

## Teaching Teachers

Randy Senzig

I am a high school teacher. For my whole life I have had inside my being a deep sense of my connection to Earth and the Universe. It was in a form that only surfaced in my way of teaching children. The activities and discussions that I shared with students came from deep inside and were things I did not learn from my formal education. When I returned to North Carolina to teach science at Fuquay-Varina High School in Wake County, my sister brought me a little magazine called *Heron Dance* as a gift. She told me that she had started receiving *Heron Dance* somehow and thought that I would like it. I took it, laid it on the table and thought to myself that I was not interested. After a few days I picked it up and began to read. The words and thoughts began to join with my spirit and inner being as roots converge into a trunk of a growing tree. I felt the energy rise up in me like the spring rise of tree sap. I ordered a subscription. I waited and anticipated the arrival of each issue as a small child looks towards Santa Claus and presents. Whenever *Heron Dance* arrived I stopped whatever I was doing. I would sit under a tree and read and reread every word. I had finally found a community that talked about the things that I seemed to instinctively know.

Then, in the summer 2002 issue, I met Thomas Berry. He had written a piece that quoted his statement, “The universe is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects.” I read each word over and over, letting each one flow through every neuron and wrap around each strand of my DNA. It was an ancient friend meeting me for the first time. In the same week, a newsletter came from the local Sierra Club with an announcement that the Jung Society in Charlotte was going to host a weekend with Thomas Berry at Myers Park Baptist Church. I knew I had to go.

When my wife came in from work I told her that we had to go to Charlotte.

She said, “Why, we don’t know anyone in Charlotte.”

I informed her, “We are going to see Thomas Berry.”

She responded with, “Who is he?”

I said that I didn’t know, but I needed to meet him.

During the week before we left for Charlotte, I went to Barnes and Nobles to see if I could get a copy of Thomas’s book. Thinking that no one had ever heard of Thomas, I cautiously asked the clerk if they had anything by him and where might it be. She told me to follow her to the section. There were ten copies of *The Great Work* on the shelf. I thought that this was a good sign and bought a copy. I tried reading it but it seemed almost a foreign language to a science teacher. Nonetheless, I knew that I had to meet Thomas.

Randy Senzig is an award-winning science educator whose work includes 31 years in North Carolina and Florida public schools and co-directorship of the NC State University Summer Environmental Camp. He wrote the Wake County Environmental Science Curriculum, hosts the website “Birds in the Schoolyard,” and serves on the Board of Trustees for the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Farms near Greensboro, NC.

That particular week, we heard Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., speak at Guilford College on Thursday night and traveled to Charlotte on Friday to attend the Friday evening showing of the film *The Great Story*. The film was so powerful that both my wife and I stayed up late into the night sharing what we had seen. The next morning we arrived at Myers Park Baptist for a meeting with Thomas Berry. We sat in a large circle with the morning sun sending fingers of light through the windows in the rotunda. He talked. We listened. He talked. We asked questions for three hours. It was as if I had met a friend and mentor who was able to articulate what my DNA had been leading me to do for all these years.

I was 55 years old, had earned a Master's Degree, had taught school for 24 years and had never heard of this man and his work. But instantly I knew that Thomas's ideas and my spirit were interconnected. Maybe interconnected for longer than I realized.

After this meeting with Thomas, I joined a community of people who wanted to learn about the human's relationship to the Earth and Universe. I found Herman Greene and the Center for Ecozoic Studies, which led to Carolyn Toben's Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, where I have participated in Seventh Generation Teachers workshops and in the two-year study, "The Inner Life of the Child in Nature." Finding that my students respond very positively to *The Great Work*, I have used more and more of Thomas's teachings in my classroom,

Currently, I serve on the Board of Trustees at The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. At my school we have formed a Professional Learning Community that consists of a teacher from each of the curricular disciplines with the intention of finding ways to incorporate true environmental education, or Earth education, into the high school curriculum.

I have had the privilege of visiting with Thomas, sitting at his feet, feeling that he is my mentor and learning so much. It must have been, as my students would say, "awesome" to be in his class. Meeting, knowing and learning from Thomas Berry has validated all I knew instinctively as a person about the human-Earth relationship and has given me the task to use every drop of my creativity and imagination as a teacher to help other teachers and my students move forward in their understandings and intentions to, in Thomas's words, "Reinvent the human to live in the 21st Century."