

# “Owed to Friendship”

A tribute to Phyllis Cunningham



from Eunice Schatz

*honoring a lifetime of friendship  
and our intersecting lives  
that converged and diverged*

Two of the pictures below are from a vacation trip Phyl Cunningham and I took in 1965, traveling up the coast of Maine to the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia. It was a memorable trip, and I enjoyed catching a picture of Phyl playfully chasing a sea gull. A few weeks later she received word that her father had died.



At another time, Phyl and I took a vacation drive through the White Mountains of New Hampshire, pausing for a meditative moment by Lake Chocorua.

Long drives in the car often provided opportunity for in-depth conversation and reflection.

What follows here in these pages are my retrospective thoughts about this lifelong friendship.

# *Phyllis Cunningham*

## *A Tribute from a Friend*

Browsing through the documents and photos and letters that have recorded a lifetime of memories, I have discovered five particular pieces that characterize the nature of my lifelong friendship with Phyl Cunningham. Some parts are in her words—both written and spoken; some are mine.

**Part I:** Since we became initially acquainted around an organization in which we were both involved—Pioneer Girls—I will begin with a story she herself told a small group of colleagues about how she came to accept a position on Pioneer Girls staff in 1955 when she was 23—a recently graduated nurse. I named it “*Why did you say ‘Yes’ to Joy?*”

**Part II:** Many years later, she told a larger story of her life in a piece she simply titled *Autobiography*, beginning with her rural roots in upper state New York.

**Part III:** In 2011, when word came that Phyl was dying at the age of 83, I was moved to consider the meaning of this lifelong friendship at a deeper level. Although Phyl and I had been close a half century earlier, we had each challenged one another because of basically different orientations to our life work. I had a lifelong attraction to the inner life, and had found exploration of the psyche—whether in therapy or in other media—to be irresistibly compelling. This had landed me in a profession and discipline where the inner life was highly valued—various forms of counseling and spiritual companionship. Phyl was just as strongly attracted to the active life, the “outer journey”—and gave herself unstintingly to activities and causes that ministered to the needs of persons and groups often neglected—either due to ethnic minority status, or due to their female gender. The piece here, called *Keeping What is Worth Keeping*, highlights this important tension in our relationship.

**Part IV:** What comes next is an e-mail written to me nine years earlier, in 2002, after she read my memoir, *Still Woman Moving*. She succinctly states the contrast between our two callings—but with genuine respect. I call this “*Accepting our Divergent Callings.*”

**Part V:** Then I uncovered a silent treasure: a dream I had in August 2010 which held the promise of resolving the tension—this time not between Phyl and me, but the tension within myself that was asking for resolution by integrating this lifelong friendship. I will let the description and interpretation of the dream speak for itself, since the unconscious tends to speak a deeper truth than anything I could craft in words myself. I could call it *Integrating the Inner and Outer Spiritual Journey*.

It is my way of expressing gratitude to God for my friend Phyllis without whom I would have been much impoverished in both my inner and my outer journey.

## Part I

*Phyllis Cunningham:*

### **What Made You Say Yes to Joy?**

Sometimes there are surprises in the choices a person makes in changing their career field. In the case of Phyl Cunningham, this is borne out by her own admission. When she graduated from Elmira College at the age of 19 and entered Case Western Reserve Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, she did not anticipate leaving nursing four years later. There were surprises on the other end, too. Phyl was not from the same file of likely candidates for staff the founders of Pioneer Girls might have imagined. She was a vivid personality, unafraid to speak the truth to power, full of mischievous humor, and with a powerful intellect. She brought fresh ideas, and a vigorous approach that challenged conventional thinking. Everyone who knew her would agree that she made a mark that all of us appreciate and remember with affection. She died in 2012 at the age of 84.

On one day in 1995, when a number of former Pioneer Girls staff were gathered to talk together in preparation for publishing a book about Pioneer Girls' early years, we took the opportunity to ask Phyl to tell us her story of coming on field staff. Louise Troup added her perspective, having been one of Phyl's clinical instructors at the nursing school, and a big influence on Phyl's decision to get involved with Pioneer Girls locally. She was one of the first persons Phyl met at nurses' training when she started in the fall of 1947. What follows are excerpts from that part of our conversation.

*Phyl:* Louise was one of those nurse cadets formed during World War II. I thought that was wonderful because I always seemed to miss those times when something financial was available. Nurse Cadet Corps had just ended. They paid for nursing, and gave \$20 a month besides. Everyone loved Louise because she was a lot of fun. She also got a little Bible study group going so I joined. We had prayer meetings together. I got sucked in out of curiosity and because I liked Louise.

I was the only one in the group who smoked, so since there was no ashtray convenient, I just lit my cigarette, kicked off a shoe, and flicked the ashes off into my shoe. I was once assigned to lead the group in a study about "minor characters in the New Testament" and I think I chose Peter and Paul. During that first year, Eunice came to Cleveland to visit Louise. Louise couldn't wait to introduce us to each other because she was sure Eunice and I would like each other. But we didn't take to each other. It wasn't a strong reaction but we just didn't cathect in the way Louise expected.

