

Dash Inspirations

*Stories and Poems
by Linda Ellis*

**Million Selling Author
of "The Dash"**



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LindaEllis.life

To every single person who has encouraged me to continue writing and sharing my inspirations by letting me know that my words have touched your heart, your life.

You are the fuel that ignites the inspiration within me...

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Introduction

My story is an unusual one. I was working for a very large and successful company in 1996 when I wrote a 36-line poem. Quickly, it spread over the Internet and went viral. Not long after, I found myself in New York meeting with publishers and subsequently, traveling the country sharing inspirational speeches! Looking back more than 25 years, and more than one million book sales later, I shake my head in astonishment.

I chose the title for this book because that poem, titled simply: THE DASH was responsible for my success, and my awakening. You see, the dash refers to that little line in between our dates of birth and death...that little line that ultimately represents everything we say and do during our short time here on earth. So, it's how you spend your "dash" that really matters.

Over the years, I've met so many incredible people and heard heartfelt and amazing stories from folks all around the world about how one little poem touched them so deeply. The poem has literally inspired millions. It has changed lives, but none more than my own.

Writers believe in their words and stories like mothers believe in their children. We mold them, we love them, and we send them out into the world hoping and believing others will love them too.

This book is a compilation of stories, prose and poems that I wrote about living the dash, including the love, the laughter, the joy and the pain. I do hope you enjoy reading my words as much as I enjoy sharing them.

*Live Your Dash,
Linda Ellis*

LIFE...

The Dash Between

*There are two important dates
around the life that we live
that reflect the time we're given
to laugh, to love, to live.*

*And between the date when we arrive
and the date we go away,
there exists a horizontal line
that captures every single day.*

*Because these days we're living
seem to vanish in a flash,
we need to make the most of
that special little dash.*

*We are blessed with opportunities
as we tread the grounds of earth
to build the loving legacy
our own dash will be worth.*

*To focus on what matters,
not on possessions owned or bought,
and smile every chance we get,
and love with all we've got.*

*To appreciate the here and now
as each moment will unfold
because we're never told beforehand
how much time our dash will hold.*

*So, if you need to make some changes,
let this be the day you start
to make a difference with your life,
show the love that's in your heart.*

*For how you spend this life
will someday be defined
by everything that is remembered
in the dash you leave behind.*

Invitations

We all receive invitations as the years roll on, requesting our presence at various events. Most will ask for a timely response so that our host can plan the event accordingly. Basically, we have the option of checking yes or no.

Lately I've begun to focus on a concept I refer to as "Life Invitations." I've realized that my life has been continually sending to me personal, VIP invitations to experience the joys, the beauties, and the endless wonders it has to offer. Previously, I had left many of those invitations unanswered and many times, hadn't even recognized their existence. But now I see them everywhere and I feel compelled to respond positively in most instances.

If the invitations life sends to us were tangible, they'd arrive with parchment paper inside shimmering foil envelopes, embossed with only the option to "Accept" written in letters of gold. Every morning as we awaken, during every hour of every day, and with every setting sun, these "invitations" are patiently awaiting our RSVP. We may not receive them in our mailbox or in an email, but they are life's celebrations, and we are cordially invited to attend.

They silently beckon us to explore, discover, experience and feel life itself. However, the busier our lives become and the more responsibilities and deadlines we place upon ourselves, the less time we have available to allow us to check that "Accept" box.

A blooming rose sends an invitation to every passerby to stop and enjoy the aroma of its petals. A gentle rainfall on a summer day sends an invitation to experience the cool drops of water falling upon our shoulders. The autumn leaves send an invitation to witness the graceful ballet of their descent from the trees. Each sunset sends an invitation to observe in awe its magnificence as it descends beyond the horizon signifying the conclusion of a day and the promise of another. The sound of a child's laughter can warm the coldest heart if we pause long enough to pay attention...not to hear, but to listen.

Life's blessings are infinite and we need to take them in...one by one.

Come to Life

*If your days find you troubled
with struggle and strife,
and you're searching for ways to find peace,
Come to life.*

*Vow to lose your disguises.
Drop your pretenses.
Be true to yourself.
Put down your defenses.*

*Your life, it beckons
with each signal and sign --
invitations to live
you're not meant to decline.*

*Blessed with this life
since you took your first breath,
your constant companion
from birth until death.*

*Yet somewhere between,
slowly...unexpected,
the two of you
have become disconnected.*

*Leave behind your regrets:
what you've done, where you've been.
Rejuvenate and revive.
Come to life once again.*

*Don't question so much.
Life isn't a quiz.
Stop analyzing;
it is...what it is.*

*Come to life. Decompress.
A mind that's open and free
won't make things harder
than they need to be.*

*Laugh until you cry.
Allow yourself fun!
Life and you
are **supposed** to be ONE!*

**Live it. Feel it.
Breathe it. See it.
Wear it. Want it.
Love it. Be it.**

*You can always bridge the distance,
no matter how far you roam.
When you come back to life,
it will welcome you home.*

Passion (Find Yours)

It's been said the key to happiness is to find something you love doing and then discover a way to make a living doing it. I find it interesting that the word *vocation* has become synonymous with the words *career*, *job*, and *profession*. The word *vocation* itself is derived from the Latin meaning: "to call." It is a blessed few who can say that their career today—their job—is their calling.

