbed. Certainly I had emergencies, but I was always practicing medicine. At home the phone rings, the dog wants a toy thrown, I look outside and see roses that need dead-heading and then I might like a cup of tea and so on.....Edith Wharton stayed in bed in the mornings and wrote and corresponded—that's one solution! Somehow I don't see us in bed with our breakfast trays and dogs and working all morning. But perhaps we should consider that.

3. Be consistent over time in following your passions.

4. If study is required to turn your passions into action, read and study. I believe you can become a "mini-expert" in any field if you read 7-8 books on it. Find good teachers if you're learning a skill.

5. Choose your friends wisely. Liked-minded friends can support and encourage you and I'll explain how this was especially true in my case. You have such a group here in philanthropy.

6. One field you choose may be complemented by another of your passions. I do believe that everything one does in one's life enhances and enriches other aspects of your life.

7. Reassess your goals and passions at least once a year and determine if you're having fun, if you are on track or if you need to make a change.

Here's the path I followed to get to the Panda Who Would Not Eat-----

When I retired from medicine for health reasons, I was a bit lost at first. Fortunately, I had always loved gardening and art and literature. I was able to indulge these passions more as time went on. Generous friends like Shirle McConnor invited me to join their gardening groups. Agatha Youngblood and her wonderful "painting ladies" group asked me to paint with them. Some of them are here today—Agatha, Francie Filanc, Thania Griffiths, Yasko Zimmerman, Carol Martin, Lani Freymiller, Beth Velasquez, Mary Rodriquez and Julie Wray, Sarita Sutcliffe--supporting me once again. I had loved art as a child and in high-school and college, but had no time for my own art with a busy practice and three children. This nurturing, supportive painting group really helped to develop my passion.

I took lessons in drawing from Irina Gronborg and painting from Sebastian Capella and Raye Anne Marks. As my art developed, I had a one-woman show. The whole painting ladies group showed up en masse to surprise me at the opening. They fought Padres play-off traffic to get there. We ended up in the same restaurant and they hid from me to make sure it was a surprise when they entered the gallery! My supportive teachers and many of their students went also.

Over the centuries, like-minded people have congregated to support each other in the arts and other endeavors. Some famous, noteworthy examples in the arts are the Bloomsbury group and what has been called the American Bloomsbury group of Hawthorne, Thoreau, Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Van Gogh and Gauguin lived together for their famous nine weeks in the yellow house at Arles. You can think of many such groups.

While I was developing my art, because of my gardening interest, I was on the board at Quail with Julie Mossy and Marilyn Dronenburg who is here today. Julian Duval, the CEO of Quail took us on a tour of the gardens and related the story of Shi Shi, the first male panda in the Panda Conservation program at the San Diego Zoo. Shi Shi was a picky eater and really preferred one variety of bamboo at Quail. His nose had been injured in a fight before he came to the US. Perhaps that is why he was a picky eater. He also wasn't good at mating and artificial insemination had to be used to produce Hua Mei—which means "China/USA), the first panda born at the San Diego Zoo. She is the first panda who lived to maturity born in the US. She has returned to China where she has given birth to three sets of twins.

Zoo trucks took the Philostachys vivax that Shi Shi liked to the zoo and zoo trucks still go to Quail to get some of the bamboo that the pandas eat. Julie and Marilyn and I said, "That would be a great children's story!" We were working on the Seeds of Wonder Project at Quail. It's a prototype for the larger children's garden which is going to be built. There is a "stories in the garden" program for under-privileged children there and we thought this would be a good book for the program.

**But-----**

Three years passed and I **still** had on my weekly list of things to do—WRITE PANDA BOOK!!! Some of you may have lists like that—another on my list is finishing the children's baby albums! My first child has one or two pages filled out, my older twin has a few lines and the second twin has a blank book—but, I digress—As I said you need time. And as you can see I haven't always followed my own list.

My art interests continued to develop and I joined a drawing group with Mary Rodriquez, Dinah Carl and Charlotte Chandler and others. Mary and Dinah and Charlotte are here today. I mentioned at one

meeting of the group that I really wanted to finish the panda book—actually I should have said **start the book**. The idea had, of course, been percolating all of this time and I had written several rough drafts. Dinah said, “You should **do it!**” and proceeded to find a course on illustrating children’s books at the Extension course at UCSD. Mary and Dinah and I took the courses.

