

# MOMENTS OF CLARITY

How our experiences bring purpose

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While reflecting on IRWA's purpose to improve people's quality of life through infrastructure development, I began to think of how I fit in with this statement. During my presidential interview in the September/October 2018 issue, I mentioned that when the IRWA first began talking about and focusing on the higher purpose of our organization, I struggled with the meaning of it. At the time, I had just met with a property owner that told me I had ruined his home and the lives of his family with a road improvement. I also thought back to the relocation of a woman who had purchased a house with her late mother and was peacefully living in the country until I came along. However, over the years I've come to realize that despite those instances, the positives far outweigh the struggles.

## A Defining Moment

A recent moment of clarity came for me during the construction of a road widening and improvement project that will eventually have a huge, positive impact on the community. Many of our members may remember an incident over 30 years ago in Midland, Texas when a toddler—who became known as Baby Jessica—fell into a well. Understandably, this event became the focus of the entire country for a few days. Flash-forward to 2018 and I'm working on a project where an old well was discovered. The well is dry-laid fieldstone and at least 50 feet deep. It is uncovered and in close proximity to the construction, so what to do next?

The project was placed on hold while a plan could be developed. After all, there are many questions to ask. Is there any historical significance to the well? Does the project continue as is or will the well be filled in? Is the sanitary sewer to be relocated? After much evaluation, it was decided that the sewer line would be relocated closer to the road in order to keep the project on schedule. That way, the historical value could be evaluated while the work continued.

The next step was to contact the county's historical society for input and to determine the historical significance (if any). It was especially exciting for me to hear what the historians had to say since my family settled in this area in the early 1800s. The well was constructed in a way that was found in New England in the 1700s and the construction of the well was thought to be remarkable for the depth. The well appeared to meet the criteria for the National Register for engineering/architectural significance. Also, the fact that the well is dry may yield archaeological artifacts.

The well certainly brings a lot of questions, but for me, it brought on significant reflection on our purpose. We have a project that is not only providing a product to enhance the community, it is also protecting the public and protecting the history that our ancestors left us. In this case, we are improving the current infrastructure while preserving our past historical infrastructure.



## Social Ecology

As I thought more about this project and how it connected me to IRWA's higher purpose, I recognized how much we can learn from communities through Social Ecology. I was able to sit in on one of the pilots of IRWA's **Course 225 – Social Ecology: Listening to Community** and I began wondering if I missed anything during the acquisition of the project. Should I begin asking about history of the property as the owners know it? And most importantly, how do I share the knowledge that I learn? Well, we now have a tool on the Member Network with the new "Social Ecology Resource Group." I encourage you all to join the group in order to share and learn. I also encourage Chapters to schedule Course 225.

I look forward to more learning products from the IRWA, Jim Kent and Kevin Preister as we continue to grow the Social Ecology program. In this way, I hope many more of you will also experience moments of clarity. 🌟