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Posted April 7, 2005**CEDU Education - "Here Forever"**

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Note: If anyone wonders just what "closed" this past week with the bankruptcy of CEDU schools, I offer the following.

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Here forever... the mantra of the CEDU schools begun almost 40 years ago was shaken this past week with the abrupt closing of CEDU's schools in North Idaho, southern California, and around the country. Shock waves for students, parents, staff members, businesses and the small communities from which CEDU has drawn so many of its most dedicated staff over the years. Shock and disbelief in the midst of a poignant CEDU workshop for parents coming to visit their children, not bringing them home just yet when they were told that the workshop was over and so was their child's enrollment at CEDU. Bankruptcy the schools were closed immediately.

As an educational consultant presently and former staff member of Rocky Mountain Academy in the 80's and early 90's, I can only guess what the financial reasons were for the filing of the Chapter 7 bankruptcy. I am not privy to the details of the financial piece. I can relate, however, to what this closure feels like as I worked quickly with my two families impacted by this decision. With no forewarning, this loss, which I am hopeful will be temporary, is not only the loss of jobs for the small community of Bonners Ferry and nearby Sandpoint, but much more than that. For now at least this closure is about dashed trust of an organization and sidetracked dreams of parents for their children. It is also about sidetracked dreams for the many staff members of not only a job lost but also a heartfelt purpose in life in which CEDU was an important vehicle. One of the primary leaders in this industry of schools for struggling teens was dealt last week what looked like a knock out blow... not a nick, but a knock out blow. I am hopeful the CEDU heart still beats. If you've ever known CEDU, to me it's a difficult outfit to knock out. I guess we shall see during the coming weeks.

After spending this past week making efforts to support my clients, and attempting to deliver some pep talks to the many disoriented staff members of the local schools who called, I decided I needed to

drive out there and see the schools for myself. So, yesterday, Sunday I took a sentimental journey out Cow Creek Road to the RMA/NWA/BCA campus still stunned that I would see no students when I arrived. And I didn't. The stillness was something else. One maintenance department staff member was there at the entrance to the property making sure folks were not just driving in there cruising around. This man was as touched by the whole situation as I was and many, many others are as well. As I looked all around I kept thinking this is too beautiful and inspiring a place for children not to be here again... and hopefully soon. Too much history on this land to let it all fold. Choked up by the moment in a way I had not been before driving to the property, I found the need to give myself the pep talk I had tried to give to a number of presently former CEDU staff wondering what they were going to do now. Indescribably saddened by it all. Was the heart still beating of a school I had known as so incredibly alive?

As I was nearing the old RMA now NWA and Boulder Creek campus, once again I was stunned by what had been closed down... the beauty of Clifty View, the mountains behind the school and the clouds settling in as I was thinking about how much this setting had come to mean and had given to children and their families for so many years. Now this inspiration through nature was closed to families who had looked to this land and school to help their children.

As I was approaching the campus and driving by one of the Boulder Creek buildings right there at the roadside, there was a light on the porch while all the rest of the lights appeared to be out. Seeing it made me smile in the midst of shaking my head. Perhaps there were other outside lights kept on at the campus during this closure time, but seeing the porch light gave me hope and a little humor in the midst of sadness, that the kids were just away for awhile and would soon return. And the porch light had been left on for them... and their families.

What else was closed? a shaken Here Forever school motto, that's for sure.

Here Forever ... this motto was everywhere when I first arrived in the 80's at CEDU's Rocky Mountain Academy. It was on t-shirts, sweatshirts, and huge murals on the living room and dining room walls. I knew in looking at the campus on Sunday that a part of me was there forever, too, along with probably every other parent, student and staff member who had ever been on that campus and experienced amazing times assisting young people with their struggles and growth. It used to give me a chuckle actually to hear newer students inquiring about the Here Forever motto and just exactly what it meant. We staff knew it meant Here Forever in one's heart. But, by the look on the faces of some of those new, bewildered students, I'm sure some must have wondered about the length of the program their parents had just chosen for them. Hmm, this is a really long program. Forever! Wow!! Now I've really gone and done it!

What else was closed? A growth experience of a lifetime.

CEDU, as a leader in emotional growth education, for me personally is the wildest horse I ever rode. I'm going to guess a few others have the same opinion. For many and varied reasons as we all experience growth in a family, be it our personal family or our work family. The children grew, families grew and the staff grew whether we were ready or not. A caring creative artistic staff with a love for building relationships with struggling adolescents helped it all happen. An outrageous sense of humor among the staff helped it all happen as well. Kids came in feeling very serious about their struggles and for awhile not wanting to be there. And then they encountered a staff that appeared tireless most days helping them feel safe enough to talk about this and to talk about that, and who made me laugh and feel touched by the place more than I had ever experienced anywhere else I had worked I recall Mel Wasserman, the founder of CEDU, saying one time that children vote with their feet. In joining CEDU's RMA in the 80's I found a faculty that worked with great dedication in many ways to keep those children from not voting with their feet. Occasionally some did vote with their feet, walked off, walked back, most stayed at the school with no fences or locked quarters.

What else was closed last week? Laughter and challenge and the growth of courage and fun.

