

Of Romeo, Juliet and social entrepreneurs

I didn't know . . .

I was 16 and woefully ignorant about world literature.

Well, there was *Julius Caesar*. We did that in tenth grade. Didn't every high schooler in the 1950s? But we never got to *King Lear* or *Hamlet* or, god help us, *Romeo and Juliet*. The Catholic Church didn't have much to say to us about teenage lust. Davy Crockett and Marshall Dillon were just fine, thank you.

So there I was, in a theatre in downtown Minneapolis in the fall of 1961, watching an amazing new movie called *West Side Story*.

The original 1957 Broadway production ran for 732 performances and received a Tony nomination for best musical. It lost to *The Music Man* – this was the 1950s, after all.

But, hey, now it was on the silver screen and I was snapping my fingers with the Sharks and Jets, loving all the music and dancing and color.

But then Tony and Maria both died!!!

I didn't see *that* coming!!!

I'd never read *Romeo and Juliet*. Nobody'd ever told me the story. In fact, I didn't realize until months later that the movie *was* adapted from Shakespeare's play.

So here I am tonight, nearly 50 years older, listening to Rita Moreno singing "A Boy Like That" from the original cast album and thinking about social entrepreneurs.

They don't know either.

They have no idea what twists and turns await them. Could be a lot of sturm und drang that winds up in a black hole. But it *could* be the next Delancey Street or Housing Works or Greyston Bakery!

All they have at the beginning – all any of us have – is a dream. Maybe some guts. And a compulsion to do some good in the world.

“This isn’t another one of those goody-goody things, is it?” somebody asked me the other night when I told him about some social enterprises being started by high school and college kids.

“Are you kidding?” I asked. “These kids are *ignited* by the idea they can use business strategies to carry out a social mission!”

So are you, or you wouldn’t be reading this blog.

And I know you’ll get discouraged. There’s a long, dark tunnel ahead of you and sometimes you’ll feel as if you’re the only torch-bearer.

But I pass along to the graduate students in my classes and the nonprofit folks in my audiences a six-word mantra, and I offer it to you as well: “*Don’t quit until the miracle happens!*”

None of us know what awaits, whether we’re a naïve 16-year-old discovering world literature in the oddest of ways . . . or a budding social entrepreneur who spots something wrong in the world and tries to fix it.

You can do it. I know you can.

It doesn’t matter what you don’t know. The only thing that matters is what you do with what you find out.

It doesn’t matter how many times you fail. The only thing that matters is what you do *next*.

It doesn’t matter how many people tell you to give up. The only thing that matters is that you never give *in*.

I’ll be cheering for you!