There are many success stories from people who have taken passions and turned them into full-time, profitable careers. By all means, while being honest and realistic, if you see avenues from which to derive an income using the talents and skills of your true passion, then follow your heart in that direction. I am a firm believer in Norman Vincent Peale's quote: "Throw your heart over the fence and the rest will follow." However, if the market dictates otherwise or fear of losing stability prevents you from taking that leap of faith, do not abandon your passion! If you feel you cannot make a living from your passion, ***you can still make a life with it.*** Find ways to weave it into the fabric of your life. It can still be the fuel that lights your fire, and that which gives your presence purpose.

How do you discover your passion, what it is you feel you were meant to do, if it's not immediately evident to you?

Follow different ideas. Try before you buy. You carry seeds of greatness within you—how do you know which ones will thrive if you don't cultivate and nourish each one of them? Give them a chance to develop and grow.

- What makes you enthusiastic when you think or talk about it?
- What signs have you received indicating your special talents or interests are greater than average?
- What do you do with particular ease and enjoyment?
- What is it that makes the thrill of challenge greater than the fear of failure?

A Poet is Me

*I am a poet.
A poet is me.
It's not something that I **do**.
It's what I was meant to **be**.*

*Words flow through my soul
like a necessity, a need,
and if I'm ever wounded,
'tis verses I may bleed.*

*A poet thrives on simple things:
rainy days and hummingbirds --
a cornucopia of feelings
to be converted into words.*

*Sometimes I'll write with elegance,
words to frame upon a shelf,
or sometimes a lonely sonnet
to be read all by myself.*

*Days pass in succession
as they build the weeks of time.
Others count in minutes
what a poet counts in rhyme.*

*In a world full of hatred,
of prejudice and lies,
I wish everyone were blessed
to see it through a poet's eyes.*

*Many question their purpose,
or their life's destiny.
But, I was meant to be a poet
and a poet I will be.*

Inside Accessories

Every day we groom and primp ourselves in order to improve our outward appearance to become more appealing to the eyes, those of the beholder and those of the public “court of appeals” from whom we receive silent judgment each day.

Initially, we seek approval from ourselves as we examine the image reflected from the mirror—our “outside me.” We spend hours every week preparing and perfecting how our image will be seen. However, that image, no matter how coiffed, limits what we are able to display to the world. Yet, maintaining it often becomes a higher priority than working on beautifying who we really are—the me that is not seen through sight—the “inside me.”

We adorn ourselves in an attempt to improve how we are perceived in the eyes of those we encounter every day. We coordinate our clothing and accessories. We shop for things to dangle, pin, clasp, and clip to our hair, jackets, wrists, necks, arms, fingers, and ears, all in an attempt to dress up our outside “me.” What would you add each day if people could see your inside me, as well? What accessories would you choose if you could shop somewhere to prettify and decorate your inside me to make it worthy of others’ approval before stepping out into the world?

If a mirror existed that would reflect your attitude, outlook, and mindset, would you like what you see? Would you be proud to display it to others unadorned? What would your reflection need? How would you accessorize your inside me to raise the level of pride and confidence you feel in yourself? Would you add the inside accessory of kindness, of generosity, of compassion? Would your inside image lack consideration, empathy, or patience? What inside accessories would you eliminate from your reflection—greed, arrogance, conceit? Envision that image glaring back at you. If your true ideals were displayed there in the glass, how would that picture make you feel?

Inside Out

*Does your inside match your outside?
Does your outside match your in?
Do the kind deeds you envision
stay confined within your skin?*

*Your thoughts and your life's actions --
are they close...or far apart?
Is the way in which you live your life
what you believe deep in your heart?*

*Are you the same person on the inside
people see on the out,
or do the two clash and differ
leaving your conscience full of doubt?*

*Do you change to fit each circumstance
like a chameleon changes hues,
or honestly communicate
your true beliefs and views?*

*Do you turn your back on your ideals
when it seems they're not in vogue,
and follow the paths of least resistance
instead of boldly going rogue?*

*Have you learned from the lessons
life has taught you as you've grown?
Do you respect the person you are with
when you are all alone?*

*Do you praise yourself for goodwill
that is only in your head?
Can you replace: "Do as I say, not as I do"
with: "Do as I do," instead?*

*Are you a different person
than the person people see?
Are you a different person
than the one you'd like to be?*

*In you, can others place their trust
and never be deceived,
and see you as you really are,
not how you wish to be perceived?*

*Would they not see a difference,
or would they grieve in sorrow,
if your inside today
became your outside tomorrow?*

The “Me’s”

I am not the same “me” I was. I never will be. Over the years, each individual me has morphed into the next, and there is no way of knowing how many me’s remain to be experienced. There was the teenage me, the corporate me, the single me, the married me, the overweight me, the thin me, the mommy me, the author me, and the list goes on. It’s as though each me had its own lifetime, yet all of them together make up the life of the me I am today. I often ask myself if the me I am today is the me I had hoped to become when I was the me I was then. Confused?

