

Grow Something Golden

It began with a group of adults coming together to sit
with other adults, to share stories and numbers
Certain things came easy to some of these adults
so they handed out skills like reading and writing and math out as gifts.
Granted these are skills most of us today would call basic,
something we are born into, some more adeptly than others, but still inherent in our living
and yet, they are also skills that 4 of 10 Albertan adults still call hard to grasp,
call slippery, call illusive, call impossible, call some kind of emergency,
call help me, call S.O.S.

It began as the first volunteer tutor program in Alberta,
a literacy association with hopes as big as its name:
Prospects Literacy Association
it had goals that were worth digging for

And yes, at first it must have seemed daunting
like trying to stand still amidst the rush of water
at high tide is daunting
there is so much push and pull you cannot control
but if you firmly believe in the power of planting your feet
you will find yourself a foundation
find roots growing through your feet,
anchoring you to the earth

the tug of the tide will always be there,
but you will learn to sway with it
to build upwards from the foundation
and to stretch into the sun

You will grow in the light,
turning something golden

It began as the Prospects Literacy Association,
it became the Centre for Family Literacy

It began with someone saying,
"I believe in you"

It begins again tonight,
with everyone in this room
saying, "I believe in you"

To the ones whose mouths are not ready for the concrete
of English to be laid down upon their tongues,
whose vowels are all sashay and shimmer
I believe in you

To the ones whose bodies are telling histories
this alphabet has not yet allowed them to speak,
I believe in you

To the baby-noise makers and the toddler shakers,
I believe in you

To the brains that aren't calculators,
I believe in you

To the books being pulled from StoryStacks
and settling on the floors of a C.O.W. bus,
I believe in you

To Rhymes that Bind and Growing Together ,
I believe in you

To the songs we have not yet sung to each other,
to the stories we have not yet told one another,
To learning in unison, To building community
because what you have to tell me is just as important
as what I have to tell you
because we can teach each other

I believe in you

There are so many ways this world makes us feel alone,
makes us feel inadequate
so often this world lets spill off its tongue that we are not enough,
that we do not have the knowledge,
do not have the right skills,
cannot succeed without knowing

There are so many ways this world works to try and push us
off our feet, to pull us from our foundation,
rip the roots we build out of the ground
makes us think nothing can grow in the darkness

But tonight is special,
tonight we have been given a light
we have been given the opportunity to join together
to send a message to the person struggling with literacy
to say, "I believe in you"

Tonight we are the prospectors,
the seekers and the diggers,
the magic makers, and
the lantern holders

Tonight we are the dreamers
growing something golden

There are rare moments in this life
when we have the opportunity to take the hand of another
and walk in encouragement and solidarity
in love and in compassion

Tonight is one of those chances;
tonight is one of those nights
when we embrace potential and possibility,
when we can stand behind the magic of learning
join with those with whom this began,
join with those with whom this continues daily,
plant our feet in the rush of the waves
and say, "I believe in you."

Mary Pinkoski, 2014
Poem for Centre for Family Literacy