I began going down to church Sunday night with Louise and her friends. We were a group of student nurses that worked days, and then hung out together evenings. I became a Christian then and I went to Baptist Bible Institute for three years. I used to work nights and get off at 8 a.m. and then take classes for four hours until 12:30. I slept afternoons.

One Thanksgiving Louise came home to New York with me. I showed her the farm and she met my folks and some of my family. We tried to milk the cow, but Louise could only get a squirt. Louise tells me she was interested in me from the beginning—this “student fresh off the farm.”

*Louise adds her recollections:*

I recognized Phyl as a brilliant person almost as soon as I began to teach her. I was not in the classroom, but in a clinical setting. I remember we had private conferences with each nurse and when I scheduled Phyl's, she was going to sit it out and not say anything for two hours!

This fascinated me. I was vying to get Phyl to talking so we sat it out. I can still see her sitting at my desk. I talked. I don't know what I said. From then on, we really liked each other. I saw how excellent she was in the clinical work, and how fast.

She would get very nervous. As a student, when she was going to do a procedure for the first time, her hands would literally shake and I remember her first catheterization, because I handled it rather well. I knew Phyl could do it, but I knew it would bother her to have me watching, and I don't think the procedure would bother her as long as no one was watching her. So we were in the utility room—and I can picture the very bed—and I said, “Phyl describe to me exactly what you are going to do and then go in and do it. I will be here standing by if you need me.”

*Phyl continued:*

I ended up in a surgical specialty ward, and had to deal with sensitive procedures working on men and their catheters. One of them said to me, ‘You are a goddess of mercy, an angel.’ I was good at taking care of them efficiently.

I got involved in camp the next year, summer of 1948. Camp Cherith was held that year at Camp Crag. That was the year we threw the director—who was Louise—into the lake—a camp custom early on.

Nancy Wareham Sites and I shared a cabin as counselors. I didn't know what the hell I was going to do with those campers; I was out on a limb, but Nancy helped me. What I remember about that camp was the black kids from Cleveland City Mission who had been put all together in the same cabin. All the whites, and all the blacks—separate.

During the year I was a Colonist leader at Hough Baptist Church. When I joined the church that's what they gave me to do.

After Louise left for South Africa, I started directing camp. Someone from national staff came through and asked me to direct, probably Joy Woods Iddings who had the Ohio area before me. It blew me out of the water. I had to have a budget. The people at headquarters said they would help me. I ended up with Rusty, the business manager, because she sent out the goods to sell in camp's store. Only problem, they arrived at my apartment when I wasn't there and someone stowed them behind the sofa and didn't tell me. So headquarters sent another set; that was when we found the ones behind the sofa!

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At first I worked the Ohio field as a volunteer, traveling around the state and getting pretty well acquainted. The hospital gave me five weeks off in the summer for my job directing camp. After a couple of years, a site was purchased at Stony Glen, and I directed that camp until one day in 1955, Joy Mackay, the national director, came and asked me *“Why don’t you come on staff?”*

So Eunice and I did a field trip together—for training. Eunice saw that was where our relationship was forged.

The whole idea of coming on Pioneer Girls staff never occurred to me. I was a nurse, so I thought I would go on staff for just two years – like a leave of absence. A fellow nurse Marcella Brown, asked how much money would I be making. We didn’t make a lot in nursing; I started at \$8.60 a day. I told her \$40, and \$40 a month for travel. She was shocked. *“What? You’re kidding!”*

Then I went to Chicago for the training period. It just blew me out. I had just finished a Masters in Administration. This training period. You know the first thing we did – stuff envelopes. I said to Eunice, *“What is this?”*

Then I went out on the field and I didn’t know the churches in the area. We had nothing organized. So I organized. We have these volunteer area leaders called Fort Captains. And I saw the potential for training, so I wrote a Manual. Joy asked me, *“What’s that?”* Later she used it as material for all the field reps.

As I see it, Joy went for choosing good people. She knew very few people would think about quitting a regular job and going into Pioneer Girls. She picked good people but then she had a lot of wild horses under her authority to handle.

I was given a field including Ohio, Western New York, and the top of Kentucky. I also had Ontario. Later I added Quebec because I knew of programs going there. That was great because my trips would take me along the Ohio River, and then up the St. Lawrence and to Ottawa where there were all those tulips everywhere because Queen Juliana had once visited there.

I was only in Lake Erie area two years. I wouldn’t move after one year because I just got started with things. One of those things had to do with Canada. Eunice told me that Pioneer Girls was sending the most All-American up there and the Canadians will throw me right back over the border. I was very loud and boisterous. But actually the Canadians liked me.

I was not conscious of the whole idea of cultural imperialism at the time but I did recognize when I went up and saw them earning the All-American badge! *“Why are you doing that? No, we will have an All Canadian badge.”* We started doing things familiar to their culture. For example, Americans were not so big on parades, but the Canadians like parades, so we did parades. At camp we brought out Canadian flags and sang their national anthem, *“Oh Canada”* so they could see they were respected.