In the meantime, my life had been enhanced by the arrival of my first grandson, Jack. Until his arrival, I hadn’t really planned to do a picture book. My grandson loved red balloons, trucks, monkeys and other zoo animals so those all found their way into the drawings. He carried a blue blanket. Actually, it was a crisis if he lost it! The blue blanket is there.

I researched the book by going to the zoo, reading books on pandas and reading books on Chinese brush painting and calligraphy. The trips to the zoo with my grandson were, of course, a great hardship!!! I am a voracious reader and had read many, many children’s books to my children and my grandson.

I tried to make the art work look like a child’s version of Chinese brush painting. **That was a good decision as it can take years to become an expert in Chinese** brush painting!—something else I don’t have time for like the orchid hybridizing! The calligraphy on each page is panda—“bear and cat”. The seal under the calligraphy says “for our descendents” as I think Quail and the zoo are both saving plants and animals for the next generations.

There are author’s notes at the back of the book which explain this for parents or others reading this book to children. This is a newer development in children’s books and one which I wish my children’s books had had.

The book rhymes in part because Dinah Carl mentioned at one of the classes, “Isn’t it interesting that zoo and bamboo rhyme?” I frequently get my best ideas at night and awakened that night and realized that I could rhyme the whole book. I counted the words in the book and there are 162 words. Believe it or not those 162 words went through at least 30 revisions all of which my son and husband faithfully read. I had 11 nieces and nephews under the age of 5 who were all given dummy books to try as were Jack and Marilyn Dronenburg’s granddaughter, Katherine. I made so many dummy book copies that the staff at Staples Copy Center kept asking me when the book was coming out and people in the check out line wanted to buy the dummy copies! (That’s when I had a first inkling that the book might actually might sell!) I’m on a first name basis with several of the staff at Staples. I think each dummy copy cost \$16 dollars—more than the current retail price of the book!—and I made a lot of copies!!! Here’s my first dummy book and then one of my later copies. The changes are phenomenal.

In the course of the class, the professor, Kathi McCord, was bemoaning the loss of John Coles’ bookstore. In the past, she had taken her classes to John Coles’ to see the children’s books. She thought we would just have to visit the children’s section at Barnes and Noble and help ourselves. I mentioned that my friend, Milane Christiansen was the owner of the Book Works and that they had a children’s section. I thought she would like to speak with us about children’s book. Milane agreed and it was a great evening with wine and cheese and wonderful children’s books and presentations by Milane and the new owner, Lisa Stephanacci.

I had my dummy book with me that evening and Milane asked to see it. She said, “This should be published!” Until that time, I had envisioned making some copies for Quail for the Stories in the Garden program. The book wasn’t finished at that time and Milane kept gently pushing me to finish it. I love going to the Book Works and I really felt I couldn’t face Milane if I did not finish the book. She helped me find Sunbelt and my editor-in-chief, Jennifer Redmond.

Once the book reached the editor-in-chief, she changed some wording as did Quail and the zoo. Once the book was accepted by the publisher it took about one year for the licensing, publishing process. Once the licensing was done, the publisher had high resolution scans of the art work done. The editor-in-chief then had a book designer help with the book. She added the red stripe on the spine of the book. She changed where I had a few of the words and a placement of the calligraphy and she added to the back cover. Here's my original back cover and the cover they produced.

The whole process from concept to finish was five years---time for the number of pandas in the world to increase from 1200-1600! That's a good thing!

For me, giving my royalties to Quail has made the whole process much more enjoyable. I feel I've received so much more than I would have otherwise. I've never been great at selling things. This way, I can promote the book and not worry. I think my mother usually had to buy all of my Girl Scout cookie allotment! One reward is that the book has been nominated for the American Horticultural Society's best children's book of the year. Of course, my son says it is probably the only nomination.

It's been rewarding to have the book readings and signings and book release party at the Book Works. One of the children said after I read the book at the book release party. "I love that story!" Some of my talks have mirrored my career—I have talked to a retirement community (--back to my geriatrics days) and 60 second graders in Poway after publishing a children's book. I've had a reading at my grandson's pre-school and this week read to a group at the RSF Library. That was a trip down memory lane as I used to spend many hours with my children in the Children's Section.

I do believe in life that the more you give, the more you receive. I have found this to be so true in this case. As Winston Churchill's mother, Jennie Churchill said, "One of the best forms of excitement known by all who do good work is to see it grow out of their labour and their inspiration." Just follow our list for turning our passions into action with dedication and time and study and the support of your friends and you will achieve your goals. Thank you.