

## Norumbega President's Letter by past Norumbega President Luana Marie Jøsvold

What do you see here? I was asked that question as an eleven-year-old. and, along with all the other eleven-year-olds in the group, answered, "A black dot." The next question was, "Didn't you notice the big piece of white paper the black dot was on?" At that point I began to fear that I was a terrible person who only saw faults, problems, or flaws, a person who was quick to criticize without necessarily keeping things in perspective. That made a very strong impression on me and I remind myself of it every time I feel critical of something or someone.

This is a lesson parents learn early on. It is so easy to point out what your children are doing wrong, sometimes forgetting to let them know about all the good things they do. Keep things in perspective: not always easy, but important. An example? When I was six, I decided to make lunch for my mother while she was out painting the car (don't ask). I put a bowl on a stool in the middle of the kitchen floor, made some waffle batter and very carefully carried spoonfuls of the batter across the kitchen floor to put in the waffle iron on the table. When I had made 20 waffles, I went out and told my mother that lunch was ready. She never mentioned the mess at all, just suggested that the next time I made waffles, I might want to put the bowl of batter a little closer to the waffle iron. I found that a reasonable suggestion. We ate the waffles, cleaned up the batter, and I was left feeling good about my contribution.

The message of the black dot is not that we should never criticize or never point out a problem, but that we should keep things in perspective. How big a problem is it really within the grand scheme of things? This is important to remember in personal relationships, such as when someone does something which annoys you. It's not always worth criticizing an annoying act when you take into consideration the other wonderful things the person has done. Sometimes a problem or error is worth pointing out, but it shouldn't be blown out of proportion. And criticism should be constructive and phrased as diplomatically as possible. After all, we are striving for peace and harmony to prevail within the lodge and within our personal relationships.

I've found this lesson important to remember as I work with different all-volunteer organizations. Being an officer in an all-volunteer organization is not like being a CEO in a corporation, where you evaluate performance and have the authority to tell employees what to do and how to do it for the bottom line of the company. It's not like directing a play, where the director makes decisions about what actors say, how they say their lines, and where and when they move on stage. The performers rehearse and rehearse and strive for perfection and are prepared to receive critical reviews. Working with an all-volunteer organization is more like herding cats. Sometimes things go smoothly and sometimes they don't, but we should value the contributions members make and overlook occasional perceived imperfections. Perfection is not always as interesting, or as entertaining. Fortunately, I am very fond of cats and enjoy the creative problem-solving process involved in dealing with them. How about you?