

Defining Creativity S1E7: Louise Neilson transcript

Debbi: Hi, everyone. Thank you for joining me for this episode of Defining Creativity, a podcast that explores where and how creativity is found. I'm your host, Debbi Ponella, a creativity researcher, cultivator, and devotee. On today's episode, we're joined by...

Louise: I'm Louise Nielson, and I am a mediator in private practice. And for 25 years, I taught at Marylhurst University, a small liberal arts college just south of Portland, Oregon. And during that time, I taught in the communication department in mediation, negotiation, and conflict management, and also courses in creativity. It turns out I'm one of the few mediators... I think there's one other in the country with a master's degree in creativity and innovation.

Debbi: Louise, thank you so much for being here today. I'm really looking forward to our discussion. I was first introduced to your work by Dr. Frederica Reisman, a mentor of mine in my creativity work, when I took her class, Diagnostic Creative Intervention, for which your book, *Mediating with Picasso*, was the required text. So that was the first time that I read your work, and I'm so excited today to explore some of those ideas on this platform. So, let's get started. And if you can just begin by telling us how creativity plays a role in your work and in your everyday life.

Louise: Well, it's so integrated that it's hard to know where to break it down to talk about it. In my attempts to do that over time, I wrote the *Mediating with Picasso*. But then since then, and you may not be aware, is that I've written a second book. And I put forth a lot of my theories about creativity or what I've combined into my second book, which I call *In Cahoots: A Playbook for Creative Collaboration*, and in it, I talk about interpersonal creativity.

And it's taking the original Torrance model of a creative person attributes being a combination of their ability, and their skill, and their motivation, that creativity is where those intersect. To that, I have added attributes of creative style, and personality type, and conflict styles, and their values, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and then communication intelligence. And I've fanned those out into where they fit within Torrance's model of skill, ability, motivation. A friend accuses me of never having met a theory I didn't like.

And I find them, and when you say about how do I use my creativity, I'm very comfortable taking these different aspects of creative research and application, and sort of throwing them at a problem, and seeing what sticks, you know, what makes sense. So that when I'm mediating, is the conflict just different style differences? Either creative style, or is it type related? I'm thinking of one mediation where I got permission to give them the Myers-Briggs. When I did, then it was like one person was an introvert, and the other was the extrovert. And the extrovert says, oh, so you're not sneaky and secretive, you're just an introvert.

Debbi: Oh, wow.

Louise: [3:49] I know. It's like, okay, now we have something to deal with. Because based on where he was coming from as an extrovert, if he was doing the introvert's behaviors, that would be his motivation. But to the introvert, he was just being himself with all positive intent, but he was getting accused of things based on, you know, this. So, I find it extremely useful all the time. All the time.

Debbi: So not only are you using your creativity to adapt to different styles and understand different perspectives, but you also apply all your creativity research to the individuals for further insight into their creativity and creativity styles. Creativity applied in so many ways.

Louise: Michael Curtin did work on styles of creativity. And his work talks about how people approach problems; that people that are on a scale, on a bell curve, innovative in their creativity, are the ones that are thinking further outside the box and taking more unrelated ideas and bringing them together into a new idea.

And those are the ones that we generally call creative. Then you have the bell curve, most folks in the middle. But then on the other extreme, you have people who are adaptive in their creativity, who work within an existing paradigm to improve things. So, where innovators will hatch schemes, adapters make them more usable. So, we know who invents the airplane, but who invented the 747, or all the improvements that have come to airplanes

after they were invented. And a lot of conflicts come out of the difference in styles, that they accuse each other of things and then label each other. So, you get the airhead and the bean counter, and we're off.

Debbi: You know, in discussing creativity, we often talk about the need for an environment void of judgment. And just thinking of a situation in which mediation is required, you are walking into an environment with not only pre-existing, but contradicting judgments of each other.

Louise: Oh yeah.

Debbi: And so, what I'm hearing is that as you work with people, some of what you're facilitating is an understanding of maybe themselves, as well as the other person and those perspectives.

Louise: Yeah, very much so.

Debbi: So, do you think it's necessary to understand yourself and your creative style or tendencies in order to be receptive to the other party?

