

full tilt living newsletter

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Boxes

So common now that we all seem to recognize right away what someone means when they say "think outside of the box." Thinking outside of the box is the big answer for all situations, conundrums, failure of things to go the way we want, nay, *expect* them to go.

Like using Super Glue when you cut your finger and there's no Band-Aid in sight. Or sticking a half a potato in the light socket if you've snapped off the burned out bulb, allowing you to twist out the part still stuck in there without getting fried.

I may not be the greatest outside-the-boxer, as my solution to the finger dilemma is to let it bleed until it scabs over and I just plain stay away from the light bulb problem. I call the electrician. Electricians get paid to be jolted across the room by wiring gone amok. Like modern day bronco busters. I also prefer to fry my potatoes in a pan.

I see the beauty in thinking *inside* the box. First off because operating in a box comes in handy for the keeping-things-running part of life. There may be no expansion of the mind—and who needs expansion—in scheduling an annual exam. It doesn't take deep thinking to get the oil changed. You can get a lot more accomplished when there's order to life.

I decided to give myself a little challenge, take a step out of my box and check out this box thing from the outside, so to speak. And discovered that I not only had one box, I had a huge collection of boxes. More than enough to build a castle or a fortress or a tower or a nice snug ring of boxes.

Each with a different kind of stuff--age stuff, gender stuff, relationship stuff, world-view stuff, cosmic stuff, stuff about who I am and what I can or cannot do. For starters.

Well, hey, it's a wilderness out there. What fool would give up the very things that make life a little bit safe, anyway. I mean, once you get past the potato and busted

light bulb, Super Glue for Band-Aid kind of thinking, you're looking at messing with some very hairy issues.

What inspired me to do this was my noticing that the “stuff” that was happening--the big scary stuff--refused to fit itself in my boxes. I was finding more and more often that as comforting as it might feel to stick to the illusion of life being an orderly, predictable affair, when you get real about it, darned little of it is.

And for those of you who have crossed your arms and snorted, "Huh! To all of this! I'm one of the most flexible, out-side-of-the-box-thinking people walking the earth!" I've jotted down a few examples. They might not be the stuff in your boxes. Then again...

Age-related boxes:

- Children who learn the alphabet by age five will be more successful than children who have no clue as to what an alphabet is at that age.
- If you haven't finished school and gotten on with your life by age 25, you're in deep, uh, deep. You know.
- If you haven't come up with a solid career plan by age 30, you'll never have one.
- The ideal way to start a family is to have children of your own. Anything else is second best.
- Dating is illegal after 40. Dating is shocking and embarrassing at and beyond 65.
- If you haven't figured out what you are about by 70, you are a lost cause.
- When you reach a certain age, you just have to accept that when your generation goes, your friendships go as well. There's no point in trying to start over with people who are younger and just don't have the same life experience.
- At 75 and beyond, you have a right to be "set in your ways."

World-view related boxes:

- Once you've made a decision, you have to stick with it. Even if it's killing you or someone else.
- If it feels uncomfortable, it couldn't be good.
- The only way to come out on top is to win.
- One individual has little hope of changing anything.
- It's critical to maintain your image. There's nothing worse than looking like a fool.

Relationship related boxes:

- That's the way things were when I was growing up and that's the way they should be.
- Trusting is the best way to guarantee that you will be hurt.
- If you make a mistake, apologizing and making amends won't make it better, they'll still be mad at you.
- I am the way I am.
- You can change people to be who you want them to be.
- If someone really cares about you, they'll know what you need without you telling them.
- Forgiving is the same as selling yourself short. The other guy gains, you lose.

Will we lose if we give up the boxes? Will we be shedding what has bound us? Will we be able to survive the risks we take when we do? Will we have unleashed our spirit? Will we have given up our most trusted beliefs and entered a wilderness?

We will.

And this I can tell you:

If you're in the box, you are outside of the game. The game is being played without you. The game may even be playing on top of you. Let go of your boxes. It's healthy.

And know that I'm behind you all the way.