



Gumbo

~ *The Grail Connection* ~

DECEMBER 2019

Shannon Rokey, The Grail, and A Lot for A Little at Woodward High School

By **Pamela Cobey**

All of us know **Loretta Rokey**. Loretta has worked at Grailville, served on multiple committees and as a Council member as well as National Treasurer. Anyone who has ever worked with Loretta knows how gifted and generous she is. Serving as Town Manager for several towns in the Cincinnati area, Loretta is someone we have been able to turn to for real-world expertise. Loretta has a son and a daughter. Daughter, Shannon, graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 2018 with a degree in International Studies. Seeking a service opportunity, Shannon applied to Americorps and was placed at Woodward High School in Cincinnati. This is where this story begins.

More than 99% of the students at Woodward come from households that fall below the poverty line. The school has the highest number of homeless children in the city of Cincinnati. As well, 98% are children of color. Woodward is as a “trauma-informed school,” which means it provides for social and emotional learning as well as academic achievement. Shannon had never before seen up close the realities of the children at Woodward. And while their situations broke her heart, Shannon fell in love. I witnessed Shannon walking through the halls of Woodward, students approaching her with fist bumps and Shannon returning laughter, smiles good-natured teasing and challenges.

On average, only 40% of Woodward High School students graduate. But one factor in particular correlates with a much higher graduation rate—in fact 100%. 100% of the students in the afterschool program at Woodward, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math), were ready for graduation in 2018. There was a problem however for 2019. STEAM was in place at Woodward because of grant funding which came to them through the Urban League with United Way funds. Related to a weak United Way campaign in 2018, all Cincinnati programming grants were cut by 20% for 2019 and the summer STEAM program was cut from the list. Without funding, the program could not go forward.

While Shannon would finish her Americorps service just prior to the commencement of the summer program, and she was getting ready to start grad school for ESL (English as a

Second Language) in the fall, she really wanted to be a part of summer STEAM. She wanted to make sure it happened. She spoke to her mom, Loretta. Loretta spoke to me. I spoke with Council. And then I spoke with the Director of the Urban League: Civil Rights lawyer, Chara Fischer Jackson JD, the supervisor of

the after-school program: Shannon's mentor, Deborah Brock Blanks, and to Shannon herself. \$8,025 could make the eight-week program happen for the eighteen youth—half girls and half boys—who were interested in attending. In April, the Grail Council made a decision to fund this program. The Council stipulated that the program would submit a financial and program report, and that Shannon, a Grail explorer, would write a reflection paper to publish in Gumbo. And so, it happened.

The eighteen students participated in courses and activities including a Media / Photography Workshop, a Jr. Chef Experience, Environmental Science, Art with Math, Music with Math, Journaling, Yoga, Mindfulness, a Memory Circle, an Acting Workshop, a Youth Summit, a gallery walk, and lunch at the Banks on the Ohio river. Students participated in twice-weekly Teens Against Bullying sessions sponsored by the YWCA, their work culminating in a public presentation on bullying and the creation of a YouTube video on the subject. Each course was specific in its content and intersected with the other courses. The goals were to consider the whole student, to create opportunities for students to learn, to lead, to think critically, to problem-solve and to connect to 21st century skills such as math and innovative technologies. Students engaged in kayaking, hiking, music classes, performing, museum visits, tree planting and event-catering. Professionals established and recognized in their individual fields led each curriculum area.

Students wrote reflections and sent us hundreds of photos. One student, commenting on time in nature, wrote, "I learned how to be patient with people and how to calm down when I needed to. I learned how to defuse an argument. I learned how to try and help people to solve problems." Another wrote about how difficult it was to do yoga but wanting to do better because it teaches perseverance and is helpful for stress management. Another noted that the program really helped her to cope with the death of her mother as students and staff were there for her. It made her feel hopeful and she enrolled in an AP class.

Shannon's reflection is published in this issue of Gumbo. She speaks of her own learnings about racial and socioeconomic disparity and her struggle to stay positive. Ultimately, Shannon found herself inspired by both students and teachers and connected with new mentors: her supervisor Deborah Brock-Blanks and resource coordinator, Rayna Moore, both of whom have spent their lives in their work with minority youth.

