

CHAT ROOM



Kathie O'Donohue

Learning often comes when it's least expected

Some things I have learned have nothing to do with formal education, yet they are essential to know. For example, experts aren't always right. They don't invariably have the right answer or even the correct approach. They make mistakes. Some of the most intelligent people I've met have had no formal education beyond elementary school. Upon further inspection, those who are sometimes most opinionated about certain subjects don't seem to have a clue. This naturally ties into my observation in the same arena that the more I think I know about something, the less I truly do. Raising children has had that effect on me - the more I'm around them, the more I realize I don't know. I've discovered learning comes from numerous sources other than educational institutions and often when unexpected.

Training lesson

I learned quite a bit from a professional dog trainer we hired to help us deal with some doggy misdeeds. He observed how one of our dogs is "sensitive." I realized not only was he right about the dog, he was inadvertently right about some people, too. For example, since infancy one of my children has always been "irritable." The pediatrician labeled him so, and I followed suit. It occurred to me that referring to this child as "sensitive" would not only be more accurate, it could also potentially change my way of interacting with him. Instead of dreading anxiety-provoking situations because I feared an increase in his irritability quotient, I would look

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Getting lost is at heart of her book

A directionally challenged school librarian turns her disability into the topic of a new book.

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When Linda Grekin says she'd be lost without her husband, Roger, she's not speaking figuratively. She's gotten lost on area freeways, in shopping malls, at the airport.

Grekin, a librarian at Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills, gets lost so often, she wrote a book about it.

"I'll Never Get Lost Again - The Complete Guide To Improving Your Sense of Direction," published by RDR Books (\$12.95), if nothing else gives those with a poor sense of direction the feeling that they are not alone. In its 100 easy to read pages, it also offers tips and advice to the directionally challenged.

"This is my very first book," said Grekin during a Monday morning interview at her post in the Hillel school library. "It came about at the urging of my husband."

Early on in the book, Grekin admits that "I would never attempt to go someplace new without intense preparation." This often includes a dress rehearsal a day in advance as well as intricately detailed maps with pictures (provided by her husband, Roger, a physician on staff at the University of Michigan Medical School faculty.)

Grekin is no slouch in the education department, either. She holds a bachelor's degree with a major in journalism and a master's degree in education and curriculum from U-M. Career-wise, she has worn many hats. The mother of three grown children, she has co-owned and operated Ann Arbor-based Around Town Tours Inc., worked as a freelance journalist and taught school. This is her second year as a librarian/teacher at



STAFF PHOTO BY BRIGAN LAMORE

Where in the world? Linda Grekin, librarian at Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills, has a tendency to get lost easily. She wrote a book about people like herself who are directionally challenged.

Hillel, which has 720 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

A difference

Early on in her tour business career, Grekin noticed that her partners were much quicker to negotiate the bus or car tours it took her many tedious hours to prepare for.

"For 14 years, I had the same office in a windowless room. Yet I didn't know what street I faced," she said. "And after 24 years living in the same house, sitting in the kitchen one day, I realized I didn't know what room was right above me."

Grekin says she wrote the book, which took her two and a half years to

research and compile, to find out more about herself and others like her and to examine the relationship between the tendency to get lost easily and a spatial disability.

"We are unable to mentally rotate," she said. "We go in a building one way and come out another exit and we're disoriented."

Researchers help out

Dr. Stephen Kaplan, a professor of psychology at U-M, helped Grekin focus her search for information and provided her with resources. She also spent countless hours researching her topic in the library. Grekin's daughter, Emily, a doctoral candidate in psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, also provided assistance.

To find directionally impaired subjects, Grekin simply walked into groups of people she met primarily through her tour business.

"I found these people felt alone, embarrassed, incompetent. They paid attention but still couldn't quite manage," she said. "I'd estimate 10 to 20 percent of the population is affected."

Through her research, Grekin heard about several ways lives have been affected by the inability to follow directions. There was the man who refused to take trips because he found they're not worth the trouble and the woman who won't carpool because she's afraid she wouldn't find her way back to the children's households. She even has an anecdote in the book about Atlanta Braves pitcher Pascual Perez who drove around the 38-mile perimeter of the city on a freeway looking for the stadium - until he ran out of gas.

By the time he reached the stadium, he was too late to pitch.

"Many won't go on freeways. The only reason I do is because I have a car phone," she admitted.

The book includes a couple of tests readers can take to determine if they're

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