The only time I got in trouble with the Canadians was the time we had camp up in the Haliburtons that didn't have electricity or bathrooms, just toilets, not showers. The only way you could take a bath was swimming in the river. One night after campfire I suggested we go down and take a bath in the lake. "Let's go skinny dipping!" We were having a great time. But afterwards, I tell you, I got sat down by some of the leaders who told me, "We don't do that." There was one person who would be with me— Elsie MacDonald from Montreal. I had brought her to camp so she could learn how to plan a camp in her area. She thought the Ontario people were kind of prudish. After being in that area for two years, Joy asked me to move to California and represent Pioneer Girls on the West Coast.

Of course there is much more to the story. Phyl was Field Director for a time, and then came back to headquarters to develop North Star, Pioneer Girls' Leadership Training Center on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. By this time, Phyl had become acquainted with the larger field of which she was to become an important part: the then comparatively new field of Adult Education.

The Pioneer Girls Board's resistance to Phyl's initiatives in her conduct of North Star precipitated Phyl's resignation. She had begun studies in Adult Education at the University of Chicago, where she ultimately completed her PhD, and went on to become professor at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb and to a series of achievements and honors in her field. She was part of a subgroup of adult educators who conceived of "transformational learning" that cut across socio-economic and racial barriers. She insisted on creating opportunities for those usually disenfranchised. Many persons have her to thank for doors that opened for them that would otherwise have been closed. A book issued in her honor was published in 2007, *North American Adult Educators, a Phyllis M. Cunningham Archive of Quintessential Autobiographies for the Twenty-First Century*.

During Phyl's time at the University of Chicago, she worked with others to found the Urban Life Center, an experiential education program providing academic credit for exposing Christian college students to the urban setting in a thoughtful and creative way. It was during these years that she met Jeanne Oddgeirsson, who with her daughter Jessie later became Phyl's adopted family, enriching life with joy and fulfillment for all three.

## Part II

# Autobiography

*Phyllis M. Cunningham*

## *Roots*

My mother, in exasperation, called me John L. Lewis and though I was fourteen at the time and living in rural upstate New York, I knew that was not a good name to be called in my highly conservative Republican clan. After all, I had been simply drawing attention to the fact that my foster brothers and sisters and I were being subjected to unfair working arrangements by my mother. This difference in political positioning continued between my parents and me and though friendly, our starting points in politics became increasingly oppositional.

We had chosen to move to New York State from Maine in 1929. Almost immediately we were faced with the inability to make payments on our farm because of the Wall Street crash. We survived and kept our farm because of the social safety net laid down by the Roosevelt Administration, yet my parents were having none of that liberalism. Their ingrained New England individualism and reliance on local self help could not stomach policies that paid farmers not to grow crops or paid federal milk subsidies to us so that New Yorkers could pay less to have a quart of milk delivered to their door. To this day, my family remains staunchly within the embrace of the Republican Party.

My parents were also an important example to me. Their generosity in the midst of poverty—always there for friends and neighbors regardless of social class—provided me with my primary instinct for social justice and equality. Because of the accident of birth, I fell naturally into the role of becoming my father's “right hand person.” It was virtually effortless for me to see myself as an economic producing person as there was no son. Like my father, I gravitated toward strong positions and speaking forthrightly with candor. My own sense of independence, interwoven with an ability to be frugal for the sake of principles, I attribute to my mother, who remained self-sufficient and active in her community until her final days in her nineties. It was a strong heritage.

I divide my story into two periods: *my formation as an educator*, and *my life as an adult educator*.

## *My Formation as an Educator*

### **College**

Our family may have been economically poor but we were culturally rich. We knew who we were and our work and reputation defined us. I grew up in a time when women did not usually seek careers. In addition we lived in a community that could be classified as low to moderate income; only two from our high school class of seventeen went to college. As the youngest of six children, I was the first child my parents could afford to send to college. Luckily for me, the only college that would accept me at fifteen years of age was a small women's college of 400 students. Here we women were challenged intellectually with a strong liberal arts curriculum. After graduation, when I moved on to Western Reserve University, as a nursing student with four years of college, I was put in with medical students for the initial science courses. I became acclimated to a rigorous academic curriculum and it has never occurred to me to think that it should be different because I am a woman.

### **Pioneer Girls**

In Cleveland, as a young nurse, I made the first decision that set me on the path toward becoming an adult educator. Though I had done a short stint of visiting nurse work in the center city of Cleveland that required a lot of health teaching, it was my volunteer work in my church with a girl's club called Pioneer Girls that proved to be pivotal. I participated in area leadership training functions, including summer camp counseling—activities which quickly escalated into training adult leaders throughout the state as well as directing the Ohio camp during the summer.

Meanwhile I acquired a Masters degree in Administration, and at the age of twenty-eight, was offered a job directing a hospital. At the same time I was asked to become a Field Representative for Pioneer Girls. The choice was a momentous one—to stay within the medical profession or to take on a role which promised growth in helping to shape a fledgling organization's development in two ways: first, expansion internationally (my territory would include Ontario and Quebec in addition to Ohio and Western New York), and second, helping the organization conceptualize its mission with regard to training of professional and volunteer leaders upon which it depended. At a less conscious level, a profound religious experience was impelling me to take seriously my own professional calling within an environment that I thought fostered taking moral and religious issues seriously.