Louise: [6:36] Well, it depends on the context. But most of the time, unless I'm supposed to be training people on these issues or on these topics, I don't get into it. I just work within the situation. So, in my experience, I've learned that everyone is creative, and that creativity is relevant, and that creativity causes conflict, and that creativity then can resolve conflict.

Debbi: Huh. That is so true.

Louise: And so that works for me. And in my experience, mediating over the years, I feel privileged to be able to witness when people have those 'aha' moments and are able to resolve it. And that's, of course, going to depend on the kind of mediation we're doing. If it's interpersonal or people who have an ongoing relationship, there's much more of a chance of that happening, either neighbors or workplace.

When it's credit claims or things where people aren't going to have an ongoing relationship, when it's just about paying your medical bill, then that isn't going to happen. Even then, I'm thinking of one claims adjuster that he was very upset with me in the mediation because I was allowing this other person to be in the room as a support person for the young man who clearly seemed like he had some developmental problems, and this woman was their support.

So, he says he wants to have a private meeting, and he takes me out in the hall. And he starts just reaming me. And he starts out. He says, you know, I was going to take \$ 500 off that bill, but you are so incompetent, and you led the witness, and you allowed this, and you do... And I just stood there trying to keep a straight face. Don't laugh, Louise. Don't do it. Don't do it. This is going to be all good. OK, so I... improvisational theater, and he gets all done. And I said, so about the \$ 500. And he said, what? And I said, well, at the beginning, you offered the \$500. Could you say more about that? And the guy just backed up because I completely disregarded all of his trying to shame me and all this kind of stuff. And I said, well, is that something we can talk about back at the mediation? And he says, oh, Louise, I just love you. You are so good at what you do. And we went back and settled.

Debbi: Wow. I'm guessing you don't get bored in your job. It's not just the same thing day in and day out.

Louise: [9:20] Oh no, no, I haven't mentioned yet that I also mediate between Portland citizens and police officers. Ah, and those are the best ever. I've been doing those for 20 years and they are community policing: one officer and one citizen at a time and there is the opportunity on both sides. I've heard apologies and you know gaining and understanding police procedures. You know I was doing what I'm supposed to and how radar guns work and you know it's all this kind of stuff that you know I stopped you because I was afraid, you know you, making a left turn like that, that could kill you, that could get you know, you could get t-boned and I work fatal accidents and I don't want to have you die. You know stuff like that. It's amazing,

Debbi: Wow. I think it's so important that you are helping generate these discussions, though. It's just so hard, in any situation and far beyond the circumstances you're talking about, to get people with different opinions and understanding of a situation to listen to each other, let alone have a discussion.

Louise: Well, right, and they don't happen often enough. I mean, you know these. This stuff should be happening all the time, but it's not.

Debbi: You say you think everyone is creative and I absolutely believe the same. I believe that every human is inherently creative, which is, honestly, one of the reasons I'm doing this podcast, because I really enjoy hearing and researching and finding out how creativity manifests itself for different people with different experiences. But I find that there are way too many people that don't recognize a universal creative potential. In fact, oftentimes they don't believe themselves to be creative at all. I found that you related an experience akin to this in *Picasso*, where you would ask people at the beginning of a seminar to raise their hands if they thought of themselves as creative. Can you share a bit about the responses you got?

Louise: [11:32] Right. When I was teaching at Marylhurst, that was a question that I would ask and people would be: it's like it's not okay to be creative. It's like they would hesitate and do what I think of is you know that? Oh, gee, golly what. You know whiz... I'm not creative and you know. Well, then we talk about what that's about, and then they could talk about their experiences of where it got shut down, because the research—Teresa Amabile and others—have talked about how children are just these free spirits. They can, you know, do all these things.

They don't have society and culture restrictions about it, and it drops by the time they get in the third grade. Something's happened, what that has squelched it. It's not okay, you know, sit down and shut up. And so, people have to be convinced that they're creative. And there's another instrument out that's called Foresight.

Any they talk about different ways that people manifest it and that it's not always just coming up with ideas, it's refining ideas, it's improving ideas, it's weighing them, it's the convergent part of it that doesn't get the notoriety, and also what I refer to as 'little C' creativity. We get the propaganda that only what I call 'big C,' ingenious, you know, the very rare kind, is the only kind that you can call creative. But we're creative all the time.