[Summer STEAM Report and Student Testimonies](#)

Reflection of Woodward for The Grail – Shannon Rokey

My time with AmeriCorps at Woodward High School was one of the most defining experiences of my life. As a white girl from Milford I've experienced some of the truest definitions of privilege. I thought I supported diversity and advocated for other rights but there's only so much change you can do from your suburban home stocked with all the food you want and the support of a family who shows up every day for you. I've heard some of the worst stories of abuse, neglect and discrimination from children and teens who themselves can't comprehend the profound impact of trauma they've experienced. Woodward High School is a 100% poverty school with an African American population of 98%. To say that segregation has ended is a complete lie.

Working with the summer youth program at Woodward enhanced my tolerance, empathy and expanded my view of the inner city. I realized how underserved the black youth in our city truly are. The children I worked with lacked the most basic needs, let alone slim access to a quality education. Working with the students showed me the flaws in the educational system and how deep the racial and socioeconomic disparity is. Even the organizations that serve the youth are riddled with budget cuts, poor organization and a slightly jaded outlook.

I really struggled with staying positive while seeing students struggle in an unjust system. The little moments are what you have to strive for. The moments are when students understand a concept you're tutoring them in or when they feel comfortable sharing personal issues.

The most rewarding part of my year with AmeriCorps was the summer program. It provides an escape for the students from the chaos at home. It brings consistency and structure for students without home support. Although the students complained about field trips like a walk in the woods at Evergreen due to the perils of the outdoors such as mud and bugs, they were given 10 minutes to splash through the creek to find salamanders and create mementos from rocks, sticks & leaves that allowed them a carefree experience enjoying nature. It was the first time I truly saw them act like kids.

So many of the children had to grow beyond their years. Particularly the female students were tasked with taking care of younger siblings and securing basic needs for the family. I bonded with a particular student who lost her mom suddenly in a medical accident. I have never seen such strength in someone of her age. Although she struggled financially and experienced too many types of grief, she consistently showed up, mentored younger students and proactively sought out work. It's students like her that make me curse the system. Here is an incredible, talented, strong, beautiful and smart young woman who has had so many obstacles thrown at her yet she dares to dream. A lot of the students settle with their circumstance and see dreams as too far-fetched. I believe the summer program serves as a way to show students what more is in the world past the confines of their neighborhood. The students need

someone to believe in them and show them their worth in this world and that they are so much more than their circumstance.

I met and worked with many incredibly strong black women who have become my mentors. My supervisor, Ms. BB was an activist with the Black Panthers and has dedicated her lifetime to serving at risk youth. The Resource Coordinator, Rayna Moore was the first person in her family to go to college and has dedicated her life to protect minority rights. She grew up in circumstances similar to the students at Woodward and provides an example to the kids that you can control your future. There is so much more I could say about my time at Woodward, but it wouldn't give justice to the human experiences I was blessed to take part in.

[Summer S.T.E.A.M. Video](#)

Toronto Visit 2019

By Mary Kay Louchart

Toronto-Xochilmilco-Bronx

It has become a 'new tradition'. Every year when Rosaura Espinosa (Mexico) visits her daughter in western Canada, she flies and we (**Sharon Joslyn** and **Mary Kay Louchart**) trek over to Toronto. Our gathering place is with Anne Otterson and Claire Richard and we try to meet with others who are free those few days we are there. This year we finally got to



workplace of Samia Saad: THE LIGHTHOUSE. (Anne had a prior commitment so couldn't accompany us.) The participants spoke about the various activities at the Centre. We four 'guests' shared about our work and sang with those gathered: **Somos el barco, somos el mar. Yo navego en ti, tu navegas en mí.**

Lighthouse Mission: As a multi-cultural Christian outreach and community centre, The Lighthouse demonstrates God's love by offering unconditional hospitality, by sharing our resources and by helping people in need. We offer an atmosphere of respect, dignity and security in order to address spiritual, emotional and physical needs, all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Vision: Changing Lives: To establish and maintain wellbeing, safety, dignity and community for individuals and families affected by poverty, immigration stress, injustice and violence.

Samia Saad is the Hispanic Ministry Coordinator and Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator. For those who don't know her, Samia has a BA of Religious Education, an MDiv in Counselling, a MA in interdisciplinary studies.

She has specialized training in trauma therapy, as well as training in popular education and participatory leadership. Fluent in Spanish and English, Samia is practicing individual, couple and family therapy.

After a visit to the Lighthouse, we went out to lunch with Samia. Clearly she is more used to using chopsticks than we were! See the intensity of Sharon and Rosaura and Samia is smiling!