I took the job with Pioneer Girls and was very successful with the first goal, creating training procedures for field staff, and in three years I was moved to California to inject new energy into an area on the verge of growth. Three years later, the organization tapped me to return to Chicago headquarters to build a National Leadership Training Center.

The years from 1965 to 1973 were among the most formative of my life. I was beginning to discover resources within the field of education that stretched my thinking. I had begun using Malcolm and Hulda Knowles' book on Group Dynamics as leader's training materials, and was impacted by an intensive workshop at the National Training Center at Bethel, Maine. I had had no formal courses in education so I started classes at the University of Chicago where I discovered the existence of the emerging field of adult education.

In 1965, I was living in suburbia consumed with my job of raising a half million dollars, planning a permanent adult training facility in the upper peninsula of Michigan, and developing an educational program for training the leaders. Concurrently, during the fall and winter quarters I took classes at the University where anti-war and civil rights disturbances were brewing. I attended an integrated storefront church in Chicago that was a part of the West Side Christian Parish, an urban church ministry of a half dozen mainline denominations dedicated to maintaining a presence in the city even as their white congregations fled. It was this group of churches that hosted Martin Luther King when he brought his movement to Chicago, creating much political movement on the ground and in the street at this time. This contact with *real politic* caused the dissolution of the parish. As the denominations told us, "We are about preaching the gospel, not politics in the street." Only two of the churches survived; ours was one of them. We changed from being called Community Presbyterian to "Faith Community Church" and, except for one or two whites, it was a black congregation. It was a lesson about the institutional church that has remained with me.

When King was assassinated, I don't think I will ever forget the images of army jeeps and National Guard troops patrolling our streets on the west side of Chicago where fires raged. I still belong to that congregation where I have experienced more humanity and Christianity than in any other church I have attended.

## **University of Chicago**

At the University, several professors influenced me strongly: Marlene Dixon who taught social theory and Richard Flacks who taught a sociology course on Marxism. They were activist scholars, and both were turned down for tenure despite strong student support for them. Flacks became a victim of violence when a political dissident who disagreed with his point of view entered his office one afternoon and viciously attacked the professor with a hammer, wounding Flacks seriously.

It was a time on campus when it was hard not to be involved; yet some still were not. When I attended a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convention in Chicago, and was asked to declare my preference for political action, I favored the Worker/Student Alliance. In July of 1969, as Neil Armstrong took his historic walk on the moon, all twenty-plus of our University Adult Education students were huddled in a Hyde Park apartment developing a declaration to the faculty demanding student representation at faculty meetings and a cessation of certain activities considered to be parental rather than collegial. It was the zenith of collective anti establishment activity for our Adult Education graduate students. But when it came to occupying the administration building, I was the only Adult Education student to go in. So the revolutionary spirit among Adult Education students was only so deep. After all, one could lose one's scholarship.

The University cultivated a deep culture of belonging among Adult Education students. The number of graduates was small and many were well known. At every national Adult Education Association, students and alumni were introduced and visited together over lunch. By the time we graduated, networks had been established, and we knew every graduate and what that person did. So when I walked into the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) or the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC), I knew many of the leaders there and they knew me.

Lucy Ann Geiselman and Bill Griffith were the two Adult Education professors that influenced me most at Chicago. Lucy Ann, very intelligent, creative and a closet Marxist, was an exciting programmer in professional continuing education. She ran the Continuing Education Residential Center as well as holding faculty rank. As a Kellogg Residential intern, I worked directly with her my first year as a full time graduate student. She understood participation as bottom up education and we did National Welfare programming with Maximum Feasible Participation of the poor, and exploration of Youth Group structures (read gangs) that became national exemplars for the country. She also helped each of the five interns do a major conference of their own. Mine, *Double Exposure on Race*, brought sixty of my white evangelical Christian colleagues to a conference about Blacks, with a Black curriculum, led by Blacks and located on the Black south side of Chicago. The white people were certainly out of their comfort zone. In 1967 this type of conference was unheard of, but Lucy Ann encouraged me to be bold and rely on the process. It was so successful that this type of participatory process- oriented education is what I later tried to provide for graduate students working with me.

Bill Griffith and I had a very strong relationship that may be related more to our common backgrounds than to our similarity in politics where we were diametrically opposed. It was Bill who informed me that I was an adult educator and from whom I took my first formal course in adult education. We had much in common in terms of values of honesty, integrity and respect for humanity. We enjoyed working together and complemented each other's talents. Bill and his family became my long time friends; Bill remained my mentor until his death.

Cyril Houle was at the University of Chicago all the time I was there but our personalities and politics kept us at a distance. However when I became an instructor replacing Griffith while he was on a Fulbright, I fell under Mr. Houle's tutelage. He was most gracious and warm towards me, welcoming me to the faculty! "What courses do you want to teach?" "What do you think we should do about this student?" You would think I was a new tenured faculty member. I knew Mr. Houle was doing his professorial apprenticing duty as I knew all University of Chicago graduates should do. These acts are well remembered because they were a part of the culture.

