

How His Work Influenced My Life

Jean Edwards

Jean Edwards earned degrees at Occidental College, UC Berkeley, Cal State Northridge, and the Sophia Center. She taught elementary grades for over 20 years, trained teachers, and developed a private kindergarten. Midwifing the first elementary school based on the principles of the Universe and Earth Literacy, she was the administrative coordinator of the Ridge & Valley Charter School, in Blairstown, New Jersey. In collaboration with other innovative educators, Jean is working on the development of an integrated curriculum based on the history of the Universe for K-12 students.



After reading Thomas Berry's insights in *The Dream of the Earth*, I knew it was the most important book I had ever read or would ever read. It was a visceral, intuitive knowing. But it was enough of a knowing to quit my job in education, sell our home near Washington D.C., and volunteer for one year at Genesis Farm, the only retreat center dedicated to Thomas' work that I knew. The significance of his work set me on fire and I knew that nothing else was as powerful both personally and culturally to make real changes in our Western institutions and the world.

One year wasn't enough to be immersed in Thomas Berry concepts. Miriam MacGillis then invited me to stay on at Genesis as part of the educating staff. While there I had many opportunities to be with Thomas and experience the depth of his knowledge as he shared with others so generously. Looking back at my twenty year process of integrating the profundity of Thomas's insights, there was a point when it was not just an intellectual knowing; it was a deep, in-my-whole-being knowing that I lived and breathed in a new cosmology. I lived in a world where everything was sacred and related as one family. I was living at home within an amazing Earth/Universe knowing everywhere I looked some sacred being had a story to tell that it too was birthed out of the marvelous journey of the Universe.

My spirituality was expanded to think of the "other," not just in the human realm. So the message, "Love your neighbor as your self," included the whole Earth community. My identity expanded from, "I am Jean," to "I am also Earth/Universe," from the small self to a larger Self. Now I am defined not by my activities but by my beingness. The gift of traveling on the same road with Larry, my husband, living together in a much larger mystery than ever expressed before, in an interconnected and numinous world, is a rare and treasured gift for any married couple. It is beyond any words to describe our gratitude. The only way to properly acknowledge Thomas' significance in our lives is to pass it on to others.

Though the process of integrating Thomas' work was gradual, there came a point when I wanted to share it with others in the field of education. His vision had unleashed an unstoppable creativity which fueled a passion in me to help create a school based on the story of the Universe and the Great Work. I wanted children and their parents to be guided in their journey with a world view that connected them to every being of the Tree of Life, and answered the big questions, "Where did I come from?," "Who am I?," and "Where am I going?"

Being part of a community of parents' birthing a public elementary school based on the story of the Universe was an incredibly creative opportunity to implement Thomas' concepts. It was my dream as an educator, a grandmother, and a mother to give children a view of the world that provided them with a deep meaning of the sacred, where the Earth

Community was their home, and an education where they could thrive developing their own unique creativity that would be a blessing to the whole community of Life. We at Ridge and Valley Charter School took the first steps. Our school, our children, parents, educators and myself owe an enormous tribute to Thomas Berry and his extraordinary work, the greatest visionary of the 21st Century.