Since our beliefs, tastes, visions, likes, and dislikes change so dramatically as we age, in hindsight, sometimes it feels as though we were different people throughout the stages of our lives. What is important to me today wasn’t important to me then. What I feed me today wasn’t what I fed me, then. What I do for a living to support me today isn’t what I did to support me, then. Some believe fate and destiny determine the me you are at any given time. Others believe you create your own reality through choices. Whether by fate or by choice, the timing of the combination of surroundings, age, knowledge and maturity combine to create each individual me.

People from whom you are estranged today may have been the closest of friends of a me from your past, and those closest in your life now may be people a previous me wouldn’t have considered befriending. The secret is not in comparing, criticizing, or ruing the actions of our me’s but to understand that each me is an important, individual contributor. Each me brings forth invaluable experiences, views, life lessons, sights, sounds, skills, memories, and emotions. Realize that each me is a vital donor to its successor. Though you may wish you could bypass certain stages—the grieving me, the angry me, the unhappy me—each phase will merge in succession with the next. Like a snowball rolling downhill, we gather, we retain, we grow as we continue the journey.

Dear Me

*I've heard it said, "If I knew then
everything that I know now."
But, we are taught at a proven pace
that time and life will both allow.*

*I could have saved a lot of time,
and myself a lot of pain
if I could have been a student
for me, myself, to train.*

*So many changes I would make
from the lessons I'd convey
to make the person who I used to be
more like who I am today.*

*If there had been a way to teach myself
to live a better life instead,
I would have written "me" a letter
and this is how it might have read:*

Dear Me,

*Make the most of every moment.
Be your own shining star.
Though you may not be
where you want to be,
it's still where you are.*

*Laugh much and laugh often.
Life is supposed to be fun.
Find humor in most everything
that can be seen, heard or done.*

*In love, not everyone is perfect,
nor can you make them so.
If you can't accept them as they are,
you need to let them go.*

*Be an open-minded person;
success comes from give and take.
Remain as flexible as the willow
that bends, so it won't break.*

*There are reasons every person
is the person they've become.
Search for the good. (Though it might
take more effort with some.)*

*Cultivate relationships;
do not take things for granted.
Don't anticipate roses
just because seeds were planted.*

*Though it hurts, live through pain,
and experience your sorrow.
Putting off the grief or anguish
only leaves it for tomorrow.*

*If you hold onto resentment,
you'll hold it as long as you live.
The only way to release it,
is to accept . . . and to forgive.*

*Do not expect to be acknowledged
for everything you say and do.
When you do good things for others,
good things will happen for you, too.*

*And now I'll close this letter,
though I've so much more to share.
I cannot send these lessons
to a youth no longer there.*

*Sealed in an envelope will be this note,
I only wish I could have read
when I had lived but sixteen years
with so many more ahead.*

Live Life in Person

If you have resigned yourself to believe that the best years of your life have gone by, you are not living life in person. Each day you wake on the right side of the soil, you owe it to yourself to live that day to its fullest. So many of us have somehow become participants in an odd type of competition, one in which life itself is our only opponent. We are overheard saying things like “I just can’t keep up,” and “I’m so far behind.” Not until we realize that as hard as we are able to compete, the trivialities of life will always emerge the victor. They will forever outnumber us, and not until we accept defeat and proudly take second place can we relax and stop running.

We start living life in person the day we begin choosing from the list of “could do” more often than from the list of “should-do.” The latter is automatically replenished via a never-ending inventory of details and deadlines; a black hole of tasks that you should do. In direct conflict, the could do list contains all that is awaiting your arrival to enjoy and savor. It represents that which you could do, not always after completion of what you should do, but more often *instead* of what you should do.

Truly living life involves finding ways to decrease the length of your should do list and increase the length of your could do list. It’s been said that we all will die with work undone. If we live totally, deeply, and in person, we will not face life’s conclusion with apprehension or fear, for we will not feel resentful or embittered, as if we were denied or cheated experiences. If we examine every corner of what life has to offer, devoting heart, energy, time, and soul into realizing, appreciating, and relishing this gift, we will be satisfied, filled, and fulfilled, knowing we simply took our turn.