Book Review: **THOMAS BERRY: A BIOGRAPHY**

By Marian Ronan

Thomas Berry: A Biography. By Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal. Columbia University Press. 264 pages, \$28.95

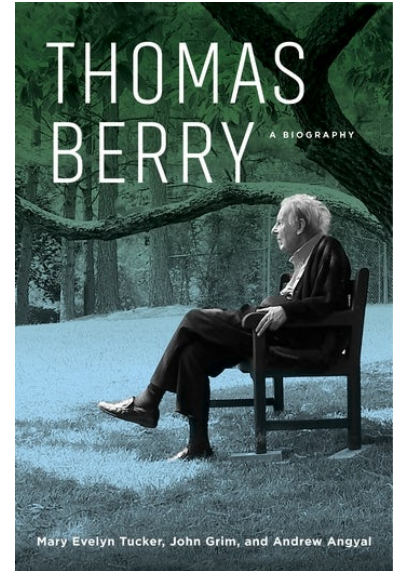
Back in the 1970s, when I was in my twenties, I was on the Grailville staff. A tall, thin priest used to come visit us from time to time. He seemed quite old and wobbly to me, and I worried that he might fall off the steps on his way up to the altar to celebrate the liturgy.

The priest's name was Thomas Berry, and in recent years, I have been forced to admit that my concerns about his age and wobbliness—he was in his mid-sixties at the time--were a bit off-point. And that his portrayal of the new story of the universe, shared with us in mimeographed form before he began publishing about it, was a great deal more significant.

The new biography of Berry by Yale's Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, with Andrew Angyal, confirms big-time my revised estimation of that tall thin priest. Berry, who in later years described himself as a "geologian," presented a vision of the universe, of all of creation, and of the Great Work we are called to within it, that was revolutionary for his time and even more relevant to the current planetary crisis.

As detailed by the authors, Berry was born in North Carolina, to a prosperous family, and fell in love with nature at an early age. His early experiences of a numinous creation shaped his life's work. After attending a boarding school run by the Passionist Order and a year of college, he entered the Passionists, drawn in particular to their commitment to the suffering of the world. He eventually added a fourth vow to the three made by all Passionists: dedication to the Passion of the earth.

Berry was primarily a scholar, and the scope of his expertise is mind-boggling. After seminary he earned a Ph.D. in European cultural history, writing a dissertation on Giambattista Vico's universe-encompassing philosophy of history. He went on to study Asian religions and cultures, learning Sanskrit and publishing books on Buddhism and the religions of India. He directed the graduate program in the history of religions at Fordham University, and founded the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, a pioneering center for religious



environmentalism. He also studied indigenous cultures and shamanism. But perhaps most pivotal of all for Berry's thinking was the impact of the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit paleontologist and theologian of the cosmos.

As well written and informative as the Grim, Tucker and Angyal biography of Berry is one aspect of it is puzzling: there is not a negative critical thought about Berry in the entire book. No mention, for example, of his economic privilege—attending a secondary Catholic boarding school in the 1930s when most American Catholics were on the bread lines or in the Civilian Conservation Corp—or the irony that the father of someone who spent his life working to preserve creation and the cosmos was the owner of an oil company. Perhaps this absence of a critical perspective is the case because two of the authors, Tucker and Grim, were Berry's students and thus deeply influenced by him over many years. Parts of the book read almost like a memoir of their work with him.

At another level, though, the gratitude and admiration the authors express for Berry's work may well be a reflection of the cosmic, compassionate unifying vision Berry offered us all throughout his life. He saw how everything in the cosmos is one, articulating the union of groups, species and material entities that are often seen as opposites or enemies in the contemporary world. Out of this cosmic worldview the authors were able to construct an interpretation of Berry's life that was positive, hopeful, and focused on the unifying Great Work that he hoped would lead us all into the Ecozoic Age.

Sometimes when I remember our discussing the beginnings of all this with that tall, thin priest at Grailville in the 1970s, I wonder: what might have occurred if the US Grail had focused on this New Story of the coming together of the universe and dedicated ourselves to living it out, instead of focusing on a wide range of other ideas and interpretations: feminism, multiple spiritualities, social liberation. Perhaps with such a cosmic unifying vision we might have found a way to avoid the conflicts that now confront us.

Marian Ronan works with the US Grail Climate Action Circle. She lives and writes in Brooklyn, NY.

Fran Martin's 87th Birthday Celebration at Twin Towers



Standing: Martha Heidkamp, Lenie Schaareman, Marian Schwab, Mindy Burger and Anne Mercier
Seated: Fran Martin and Debora Schak

Review of a Performance, Emergence: A Communion

By Ieva Zadina

The Anti-Racism workshop and Grail national gathering last September went deep for me. I came to understand more fully how capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, developing in the West at the same time, were all sustained by racism. Most social systems were, and are, imbued with this powerful brew. The consequences have been social tragedy and now — environmental catastrophe.