When we substitute a recipe or we decide to drive a different way or rearrange the room, we're doing that creative problem-solving that allows us to have an adaptive response to what's going on. And it's amazing how people will have that realization and a memory of what squelched it.

And one of the most profound was this young man that, he said in middle school he couldn't read music very well, and so he developed his own musical scale, his own notation. So he would diligently translate from what's known over to his own, very creative approach to a problem.

Debbi: Incredible.

Louise: Well, his teacher comes up, sees this gibberish on this page in his mind, grabs the kid by the shoulder, he tells this story in class. It was like PTSD. He's talking about it and it's: What are you doing? You know, the kid tries to explain and the instructor gave him an F, kicked him out of class, and he says he never played that, he never played the clarinet again, and so it's that kind of thing where you have to conform to what somebody else thinks is creative and we're off.

Debbi: That's discouraging.

Louise: It's, yeah, very discouraging.

Debbi: I guess the question is: how do we combat that? How do we get people to nurture creativity instead of squelching it, their own as well as others? I feel like it always comes back to all those basics of creativity: helping people to communicate, listening to each other, and to see other perspectives interacting and connecting in a way that has an openness and reserves judgment. I would absolutely love it if we could get more people to embrace that.

Louise: [14:51] Well, and, which brings me back around to my second book, which you know that the subtitle of it is: "Discover connections between creativity, conflict, and collaboration to amplify your impact for the greater good."

And so what I'm advocating in *In Cahoots* is for people to take a look at their own aspects of their creativity, like I said, their style, their type and their conflict style, and then also their values, because that's what motivates us, and assess those and talk about their inner personal communication and unconditionally constructive strategies for getting what you want and working with people that you have a goal, but they're people you wouldn't want to go hang out with after work or after the homeowners meeting or the nonprofit board or something, but...

Debbi: Right.

Louise: A lot of it, in *In Cahoots*, I ask people to look inward, you know, and through their own writing, their own journaling, really get comfortable with their own attributes and what those attributes do to cause conflict in a group, because some of the attributes of creative people in the literature, you know, aren't pretty. Gary Davis, one of the researchers. He talks about different personality characteristics long associated with creative people.

Okay? They're aggressive, courageous, autonomous, sensitive, cynical, playful, thorough, argumentative, energetic, assertive, dominant, enthusiastic, independent, easygoing, expressive, self-confident, altruistic, warm-hearted. So, to invite people, as they're reading this, to circle the ones that you recognize in yourself, and if you're circling- aggressive, dominant, argumentative, you know? Like, how's that working for you?

But the flip side is that if you're only acknowledging those parts of you that are so adaptive and accommodating to people that you're not being assertive and so you're caving into these people and just being resentful, then that's not useful. So, the value of people being willing to own their own behavior is huge and that's, I think, the first thing that has to happen.

One of the things I've done is I've developed a survey about values and what aspects then of their belief system motivate them to want to be more creative and productive— productively creative. I've taken some of these from different kinds of work, including army values. I was teaching a creativity class, co-teaching with somebody, and I had earlier had a student who was a former military and she was talking about army values and it was in the conflict management class, but I took them and wrote them up on a flip chart and had them up on the wall. And this other mediator came in and said: What's that about? Because it's like authority and discipline and honor and duty. He didn't like those.

Debbi: Well, I guess at first glance they might seem antithetical to flexibility and a mindset willing to negotiate or resolve conflict, but what a perfect example of what you were just talking about: values and how that motivates interaction and creative collaboration.

Louise: And I've been using them ever since, because I buck authority.

Louise: [18:28] There's a whole piece in here about trust that is paramount, and if you're in a group, in order to get to a point where you can function, you've got to be able to trust people enough to be honest with them. I talk a lot about stages of group development, about forming, when everybody's you know being polite, and then storming, which is when something goes amiss, and you start getting testy about it or somebody's late or whatever. The majority of, then, the second section of the book is about group process and how you put your own creativity into action when things hit the fan, and I talk about teasing and sarcasm, and other kinds of things that diminish the human spirit and prevent us from being creative. And then how to be assertive to stop that and to be an ally for people in a group.

