

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Best Holiday Gift May Be a Bookmark

Happy
Holidays

LIFE EVENTS

At our IFEA 58th Annual Convention & Expo in Pittsburgh, PA in September, I spoke about building bridges to connect our global industry. One of the quotes that I made reference to was from Oprah Winfrey, who said "I am where I am because of the bridges that I have crossed;" a quote that keeps coming back to me, but especially so at this time of year. In the United States we are getting ready to celebrate our Thanksgiving Holiday, followed quickly by Christmas; both holidays that bring about welcome reflections of friends and family around the world. Reflections that serve like life's bookmarks, to be quickly referenced among cherished memories, or as we

may need some special inspiration to get through current challenges.

Among my bookmarks are cast a very broad and expansive array of characters (many of you among them) and experiences, reaching back across my childhood, my school years, my career, my travels, my family, and the world around me over the years – historical markers, music, fashion (some best forgotten), and more. Not all of the bookmarks are positive or nostalgic, but I am pleased to say that a large majority still fall into those categories. There are others, as we all have experienced, that fall into less desirable categories, such as fear and sadness; pain and worry; loss and sorrow; regret and remorse; stress and battles. But no matter the category, I have learned and grown from them all, although not necessarily as I might have predicted at the time, or that I even recognized in some cases until many years later. Characters and experiences that have taught me skills, established my values, built my trust, expanded my horizons, grounded me, made me laugh...and cry, given me confidence and strength, taught me empathy, allowed me to love, inspired new visions, earned my loyalties, highlighted my strengths and weaknesses, and reminded me of the lives that I have touched, in turn.

And in my reflections, I have come to realize that our events...of every genre... that we all produce, create, embellish and influence for our own communities around the world, are the same. They have their own bookmarks, filled with unforgettable footnotes and addendums of the countless staffs, volunteers, sponsors, interns, community and industry partners, and attendees that have made so many of our successes possible and our disappointments bearable. Bookmarks of 'war stories' and experiences that make us laugh or recall how we achieved things



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we didn't think possible. Bookmarks that we would like to forget, but that remind us of our unique abilities to persevere through unimaginable challenges and the importance that we do. Bookmarks of generations touched, imaginations spurred, possibilities inspired, communities strengthened and a world brought closer together through what we have the very good fortune to be a part of every day.

My son, working on a class project that required he interview me about my life, tried patiently to understand as I mulled over each 'simple' question; wondering why I needed so much time to formulate my answers. But as I reflected on each question, my mind was revisiting countless bookmarks along my journey that, in some fashion, had shaped each answer. These were the 'bridges' that I had crossed to get to where and who I am today. When he finally asked "How would you like to be remembered?" (a little early in my life to be asking such things I hope), I responded that I would like to be a positive bookmark in as many stories as possible, referenced fondly and frequently for a long, long time.

At this special season, I thank each of you for being important bookmarks along my personal journey and the journey of the IFEA. Have a safe, healthy and happy holiday!