## **The Urban Life Center**

It was in this period that a group of white graduate students and colleagues in a variety of fields came together to develop what became the Urban Life Center. Blacks were mounting a strong critique about who was really the problem in America and Lerone Bennett in particular, had made it quite clear that he thought it was the whites.

Accordingly, as a committed group of alienated evangelicals we decided to develop a non-traditional "free university semester in the city" for Christian college youth. We contacted about a dozen such colleges and arranged for them to pay us to provide upper division students experiential education on the south side of Chicago for fifteen hours of college credit awarded by the college.

The students lived communally in a building we rented, and were engaged in prison, welfare, art and community organizations as interns. Students were taught courses by our staff, by persons on welfare and by community activists. We enrolled eight to ten students a semester and forty in January term. Thirty-five years later the program still exists in a modified form. We were able to take these young adults, many of whom had never spoken with a person of color and invite them to confront their perspective on race and class in relation to their faith. Again, I experienced the power of participatory education in expanding consciousness as many of these students had transformative experiences and are today working in movements for social justice. I also learned the difficulty of establishing a non- governmental organization (NGO) that would create permanent social space in civil society.

By this time, I had left Pioneer Girls over the issues of racism and sexism that was deeply embedded in the churches with which we were working. The curriculum of the Leadership Training Center turned out to be too socially relevant for the local churches as leaders returned home prepared to make changes. One of the most contentious issues was the integration of Blacks into the program. The Pioneer Girls Board acquiesced to conservative political pressure from its constituency, and retrenched within narrower limits of vision compatible with the largely suburban middle class population it served.

Many of the top talented leaders left. I was angry, for I had given eleven productive years to the organization. Deeper than the anger was my disheartenment. I had hoped that the church, and religious institutions with which it was allied, had within it the moral and spiritual will to pursue a courageous course at a time when the young were asking for radical change. It gave me a valuable experience in understanding the power of structures in our society to perpetuate displaced institutional goals.

### *Life as an Adult Educator*

In 1973 a new phase of my life began: I graduated from the University of Chicago, worked three years in the City Colleges of Chicago, and then became a professor at Northern Illinois University (NIU) where I stayed until I retired in 2002.

#### **Open Learning and the Community**

Upon graduation I tried getting a job in the professoriate and was turned down by Illinois, Syracuse and British Columbia. I ended up taking a job at City Colleges of Chicago in what became the Center for Open Learning. It was here that the community college and public library consortium was developed utilizing video & audiocassettes and where GED/TV, using the Kentucky tapes, had its most successful national program. I see this program as another of my most valuable learning experiences as well as one of the more creative programs I have had a part in developing.

The Public TV station broadcast the tapes, the fifty-four library branches registered the students and developed reading support lists, and the college provided the study guides through the library and teacher support. We registered 3,255 students the first round of the program. It was a win-win situation. The TV channel had such good market share they offered to repeat broadcasting free. Our students passed the GED test at the same rate as those students prepared by taking classes (Cervero, 1976). The librarians were happy as we brought a whole new clientele who had never been in libraries before.

Again those adult educators who made GED/TV work were a "band of brothers" because of the intensity of the program and its pace. All were from the University of Chicago—Mike Haverkamp, Peter Finestone, Ron Cervero and me. There was such satisfaction on its completion because we had triumphed over the college bureaucracy, done an end run around the Springfield "no it won't work" vision and had met with much success—at least in our minds. Yet some of my best friends criticized my work as anti-revolutionary and reformist (Horton, 1974), a criticism that has recurred from time to time.

The time spent in thinking about access to higher education was important in my own formation. The community college was growing at the rate of one per week; its function was not clear and we had just fought the battle over privilege and elitism. As Dean of Open Learning I was in a similar position with about ten other administrators of the Chicago higher learning institutions starting non-traditional programs to improve access. We had been thrust into positions that we knew little about or where there was very little known about these programs. Four of these administrators were University of Chicago graduates, so we organized ourselves into the *Chicago Area Roundtable of Open Learning*. We began trading information at monthly meetings and developing patterns of doing things.

I became very interested in the Black and Latino community and it was at this time that my knowledge and familiarity with the community-based organizations deepened. Those years in the community college, and in striving to develop non-traditional adult programs, were important in giving me experience on the ground in an urban context, something much needed in my next position.

### **The Ohliger experience**

I had met John Ohliger when I was still a graduate student and he gave me a bibliography on compulsory adult education. That bibliography grew to five linear feet of bibliographies and other papers along with about thirty tapes of "Songs of Social Responsibility" from his radio program. By the time I got to Northern Illinois University, John had moved to Madison, renounced his tenured status at Ohio State University, given up his car for a bicycle, and was working for minimum wage two days a week so he could spend time living. What a man! His organization, Basic Choices, and his newsletter, *Second Thoughts* were, in my opinion, some of the best material available for discussion in graduate programs. Here was someone who acted on his convictions.