To get from storming, over to what they call norming, where you can start to respect each other again and trust each other, and then you get over to performing. You don't go from walking into a group to being productive. You've gotta go through these stages in order to get there. And people don't understand that, by and large, and they need to go through those and work it through.

And some of this, a lot of it, again, takes training, takes sharing the information. So much emphasis is on production and technical, left-brain stuff that people aren't trained how to get along. A former student of mine, who's a mediator, and she works for a large international company, and she's just been made Director of Culture and People Development. And she wants to use *In Cahoots* for onboarding and training people so that they can be more productive.

So that's where I see hope, is the people who see the value of what I've got to say and are willing to put it out there where it can be useful. I've got a couple of police sergeants in Portland. One of them took it, I love this, he wanted to share it with his book group. Breaks the stereotype, police book group, I love that. And I was just at the International Creative Problem-Solving Institute in Buffalo last month, and there was a young woman, she's an attorney from Australia, who's very interested in restorative justice. And don't you bet, she took a book home with her. So, the restorative justice piece is in here too, about how do you help people reconcile differences? The pendulum has to swing, it just really needs to.

Debbi: Well, and I know even in your first book, when you were talking about creative problem-solving, you mentioned how sometimes people bristle at the notion of creative problem-solving. They see it as something more directed, like being told what to do.

Louise: Prescriptive.

Debbi: Yes, exactly. I guess that kind of ties back in with what we were talking about with definitions, or the perception of what certain words and phrases mean. When you're trying to creatively problem-solve, which is so important, and you're approaching it by being open, ready to figure out options and possibilities, but the other person hears those words and takes them a totally different way.

Louise: [21:51] Right, right. Well, and that's where I think facilitation comes in. And one of the things that I learned in graduate school was how to facilitate the creative problem-solving process. And because I was taking the mediation courses in the same time as I was doing the graduate school, I started at Willamette University. They had this brand new center for studies in dispute resolution.

And so, I took some of those classes, and then I took a year off while I went to graduate school, which is why I could see so clearly mediation process and creative problem-solving process as virtually identical.

Debbi: Oh, absolutely. I definitely think there's so much parallel. In fact, I think there's more parallel with creative studies and any profession you can pick than people are aware of or necessarily embrace.

Louise: Yeah. What I realized from that was that creativity isn't something you do while you're hatching a poem sitting under a tree, that you're doing it all the time and in all these difficult circumstances. And so that's what I'm saying about facilitating the process, that I learned to do that and how much it's like facilitating mediation, a large group mediation.

I had the opportunity a few years ago where I live at what I call the once and future city of Damascus, Oregon, because we incorporated, and then eight years later we disincorporated for reasons I won't get into, but they were bad. But I facilitated 29 town hall meetings during this time with, I don't know, up to a hundred and so irate people and the city council who was there to answer questions, and I was the gatekeeper. And I kept order with a squeaky dog toy and it was very effective, as I maintain that it was as effective as it was absurd. And when people get yelling, I would... You know, you can't shout over somebody. It doesn't work. But you can squeak 'em and it's loud.

Debbi: Wow.

Louise: People... I got so I could just hold up the... I had that one that was a shape of a dog bone. I would keep it rubber-banded to my wrist. It was very effective. And part of that was, too, because people were upset with City Council and they would ask a question and I would invite whoever on council was appropriate to answer it and they would dodge and weave and stuff, and then I would say back to the questioner: Do you feel like you've got your question answered?

Debbi: Nice.

Louise: And the council, of course, wanted to wring my neck, but...

Debbi: I'm sure.

Louise: Oh yeah. But they said no, no, no, this and that. And what happened was, the council members, and staff, whoever was being asked, started answering the questions. So then they got routine. But the other thing was I was working with the Committee for citizen involvement and we drafted rules for the meetings and we got buy-in that people can't just go on a rant.

You had to ask a question, you know, and we had guidelines for how we were going to be together and then at the end of them, we had evaluations and people wrote down what worked, what's the potential for this, and what are concerns, and that was straight out of my graduate program about looking at how to improve ideas is to look at what's working and have that first and then what's some potential and concerns would be.

