

# Who inspires you?



We should all find someone that can inspire us whether a friend, a mentor, or a person we've never met. I often become inspired by people in history. No matter where we find them, we all need mentors. That said, we must not idolize them. People are flawed. We may see greatness in a person, traits we want to emulate, while we also recognize faults.

I have a homeless friend, M—. She has been on the street for most of the twenty years I've known her, and she is getting too old for such a harsh life. It's been a while since I've seen her. Sometimes she gets a job that provides a place to live; I hope that's why she hasn't been around the neighborhood. How does she inspire me? One day I saw her in front of the dollar store and we stopped to talk. It was a hard day for her. She had gone through training to be a live-in caregiver and had a job lined up. The COVID pandemic changed everything, and it left her on the street. Even through the tears, I saw the strength of her spirit.

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I've watched her come alongside other homeless people, encouraging them to face each day. She keeps a low profile and I don't see her often, but I feel fortunate to know her and call her a friend.

Niels K. Rasmussen was from Denmark, born in 1885. As a young man, he became a master mechanic and blacksmith. After moving to America with his brother, he found work with the railroad in the rugged mountains of northeastern Oregon. Finally, he settled in Elgin and opened a blacksmith shop. Over the years, he used his skill to fit horse shoes, fix farm equipment, and kept mills running. His shop was on my way home from school, and I would stop by and watch the old man work. I heard him tell a customer, "He's gonna take over the shop for me when I retire." I almost popped a button off my shirt. That was sixty years ago, and I still smile when I think of that old man putting up with a little boy. I am inspired by people who care about kids.

Another generation and another craftsman, Don Hendricks was my high school shop teacher. He was also one of the most skillful artisans I've ever known. Mr. Hendricks wasn't content with just teaching students how to make woodworking projects. He said, "If a student wants to make something, I'll teach him. If I don't know, we'll learn together and then teach others." Our little school of 200 students had a large shop equipped with all the

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equipment you would expect for a wood shop. It also had a metal lathe and milling machine. I still have a fiberglass recurve hunting bow I made in shop class. There was a corner for welding and a foundry where we could sand-cast projects in aluminum and brass. I made a pattern for a small brass cannon. We had to know whether it worked, so we took it out the back door of the shop, put a charge of black powder in it, a piece of a wooden dowel for a projectile, some powder in the touch-hole, and torched it off. The boom and cloud of smoke proved my efforts were not in vain.

A student trying that today would be expelled—or arrested. But, another student proved that even in rural Oregon in the early seventies, there were limits. He used my pattern to make his own cannon and shot it inside the gym. He loaded it with BB pellets to see if they would go to the opposite wall—they did. The BBs embedded themselves completely into the wood. That stunt brought the end of our making cannons, but we still had a great shop.

My shop teacher was also my scoutmaster. Years later, I went home for my parent's fiftieth wedding anniversary. It was the last time I saw Mr. Hendricks. I had time talk to him, and he was pleased to hear that I had become a scoutmaster.

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My grandfather, Bernal Hug, was bigger than life. He was an innovative and progressive farmer, and I heard one person refer to him as, “The patriarch of Elgin.” His grandfather, Henry Hug, was much the same. Elder Hug sailed from Liverpool on the Emerald Isle in 1859, as the leader of fifty Mormon emigrants. Brigham Young sent him with a few others to establish a Swiss colony in Southern Utah, which is now the city of Santa Clara. A few years later, Henry renounced the Mormon religion and moved to Union County, Oregon. These men were successful and revered, but while growing up, I heard very little about Walter Fridolin Hug, my great-grandfather who had died before I was born. I didn’t know much about him.

A few years ago, I was talking to an old man, a childhood friend of my uncle Ed. He started talking about the things he and Ed did as children. Then he said, “Fridolin was always teaching us how to do things. If we were bored, he would say, ‘Let me show you how to ...’.” I realized that my great-grandfather seemed to be eclipsed by his father and his son. But perhaps that was only because, while they were succeeding in their own generations, he was busy building the next one.

My oldest sister called. It’s been a few years now. With her usual upbeat demeanor, she said, “Just wanted to give you some news. I went to the doctor because I was having some pains and thought I’d have to have my gallbladder out. He ran some tests

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and told me that I did have some problems with the gallbladder, but the big malignant tumor in my lung made that a nonissue.”

During my last visit some months later, she told me about a recent doctor’s visit. Her physician was trying to get her to face the inevitable. When she arrived home, she wrote him a letter stating:

“On the drive home, I kept thinking about what you said, and why you felt you needed to say it. Then, it hit me. You think I am in denial. No, I am dying. What you see as avoidance is simply acceptance. I’ve listed all my belongings to make it easier for my children. I have taken my daughter to everyone with whom I do business and put her name on every account. My sister and I planned the entire memorial service. My will is in place and my brother is the executor. I am not in denial; I am simply not afraid to die. If you cannot understand how that can be, perhaps you should look into your own heart to see why that is.”

Ellen inspired me in many ways during her lifetime, but none more than when I saw her face death.

The greatest and most consistent source of inspiration comes from Vanda, the one who married me forty-seven years ago and has put up with me since. I get to have the fun of working with youth, but she’s the one who invests hours each week praying for each of those kids. She is the one who sustains, encourages,

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and most importantly forgives me. I can see admirable traits in many people, traits that can help me be a better person, but she is the one who makes me want to be that better person.