Several graduate students, another “band” (Jack Ross, Dieter Bussigel, Mickey Hellyer among others) formed a support group for Basic Choices and did what we could to promote the intellectual freedom and critical inquiry championed by John. John and I became the closest of friends, teaching together and organizing with others such organizations such as the National Alliance for Voluntary Learning (NAVL). We promoted actions such as those taken at the Boston AEA meeting where we challenged the association on its values and put out a daily newspaper called *Navel Gazing*. We forced the Association to form a task force on voluntary learning (Cunningham & Hawking, 1981). The following year we worked with our friends to put the Association on trial for "negligence regarding the social action focus inherent in the mission and tradition of adult education" (Mezirow, 1991). John was a person to whom I could always turn and from whom I could get a straight answer. He was one of the very few intellectuals we have had in U.S. adult education. I was honored to be the “best person” at his marriage to Chris Wagner.

## **A Global Perspective**

I had never been outside North America when I came to Northern Illinois University. I signed up to go to Finland/USSR with John Niemi in 1978 because I felt so naïve. The following year, Bob Smith and I took a group of students to England and Scotland. Following that trip I was selected to represent the AERC Executive at the United Kingdom research association, Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA). Two years later, I secured funding from the Kellogg Foundation to sponsor a Trans-Atlantic Dialogue between young British and North American professors sponsored by the CPAE/ SCUTREA. This was highly successful and relationships continue today but I came to see its Eurocentric limitations. About this time at a Participatory Research conference sponsored by the Lindeman Center, Budd Hall invited me to the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) General Assembly that was meeting in Paris. This conference changed my western view to a global view and introduced me to adult educators who have been highly influential in my life—people like Dame Nita Barrow and Pat Ellis (Barbados); Rajesh Tandon (India), Jaya Gajayanake (Sri Lanka); Elsa Lobos (Brazil), Paulo Wangoola (Uganda), Derek Mulenga (Zambia) and Larry Olds from Minnesota. I became active in the ICAE and in 1984 attended the two-week symposium in Shanghai that opened up Chinese adult education to the western world.

At this time I was Chair of our faculty and brought to them the possibility of further internationalizing our program through building on the China opportunity. The faculty was eager for experience abroad and agreed that we would be careful to frame any agreement so that it promoted two-way equal exchanges. And for the next ten years that is what we did. Over twenty-five Chinese students enrolled in our program, several Chinese visiting scholars came to our faculty for several months to one term; and seven NIU professors taught for one month in Shanghai. Three NIU books were translated into Chinese.

## **China**

*Lessons from Practice* was published as a Jossey-Bass Source book (Marong et al, 1987) to bring Chinese thought to the west and three bi-national research conferences were held. The Chinese experience was a large part of what became a wide recruitment of international students from the global south from twenty-seven different countries.

Between 1990 and 2000 there were over 200 doctoral students in the program and eleven percent of them were international students of color (Cunningham& Shim, 2001). Much, if not most of the recruitment came through contacts with the IACE or with contacts from Wheaton College's (Illinois) Billy Graham Institute missions programs that brought a number of persons from Africa and the Caribbean into their Masters of Communications programs. Those with an interest in education for social change were naturally attracted to our doctoral program.

## **The Chicago/Conscientization Experience**

One can trace the development of my critical consciousness from its early beginnings, but it was not until I became involved with Budd Hall, John Ohliger, and especially Marcelo Zwierynski, that I was able to conceptualize and name the oppression that I had seen and experienced many times in my life. Marcelo, an Argentinean political refugee worked with Tom Heany in the NIU Chicago Lindeman Center. He introduced us to social theorists from both Europe and Latin America. We taught classes together, wrote grants for Community Based Organizations, and worked with community activists in the areas of popular education, popular culture, and participatory research. There was a group of about two dozen students committed to the concepts of educating for social change. They demanded changes in the curriculum to neutralize the psychologizing hegemony that permeated it. We were also able to democratize our recruitment and admissions process. We brought the community into the campus and the campus into the community by developing community-based research projects and linking our research and intellectual activity with popular social movement activity.

We could not have done this without our base in Chicago. It was fortuitous that in 1975, Bob Mason made the decision to apply for both Region 1 & 2 Service Centers for training teachers in ABE, GED, and ESL. He was also sensitive to the African Americans in Chicago when they insisted that a center be placed in the city. So for ten years NIU had a funded campus in the very center of Chicago with connections to all the community colleges and public school districts receiving federal adult education funds. Utilizing this base we were able to reach out to community based programs that did literacy and popular education as well. The Lindeman Center, based in our University Extension was also operating in Chicago. Collectively we became a force in developing a progressive training program, a popular education curriculum and an Afrocentric curriculum.

Then with a new Department Chair, Glenn Smith, we developed a Cohort Program that favored recruitment of people of color. Our percent for non-white graduates rose to thirty-nine percent (Cunningham& Shim, 2001) and NIU began to be cited in National Statistics for graduating a large

number of African American doctorates. We launched African/Latino research conferences and listed over a dozen of our graduates of color as adult education professors. This was the work of another band that had a profound effect on me. Donna Amstutz, Ian Baptiste, Scipio A.J. Colin III, Bernice Chapman, Suzanne Davenport, Elio DeAruda, Phyllis Ham Garth, Derek Mulenga, Joye Knight, Elizabeth Peterson, Jack Ross, Javier Saracho, Margaret Shaw, Vanessa Sheared, Fred Shied, and Gabriella Stroschen.