That is why Adrienne Maree Brown's book, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, is so important and is attracting attention from young people. In both substance and form, it proposes a life strategy (and organizing techniques) that re-imagines and prioritizes nature's life systems.

I recently attended a performance by New York University drama students titled *Emergence: A Communion*. The program describes it as "a devised work" based entirely on words from *Emergent Strategy*, and created collaboratively by the students and their mentors. Six choreographed performers move fluidly in a central space, repetitively reciting words and phrases among themselves and with the audience, so that



Photo by Ieva Zadina taken at performance with permission of actors.

complexity emerges out of the small bits. "Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of multiplicity of relatively simple interactions," wrote Nick Obolensky in *Complex Adaptive Leadership: Embracing Paradox and Uncertainty*. Inasmuch as we are scientists, artists and activists, we sense the overwhelming complexity of nature. Only because we ourselves are among the microcosms of the whole can we even begin to know, and shape, ever-changing realities.

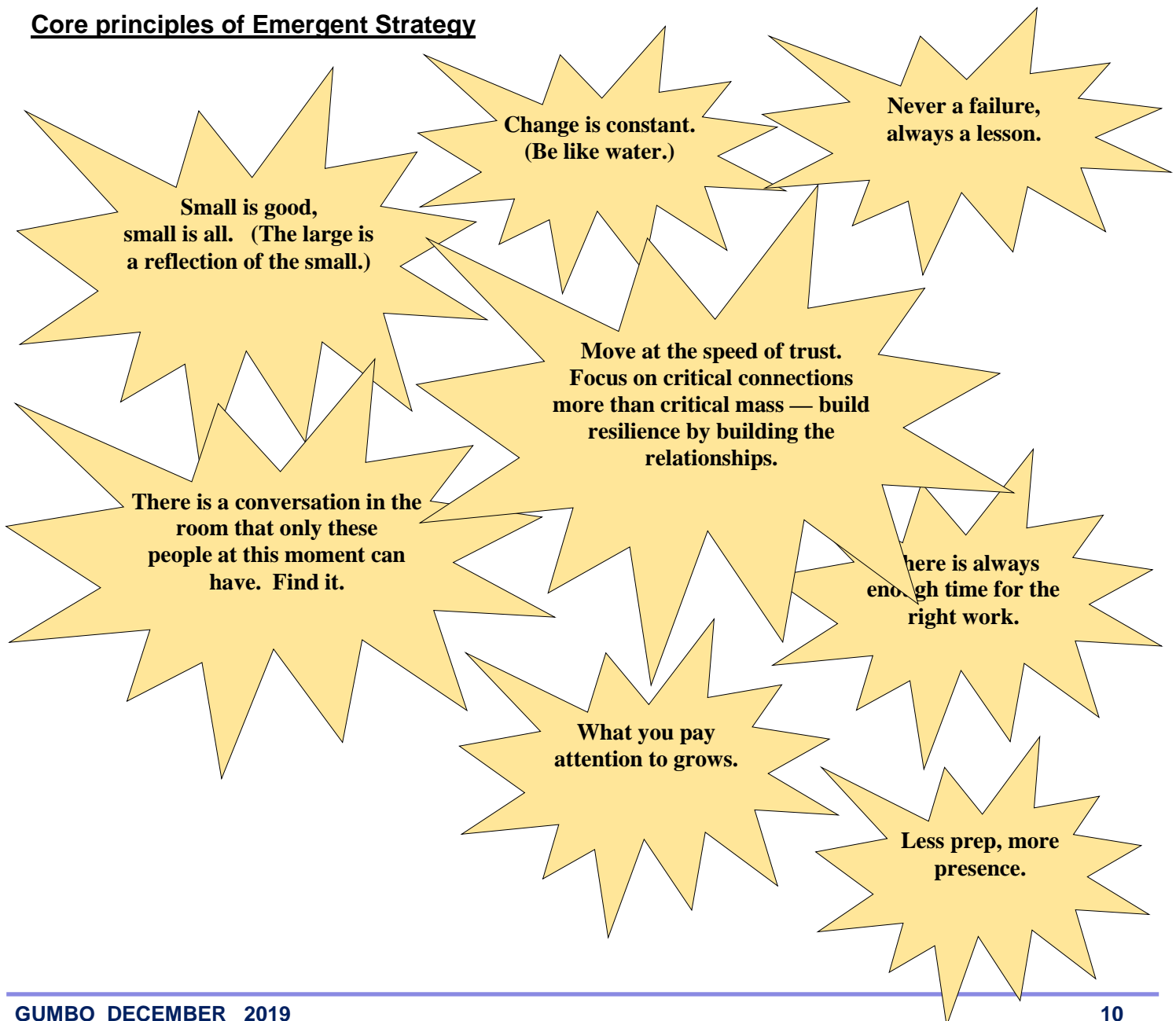
To give you an idea of the passions and concerns of the young performers, here are some of their phrases that I scribbled down in the dark: **moving toward life—growth and innovation—simple life—energy, growth, life—nonviolence—grief is gratitude...the heart bursts open—love as large as we make it—I want to be a resource sustaining our work—truly be ourselves—simply the miracle of your life—communion is acceptance—on earth, nothing new—feeling in real time, feeling emotion to its end—Nature is everything—how do we need to be for justice to be transformative—radical honesty...no white lies...small lies are the hardest to stop telling—we can be honest and kind ...with practice—**