Live It All Up

*I wish to be ready
whenever my time comes,
having eaten every slice of life,
leaving no crumbs.*

*I want to know for certain --
in my mind, to verify
that I have lived
all that I could
before I say goodbye.*

*This life, a precious gift
was bestowed upon me
with invaluable blessings,
abundant and free.*

*I will seize every moment
while I am still able
to Live It All Up,
leaving none on the table.*

*I will say I lived sincerely --
that I never pretended,
and that every moment mattered
like my creator had intended.*

*Even though I'll take with me
all the lessons I have learned
from the bridges I have crossed
and the pages I have turned,*

*I'll not be the dangling leaf,
withered and thinned,
who never broke free
to ride with the wind.*

*I want people to say:
"She left a big empty cup,
because she drank it all in
and she Lived it All Up!"*

Ordinary Days

I once had a conversation with my friend, whose mom had been bravely battling cancer. Her mom had mentioned to her that when my friend was growing up, they had a special set of dishes that was set aside to be used only on very special occasions. My friend vaguely remembered images in her mind of those “special” dishes. As a child, she could only catch a glimpse of their decorative rims as even on tiptoes, her little neck could stretch barely high enough to view their neatly stacked piles on a top shelf in the cabinet. She also recalled that the contents of that shelf were to be considered untouchable. However, her mom told her that since she has been facing this challenge in her life, those same dishes are now proudly displayed upon her dinner table on a regular basis, and she deeply regrets not enjoying their beauty on even the most ordinary days of the past.

I considered the phrase “ordinary days.” I couldn’t escape the thought that so many of us bundle and individually count down the days until our next notable happening or event, that we dismiss those days in between and tend to label them as “ordinary.” Often, we will discount them as though they have less value than those times when something exciting is scheduled to happen in our life.

I’ve begun a whole new way of thinking, and that is that no day should be considered ordinary. Every morning that the sun rises and we wake up should be considered special.

Ordinary: a commonplace condition or situation.

Is there anything common about the way the sun slowly appears over the horizon? Is there anything common about the bright and blending hues of the leaves as they change in the fall? Is there anything common about the way the rays of a sunburst form a perfect pattern as they gently force their way through the clouds and illuminate the surrounding sky as if designed by some AI computer program? All of these extraordinary events, and so many more, happen on ordinary days. When we learn to realize the uniqueness and beauty found in each day, then we can truly understand that no day is ever ordinary.

Every Single Day

*Though we may battle our opponent -- time,
someday we must admit defeat.
As the days run into weeks and years,
too soon a lifetime is complete.*

*But if the span of every lifetime
were cut into pieces with a knife,
then every single day would be
a single slice of life.*

*And we'd be certain of the days we have
to laugh...to love...to live
knowing just how much to take from life
and just how much to give.*

*We'd divide our time accordingly --
say and do the things we'd need
because every single day to us
would then be, guaranteed.*

*But life is not indefinite;
time continues its forward stride
and it may end before the laughter's done
and all the tears are cried.*

*So do what you feel you have to do
and say what you need to say.
Seize all the life contained within
every single day.*

*Speak "I Love You" more often,
than just every now and then.
You may not have the chance tomorrow
to say it once again.*

*Don't put off true happiness,
or put your dreams upon a shelf.
Live every single day
as if it were a lifetime, in itself.*

Perennial

Perennial: A plant that lives for more than two years.

*I want to be a perennial;
I want to get a second chance.
I want to learn the steps the first time,
come back and know the dance.*

*I want to be a perennial,
and take the paths of least resistance
through the routes I am now mapping
during my inaugural existence.*

*I want to be a perennial.
I would flourish; I would thrive.
I would bring back all the lessons
from the first time I was alive.*

*I want to be a perennial,
a striking bud amid the clover...
to live another summer
after my first season is over.*

*I want to be a perennial,
to hibernate under the ground.
I vow to return twice as grateful
the second time around.*

*I want to be a perennial,
though this first trip was splendid,
I shall want to ride again
after this journey has ended.*

*I want to be a perennial
like a daisy or a rose,
for I never fully realized
how fast the first time goes.*

*I want to be a perennial.
I think it's something I have earned.
It seems a waste not to utilize
all these things I have learned.*

*I want to be a perennial,
to show this world what I can do,
a chance to bloom bigger
after my first chance is through.*

*I want to be a perennial,
so many things would be corrected.
I would appreciate all the blessings
the first time, I neglected.*

*I want to be a perennial,
arrive an automatic winner,
instead of entering this world
an inexperienced beginner.*

*I want to be a perennial,
to become all that I am not.
It appears I'll need more time
to achieve the dreams I've sought.*

*But, I cannot be a perennial;
from the end, there is no pardon.
We only get one chance to bloom
in life's magnificent garden.*

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