## *Summary*

As I think back over my life, I can follow the threads of influence woven first of a mother who embraced friends, neighbors, and foster children regardless of social class or economic circumstances, providing me with my primary instinct for social justice; and second a father who treated me as a person who would contribute in my own right, fostering my independence and sense of empowerment.

Spending my formative years in a women's college, whose motto was "The first women's college to give a degree equal to that of a man", and then on to nursing, a women's field at that time, I escaped much of the male hegemonic forces experienced by other women my age. I do know that behavior which I define as normal is seen by others as strange for a woman. I have never let this bother me for I feel I have a clear head on the equity issue.

The adult education experiences that I cherish most are those that have brought about some social justice or changed a person in such a way that they are working to bring about social justice. I think of the many women in Pioneer Girls who came to think of themselves as more than "just a housewife." I know that some of them have become agents of change in intransigent local churches. The same can be said of those idealistic youth who studied at the Urban Life Center and opened up their consciousness from the construction of a rigid white evangelicalism that only honors "preaching not politics." As a professor in my latter years, helping build a program that opened up space for others is my greatest accomplishment, and in doing so, others have been encouraged to be space makers as well.

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## Part III

### *Keeping What is Worth Keeping*

*My Thoughts Written in 2011*

An old friend of mine is dying. I say old, because she is 83, and I am still young at 81. She is not dead yet; she had a stroke and is lying inert in an extended care facility without pain, but also without speaking. The jargon of the medical establishment is that she is “unresponsive,” but we cannot trust that, because we now understand how people in a coma hear people around them talking and asking questions, but they cannot respond when everything seems to be going so fast, but they are listening and mark what is said.

So I sit here, a thousand miles away, waiting to see whether this “unresponsive person” whose heart rate is slowing will slip away, or if she will miraculously rouse into her habitually energetic self and go on for another decade or more. After all, her mother lived to age 95. She is from sturdy stock, and could rally.

Meanwhile I sit here absorbed in the reality that this vital person whom I have known for fifty-five years is actually in the process of returning to another Home. I learned this about death recently—that God sends us into life with a mission to fulfill, and we live out that mission, and when we die, we return Home to tell God the story of what we did, making death not a leaving, but a returning. I am comforted by that.

In the interval, I begin to notice the artifacts of her presence in my room. I am scanning some old slides this week—part of a long-awaited project of taking my hundreds of Kodak slides to a miracle man who can scan them and return them to me on CDs in digitized form where I will be able to call them up at will on my trusty computer. I will not “lose” them to posterity—for alas, my husband and I married too late to consider having children, so this business of paring down our “stuff” has a different cast for us. There is no one eagerly waiting for us to pass on our treasures for the grandchildren, which makes “throwing things away” more complicated.

Among those slides, mostly of wonderful long trips to the West Coast—Yosemite, Canadian Rockies, Oregon coast, Grand Canyon—suddenly I came across a series of snapshots of my dying friend. There she is in her bathing suit at camp; or blowing her bugle as camp director; or sitting meditatively by a New Hampshire lake on one of our vacation trips together.

And best of all, the picture of a tiny cage containing a live mouse. She and I had been traveling together on business, and along the way, someone had given me a joke gift for my birthday—a live mouse, symbolic of a camp nickname I had chosen as a teenager. My friend and I were staying overnight with one of our work contacts in Ohio, who happened to own a very large curious cat, who became suddenly extremely interested in the paper sack in which we were carrying our caged mouse, hoping that our hostess would not notice. It was a night to remember, and we eventually broke down and confessed the presence of our tiny intruder.

Modern technology has saved me from having to throw out those slides after all. But then I rustle through my files—a task I have given myself a full year to complete, for of files I have *miles*. And I find a folder that is labeled “Eunice’s writing projects.” And inside is a piece I wrote a year ago about a significant dream I had featuring this friend. The impact had been profound enough for me to write an extensive piece about it, in an effort to learn what my unconscious was teaching me through this dream figure.

What I have not said thus far, is that this friend, so dear to me in many ways, was also at times my nemesis, for in addition to the warmth of feeling between us at times, we also fell into conflict more often than I like to remember. So this dream presented me with a totally new angle of viewing, for I know that dream figures are often representations of an unacknowledged part of oneself. The dream brought me face to face with a part of my friend that I have not fully incorporated—and it is the precise part of her that is devastatingly true and honorable, and that sometimes has caused me so much pain and put us at odds with each other.

Perhaps I have imagined that of all the stuff I must throw away, I could get rid of that part of my friend that challenged me in difficult ways. Now I feel ready to attack the last emblems of our lifelong relationship: a folder of letters scrawled in her own ragged hand written at the beginning of our friendship when she was looking to me for reassurance, rather than I following her. She was changing the trajectory of her career from one of assured prestige in her field, and pitching it all overboard with one grand sweep of her hand in order to join me and others in a ragtag organization of marginal people trying to create an innovative outreach to kids outside of the usual institutional frameworks. An unlikely setting for this person who was destined to eventually achieve international prominence in the educational field she grew into.