—our responsibility to write ourselves into the future—we have to emerge ourselves—meaningful collaboration...deepening relationships—these changes are the key to human survival—we are seeing a world we have never seen before—in the end nothing will stop nature—we believe Black Lives Matter—we are the ones we have been waiting for—we see ourselves as microcosms of the world—true to what I want and am—still I rise—trust...the right people in the right room—let’s practice—I honor my own transformation—the work happens—JOY—ENOUGH

I left the performance feeling that these young people have something to hope and work for, even while living amidst environmental catastrophe. They see the possible emergence of a better world, a world of justice and liberation, where they can become their true selves.

Emergent Strategy is not simply a book by one author, adrienne maree brown, that can be read once through. It contains bits and constellations of her continual learning from hundreds of mentors and colleagues. It is truly a guidebook, with many lights showing the ways. No wonder many young people are finding star paths within it. My understanding is that the Grail Young Women’s Initiative also regards it as a guidebook. Consider, for example, these core principles of Emergent Strategy:

Core principles of Emergent Strategy



For adrienne maree brown, permaculture systems, based on natural systems, also represent emergent strategy. Increasing numbers of young people are applying, in their own ways and in many domains, basic permaculture principles such as these:

Permaculture principles, based on natural systems



These days I tend to relate everything important to the Grail. And it seems to me that the Grail Mission Goals (here pictured in blue) and the Grail Purposes, as listed in the US Grail By-laws (in green), can also be something for young people to hold on to in shaping change, changing worlds — especially in conjunction with the principles and passions imaged previously.

Grail Mission goals—blue, Grail Purposes, from US Grail By-laws—green



For the sake of a sustainable future, I invite you to play around with the graphics on these pages to see how they can support and clarify each other. ***An emergent communion.***

Happy Birthday!

December & January

MONICA THYBERG	DEC 1	TEAGAN BLACKBURN	JAN 02
BETH WASMER	DEC 4	KATE TWOHY	JAN 04
MARIE THERESE MCDERMIT	DEC 5	JUDITH DEFOUR-HOWARD	JAN 06
MARY KAY DELGADO	DEC 5	CHERON HOLMAN	JAN 07
HELEN CULLENTON	DEC 8	LYNN LOUCHART-KIEFER	JAN 07
GLORIA SELLERS	DEC 12	LAURA PAGOADA-MELLADO	JAN 09
VIOLA LAFOSSE	DEC 13	ELIZABETH MURPHY	JAN 10
GAIL MALLEY	DEC 14	ELIZABETH ROSE	JAN 11
MARY DIVITO	DEC 18	CYNTHIA CHEYNE	JAN 12
JOYCE MINKLER	DEC 19	MARGARITA CABRERA	JAN 15
PAMELA HALL	DEC 19	MARJORIE TOUPS	JAN 20
JULIE ALMAGUER	DEC 19	TERRY MARSHALL	JAN 22
LEA GRUNDY	DEC 22	ELIZABETH SCHICKEL-ROBINSON	JAN 23
TAYA DORO-MITCHELL	DEC 29	KATHLEEN WALZER	JAN 28
CAROL NOSKO	DEC 29	LAURA HERSHBERGER	JAN 29
NANCY RICHARDSON	DEC 29	ANN STEFFY	JAN 30
PATRICIA DILLON	DEC 30		
KATHY HURLEY	DEC 31		