Thursday night doesn't work for me, you know. It was valid. So, we would alter the town hall meetings to meet people's needs and over time they got to be routine and people calmed down and I... It was only three times that I insisted that there be a sheriff's deputy there, you know.

Debbi: Oh wow.

Louise: Because it was... It was very contentious. I think back on it now with, you know, a great hilarity, but at the time it was, it was a little tight, little tight. But, I was having to be creative and inviting the committee to be creative to do gradual improvement over it. You know, very adaptive, creative process and it was effective.

Debbi: Well, and it sounds like you helped them develop their listening skills and their communication skills.

Louise: Right.

Debbi: I mean, communication is a two-way street, not just I give an answer, but actually listening to the question...

Louise: Right.

Debbi: ...and answering the question asked.

Louise: Yeah.

Debbi: You need to understand what actually connects with the concerns.

Louise: [26:07] Yeah, and I, when I do any training or teaching, I always establish guidelines for how we're going to be together and I always ask people to think about how they want to be treated, and that's, that's easy. You know, people write things down or you know think of... Well, you know, especially respect and stuff, and my next question is: What are you willing to do to be treated that way? Oh, oh, it's not just about the other person. So a whole bunch of this has to do with personal accountability, and so it can't just be the other, it's got to be, you know, internal also.

And then we have a conversation about what does respect look like, because it looks different for different people. And as we would start to generate this list that would go up on the wall, people would talk about from well, I have to leave my phone on because my child's sick and the babysitter might call... over to my favorite about, "showing respect is no loud snacks."

Debbi: Wow.

Louise: So we had to come to a never no idea.

Debbi: Yeah. It is those shared definitions and those shared understandings and getting rid of some of those assumptions.

Louise: Right, and somebody made the... They were able to make the request, people to not wear perfume because she have would have an allergic reaction, and so it gave people the opportunity to accommodate that for her.

Debbi: Right. And creating an environment where people feel comfortable to even voice some of those things has to start with the simple before it can move to the more important and you can actually get things done. And I think it actually goes beyond a specific situation. If people can learn to reserve judgment and look beyond their instinctive assumptions, that carries forward with who knows what benefits. Whether it's that you stop to consider there might be a reason someone is acting a particular way, beyond it just showing disrespect or being frustrated, or considering if your own candy and wrapping might bother someone else.

Louise: Yeah. When people bring in the popcorn, you know, munch, munch... Don't do it.

Debbi: [28:33] I want to change direction a bit and ask about your creative process. As an author, for instance, are you somebody who enjoys starting with a blank page or is that inhibiting? Do you start with a specific approach? I guess where or how do you start and what is your creative process?

Louise: Well, I start in the middle, whatever that looks like. And I'm not linear. I'm much more holistic than that, which is its own set of problems. When I wrote *Picasso*, I had a lot of people who said, oh, this is really great. You should write it for the general audience. And so, I thought about that for years and tried to do it because I thought, oh, all I need to do is take all these years of handouts that I've generated, because that was

one thing I tend to do is to take what a book or something and synthesize it down into one- or two-page, three-page handout. And that helps me internalize the information.

So I tried that, but it was very disjointed and a mess. So I had to work with that. And another thing I do, I'm a big fan of post-it notes. And I had my office, on the closet door, color-coded post-it notes of things I needed to do. And I had them categorized. I should have taken a picture of things because, you know, I'm a real fan of the progress principle that you've got to see incremental improvements, so you don't give up.

And so, I would break it down into little parts that are doable, like introduction and acknowledgments and these different aspects of it that I needed to work on. And then as I completed those, then I would take the post-it note off the wall. And then, you know, pretty soon I'm adding more, but it made it more coherent and got it out of my brain onto something I could see. And I know that I need to do that. I can't carry a lot of information in my head because it just drops off. And so that was one thing.

And the other thing that really helped me was I ended up more and more collaborating with a friend of mine who I really value, actually it's a former student. And she helped edit *Picasso* years ago. She did help do the citations and stuff. She's really good at the research part of it. And so, the more I got working on *In Cahoots*, the more I would rely on Katherine to keep me focused and keep me honest. And she got to be what I called my trite police. When I would get sounding a little, you know... She'd say, "Nah, it's not going to work."