Each generation of CEDU staff has brought to it its own personality and skills in carrying out the CEDU curriculum. Whatever the format, CEDU brought creativity and fun into the lives of struggling adolescents trying to figure out at home how to have fun, while often finding trouble instead. My CEDU generation brought The Staff Lack of Talent Show into production. I can still see students who had not wanted to be at RMA initially, on this night falling out of their seats with laughter in the living room cheering on some of the male staff in their polished version of Swine Lake in their pink tutu's and pig noses. Now how many schools can brag about that! Next was the imitation of the outrageous comedian Gallagher smashing watermelons routine in the living room (with plenty of plastic all around, of course). And can't forget the now publisher of Woodbury Reports playing two clarinets at the same time (when he was RMA's admissions director) just before the Blue Brother's song and dance routine. It goes on and on, the staff skits of the first telephone call home--"mom, you can come and get me now, I've really changed!", the transport to the school (carried out by the shortest staff member transporting the tallest. Tons of laughter in that living room. And then there was the wilderness staff doing a skit where they were setting up camp ahead of the arrival of all the students --- staff sneaking ahead hiding their TV's, blow dryers, and extra food, and basking in the sun so they would look cool. Never had I worked at a school like this before where I laughed so hard so many times. And so did the kids. It was working, drawing kids out... their real selves.

What else was closed down this past week? Workshops and challenges for students and staff that helped all grow.

The reborn dancer. The newly discovered poet. The reborn friend who thought he was not a good friend before RMA. Parents and staff grew too. Experiential education has been the hallmark of CEDU Education. Staff, like myself, had to perform before the school in the same way we asked the children to perform, stretching beyond what was easy for us. Teaching by example. One performance night I went home, having been cheered on by students in typical RMA fashion, that I just knew I was ready for a new career in show biz. My throat had never been so dry singing that song and my hands so shaky on a guitar. The kids loved seeing us do what we were asking them to do. It helped them to see our throats get dry, and knees shake, but doing our performance challenge anyway. The rewards were amazing. For everyone. And for the children we were hoping to help feel courageous and excited about their lives.

What else closed this week? A sense of family and home away from home.

There has always been an amazing sense of family in CEDU schools. Like their families of origin, within their CEDU families there was love and care, anger and arguments, tears, and also hugs. I know of no college level course I ever encountered that could match the education received at RMA and other CEDU schools as it happened via that sense of family, belonging, and safety.

Some organizations, times, persons, and moments and relationships in a person's life forever change us. I remember a colleague telling me shortly after my arrival at RMA that RMA was more of a sculpture than anything else. And, of course, I am hopeful about every tantalizing rumor I hear these days about all the telephone calls that have happened since this closure and all the hope for the future. I know that there is a part of me that is most hopeful that that essence of CEDU/RMA that I knew will reappear somehow on the Paradise Valley campus created by another group of creative and courageous owners and staff, and that someone or a group will be in a position to help make that happen. It would brighten the day of students, parents, many dedicated CEDU staff, many professionals around the country, and the communities who have come to love the fact that they have had an opportunity to be a part of CEDU, too, each in their own way.

Of course, the reality is that CEDU Education, begun by Mel and Brigitte Wasserman some 38 years ago, is all over this country staffed in a variety of versions by many former CEDU/RMA faculty and students who, after a number of years on the northern Idaho Paradise Valley campus or on the southern California campus, rode off into the sunset or sunrise into the next phase of their lives and took with them tons of CEDU. And CEDU became a school of another name in another location outside of southern California and northern Idaho. ... in a little different version with the added creativity of another group of individuals.

My duration at RMA was 8 years, and upon my leaving I began my educational consulting practice and other journeys. But in many ways a part of CEDU has always stayed with me. It just does that. I cannot return to that campus without getting totally filled up with memories, laughter, warmth and feelings of the good, the difficult and the challenging, and the outrageously funny and tender moments. I can remember the nights I drove home filled up and choked up because of a touching moment that day, the emotional courage of a teenager ... or a child we had finally enrolled in 6 hours instead of the usual two.

Not every place and time in a person's life holds a "here forever" significance for us but just see what happens when you ask most former staff and students and their families of CEDU what the experience was like. Get ready. Do you want the 5 minute animated version, or the story after story longer one accompanied by the sighs of gratefulness.

So, even in this recent closing of the CEDU schools, I am hopeful and looking forward to the celebration of the reopening day with children and families and staff back on those awesome campuses. For all my days in the RMA family, the groups, the workshops I wanted to walk out of at times, and some of the most poignant times of my life, I am forever grateful. Some of the first CEDU pillars who trained me... well, wow, what an experience. I still see their faces in my daily life when they supported me and also kindly made me squirm in workshops as I grew, whether I wanted to or not.

So, I guess I do not see the doors as closed tightly. I see housecleaning and reorganization needs perhaps, but getting ready for a reopening and new era on the presently closed campuses. And since we cannot see around the corners nor are we all sitting in on the present meetings and phone calls and plans being considered, I guess I'll trust that among so many impacted by CEDU that there is a group out there happy and eager to step up to the plate at this time, another generation of folks eager to feel what a paycheck is like that is attached to helping in the growing of lives and seeing the return of joy, energy, laughter, and love.

That CEDU energy is pretty hard to sit on. Someone or someone's will be stepping forward with the financial means to resuscitate CEDU. And then the doors will reopen. My vision. My hope. And the children and their families will return. And the staff and surrounding communities will again live happily ever... will live more happily than this past week, that's for sure.

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