

Pioneer, Prophet, and Mentor

Fred Lanphear

I am deeply grateful to Thomas Berry for his role in composing the new story of our time. This time in which we live has taken on a greater significance because of this new story of an expanding, evolving universe. My life has a greater sense of meaning and purpose as I now understand myself to be a conscious participant, a co-creator, of the evolving universe.

It was in 1990 that I read *The Dream of the Earth* and heard Thomas speak at the Earth and Spirit Conference in Seattle. My worldview and life's focus were transformed. I had been involved in human development activities on a global scale for almost 20 years and discovered that my context had been too small. The shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric perspective was a major paradigm shift for me. It has allowed me to rethink my horticultural science training and human development background with a new resolve to think and practice biocentrically.

I believe that this time in history will become best known as the era in which the new story of the universe was revealed. The greatness of this story and the implications for our conscious participation in the ongoing evolutionary process will surpass the stories of terrorism and struggles within and between nations. Thomas has been a pioneer in discerning the implications of the unfolding story of the universe.

The criteria that has guided my actions and sense of purpose in life is the notion that whatever I do takes into account the implications for all of history and the whole globe. The new cosmology that Thomas helped forge has deepened that sense of time and expanded its scope. One of the images that came to me as the concept of the Ecozoic Era was proposed by Thomas were the colorful bar graphs of geologic time that have given me a sense of the unfolding journey of our Earth. Knowing that we are at the threshold of ushering in a new time, the beginning of a new colorful bar, dramatizes the magnitude of our task, which Thomas so compellingly describes in *The Great Work*.

I am also grateful to Thomas for my recent "love affair" with nature. As a landscape horticulturist, much of my life has been connected with plants, but since reading *The Dream of the Earth* I experience a deep connection to nature in all of its manifestations. One of the few TV programs I watch faithfully is Nature on PBS. Taking the grandchildren to animal parks and zoos is a great joy. The evolutionary process and the integral web of life has become a deep fascination for me. I also have a new sense of kinship with all creatures, even slugs and moles.

Although I only had the opportunity of spending an hour with Thomas a few years ago, I consider him a primary mentor in this phase of my life. His writings have informed and inspired me on my elder path. When I was 70 I took on the mantle of Earth Elder, caring for Earth and future generations in the ancient tradition of indigenous people. Thomas has been a role model of what that looks like in the 21st Century, as he beckons us to reconnect to Earth and all its beings and to celebrate our place in the Universe.

Thank you, Thomas.

Fred Lanphear is a co-founder and resident of Songaia Cohousing Community who designs and creates sacred landscape space. A professor of horticulture at Purdue in the 1960's, a facilitator of community development with the Institute of Cultural Affairs in the 1970's and 1980's, and an educational administrator in alternative healthcare in the 1990's, his social activism currently focuses on his role as an Earth Elder.