And so we trust each other so much that she could speak truth, you know, and I'm like, oh yeah, good point. Because the first iteration of *In Cahoots* was the book that I needed to write. And being a storyteller, it's got lots of illustrations written and lots of the theories and diagrams and, you know, examples and all these things that didn't work because it was, it was too shotgun. Examples were too random across the board. So, a board of a nonprofit doesn't need an example about starting a farmer's market. You know, they were just too, too much.

So with Katherine's help, Katherine Stansbury, we edited those out and cut down the book about a hundred pages. And it's much more coherent now because it's more focused on the reader, not on Louise's war stories, which are just so much fun, you know, it was too broad. So, what we're going to do is do iterations of it so that the war stories would be relevant to that target group.

Debbi: Interesting. So, tell me about the title *In Cahoots*. What a fun title, because when I think of being in cahoots with someone, it's mischievous and playful. And I love bringing that to the idea of collaboration.

Louise: Right, right. And it is. And sometimes, you know, as I point out in the book, it's just tedious and it's boring, but it's got to be done. You've got to keep the larger purpose in mind that sometimes for me, you just do the convergent part of dwindling it down because I can stay out in the ozone for a long time, but that doesn't work. So, so my creative process is to discipline myself, to stay on task, to do the creative problem-solving model. I rely on it to keep me focused. I'm doing hand gestures about staying within the bounds of what I'm doing and not go off on tangents, because they're just more fun.

Debbi: Are there particular things that stifle your creativity?

Louise: [33:11] Yeah, you know, the time- energy- money stuff, the limited resources. Those are the generic things. There isn't a lot now. I used to have a lot of limiting belief systems that seriously stifled it that years of alternative therapy was able to uncover for me so that I laugh at them now, but back in the day, I write about in *Picasso* that I had all these issues about having been adopted and being less than and... Very real. And I'm old enough that, you know, it was a secret to be adopted. It was just like, you didn't talk about it.

And once I got over myself on that one, it was like, you know, bring it on. I've had people over the years describe me as fearless, and I'm not quite sure what that means, but I'll wade in to where other people are kind of, you know, ducking for cover, and I'm saying, so say more about that. And that's where it gets interesting, is when it gets confrontive. I'm not afraid of confrontation. I think that's the bottom line.

I did a lot of consulting for employee assistance programs and stuff, and one time I was to interview this sheriff's deputy that had a discipline problem. He got mad at his assistant and threw a chair at her, okay?

Debbi: Oh, my.

Louise: So, they bring me in, because, you know, Louise will do this. And so, you know, I'm 5'1", and I had out my business card, and they wanted me to talk to him and see what was going on and all this kind of stuff. And they said, he'll never talk to you, he'll never talk to you. And so armed with that, I go into his office, and I get

just a little bit into his personal space, and I look right up at him, big, tall, you know, hunking guy, and held up my business card, and I said, introduced myself, you know, I'm Louise Nielsen.

I'm the short, white, middle- aged female SWAT team who's here to talk to you. And the guy paused, paused, and he laughs. And then we talked for an hour and 15 minutes. You know, but I just go, oh, you want to leg wrestle? Okay, that works. And it's very disarming to people to have somebody, just to be able to cut through, and humor, to take humor as a disarming mechanism. But it has to be, the humor has to be aimed at me. If it's self-deprecating, I can get away with stuff, oh, you can't believe the stuff I can get away with.

Debbi: But I would think it's important to know which strategy to use to be able to read the room and discern what's best, or what will work best in a certain situation. And you might not even know this person, you might just be meeting them. So how do you decide what approach to take?

Louise: Yeah, it's, again, in terms of Myers-Briggs, the way I take in information is intuitive. You know, I don't do a lot of sensing, so I'm not paying attention to like counting the numbers and how many have on blue shirts, you know. I'm scanning for vibes, or I don't know what you'd call it, but what I try to have as my primary concern is the most uncomfortable person in the room. Who's the outlier? Who's the lone, you know, fill- in-the- blank, whether it's teenager, part-time employee, whatever it is, and try to draw the circle to include them.

And that goes a long ways. I used to do a lot of work with the Postal Service, when they were trying to get the term 'going postal' out of the vocabulary, and it was labor management disputes. And so, I deliberately belonged to a union, Communication Workers of America. And when the subject came up, I would tell them that, because the union employee didn't trust me, because I was with management. And so I'd say, well, actually, I do belong to a union. What? And that's what they both said, management's like, what, you know?

But they flew me to Denver one time to do this training, and they told me that I was the only facilitator, mediator, in 11 western states that both labor and management trusted. And so, the meeting was going to start in the morning, so I'm at this motel they put me up at, and I'm sitting there, and I'm hearing these guys in the bar talking, and I can tell, I speak postal. I understand some of the lingo, you know, language. And so I'm very strategic on my part. I wander up to them and say, you know, I was just curious, I was hearing you talk.

Are you with the postal service yet? Are you going to be at this training tomorrow? Yeah, yeah. So, I said, well, I'm the facilitator. So, one thing leads to another, and they invite me to join them for dinner. Okay, so the next day, as the training begins, management's introduced to me and big, I don't know how many people, 30 or 40, mostly men. And out of the back of the room, one of them says, oh yeah, we know her. She picked us up in a bar last night. And I'm in, you know.

Debbi: Well, you're making a joke about speaking postal, but it is like speaking different languages with different cultures of beliefs and experiences, understandings, values. And in order to bridge those cultures, I would expect people need to feel their culture and perspective is respected, even if not necessarily understood initially.

Louise: [38:36] Oh yeah, very much. And I'll ask people, I'm very intentional about asking people to be my cultural informant. And people love that, whatever that might mean. In class, one time, introducing each other, the first student said he was a Persian Gulf veteran with PTSD. I said, would you educate me about that? And it gives people so much permission to be who they are because it's being honored. And it turned out that there were three other vets in the room who didn't feel like they had permission to say.

Debbi: Well, that's building all that trust and everything you're talking about so you can learn and communicate.

Louise: Well, and a lot of that is about being vulnerable to be willing then to answer questions they have. I'll ask people, what do you need to know about me in order for you to decide whether or not you can trust me?

Debbi: Wow. I can only imagine what kind of responses.

Louise: Well, most of the time it's like, oh, yeah, well, you know, fine. But, oh, sometimes, well, I don't trust you. Well, say more about that. Instead of being offended, well, you should, say more about that. Well, management hired you. Why should we trust you? What do you need to know about me? What does the contract say? So I told them what the contract says. Oh, OK. OK. So it's just keeping the guard down and staying vulnerable. There's a lot of huge amount of power in that. And that's why I get called fearless. So there you go.

Debbi: That's incredible.

Debbi: Well, you have given me so much time and I really appreciate this. For the final question, I do want to ask you, because it is the *Defining Creativity Podcast*, how do you define creativity?

Louise: Well, let me tell you, I actually talked to Katherine Stansbury that I collaborate with about this question. And I came to realize that for me, creativity is a resilient and adaptive response to my environment. Resilient and adaptive. But it's a response to what's happening. Does that make sense?

Debbi: Amazing. Absolutely. I just love this. I truly think that there's probably as many, and I've said this too many times, but as many definitions of creativity as there are people.

Louise: Oh, right. And that's why I appreciate what you're doing, because it does help broaden it away from the old model. So, it's come around. But I just, I really appreciate what you're doing.

Debbi: Well, thank you. Remind people one more time. Your books are?

Louise: *Mediating with Picasso*. And the other one is *In Cahoots: A Playbook for Creative Collaboration*.

Debbi: Well, I encourage everyone to check out Louise's books, and then be in cahoots with your community and build a bigger community.

Louise: Yeah.

Debbi: Louise, thank you so, so much for your time today.

Louise: This was a pleasure. You're welcome.

Debbi: Thank you for having me.

Louise: Bye-bye.

Debbi: That's a wrap for episode seven, my discussion with mediator and teacher of mediation, negotiation, conflict management and creativity, Louise Nielson. I'm so grateful for Louise and for you, the audience, for tuning in. Additional thanks to August Fackler for composing and recording the music. Join me next time as I talk creativity with TV, film and theater performer, Megan Elise Fulmer. Meanwhile, be open to possibilities, make connections and embrace your creativity, however it manifests itself in you.