I shall not need to keep these letters. They belong to her daughter and granddaughter, and I can let them go with abandon, because they have brought me home to the beginning of my friendship with this person, and she is at her own life ending. We will both be at rest—across the thousand miles that separate us, and the even greater chasm of her unconscious state at this hour.

## Part IV

### *Accepting our Divergent Callings*

After Phyl read my memoir, *Still Woman Moving*, she wrote me one of her rare e-mails (she was not fond of technology, beginning with having to type her field reports years ago in Pioneer Girls).

Well, I finished the book last night. It certainly is a prodigious effort. I have to admire your ability of have such a developed inner journey. This comes from one who rarely knows what, if anything, is going on inside myself. It looks as if your mother was as, if not more, influential on you as your father.

You write well and I found it incredible that there are so many layers one can uncover from one's consciousness. Congratulations on your accomplishment. I was hoping to find out why you were so upset with the Urban Life Center after you left, but didn't.

Anyway, I would love to see you and I can tell you about my *outside journey*—the Mexicans in Dekalb, the Pullman Porter Cultural Center, the North American Alliance for Popular Education, Mpambo Multiversity in Uganda, etc. It is interesting to see our various destinations.

Age is more important to me right now. I am 74 and Jessie is 15 in two weeks. My body doesn't move right, so I have slowed down a lot.

I am taking a tech course so I use the blackboard as a type of web board in my classes. Everyone is laughing at me giving in to technical rationality. But I still think I am in charge of my life world.

These brief comments say much about the healing in our strong relationship over the years. We traversed two different spiritual journeys—inner and outer. We challenged each other, while giving honor to both dimensions as manifest in one another. My life was enriched by this.

## Part V

### *Integrating The Inner and Outer Spiritual Journey*

*through a dream about Phyllis Cunningham*

#### **Dream of August 29, 2010**

*Some of us are to preside at a wedding and within a religious context. I am not sure how to proceed. Phyl Cunningham is seated at the back of the room and has some notes and materials she thinks may be helpful to the rest of us. She indicates that she is not sure she understands the material herself, but she plunges in, using the materials she has before her. As she unfolds these writings, everything becomes clear to me—the connection between these teachings about God and Christ, and his sacrifice on the cross and the sacrament of marriage. I express my profound joy at this discovery, and feel I can take it on from where she has left off and go on my own. I begin to be able to say it in my own words.*

The motif of a wedding instantly sets up the issue of opposites within and in a positive way, for a wedding is a joyful occasion and one indicating the beginning of a new life. The religious context signals that this inner marriage relates to my spiritual sensibilities. Since I am one called upon to preside, this also points to my calling to spiritual leadership.

When I am not sure how to proceed, the dream points to a part of me that is presently “at the back seat” so to speak and is personified in the dream by Phyllis.

At first glance, anyone who knows Phyllis will not see her as a back-of-the-room person, for she is loud and forceful always with dominant—and sometimes dominating—presence. But wait a moment, I who have known Phyllis closely for a sizable chunk of my adult life (especially from age 25-50), recognize one aspect of her power is indeed to be able to stay in the background, and only step forward at the crucially strategically important moment to offer her help in a way and at a point when it is most powerful and relevant and apt to turn things around dramatically.

Although my first take on this part of the dream was that this kind of background presence, backed up by “notes and materials” that have been collected through research and experience that “may be helpful” in the situation presented by the dream represented a kind of power that came from this stepping back intentionally, I now perceive something quite different, and more relevant.

The powerful person Phyl was in moving bravely into initiatives in the outside world—that part of Phyl—has been in the background in me, and the dream may be suggesting that I need to pay more attention to my place in the more outer active life, symbolized by Phyl. Having recently been placed in a position of needing help and care from others on a physical level (my recent knee replacement surgery), I am keenly aware of how removed I have remained from the caregiving population—largely ethnic minorities recently immigrated from areas of the world riddled with disasters—earthquakes, terrorizing wars, extreme poverty and famine. I have been very engrossed in my rich inner life, and was caught unawares as I became dependent on others for simple acts of kindness and basic necessities. Phyllis lived her life in continual contact with these realities; she sought them out. She cared about equal opportunity; she lived as an equal.

I am not surprised that in the dream Phyllis does not understand the material herself for many are the times in our conversations together when she has shaken her head in frustration about the less tangible or inarticulate aspects of spiritual language or practice as well as the more psychological elements so dear to me. Back in the days when I was deep into the mystical poetry of Amy Carmichael, Phyllis used to utter a frustrated whine of non-comprehension, and subtly poked fun, calling me “Amy,” wanting to jar me into the reality of my own fragmented understanding of things beyond my present knowledge and experience—and piercingly aware of my failures to live up to my exalted ideals.

We had perennial conflicts and arguments about this chasm between the ideals of the Christian life and the way we saw it lived out in reality—both in ourselves, and in the turbulent times in our culture. She was especially critical of the evangelical subculture that was so slow to see the discrepancy between what it taught about love and the exclusion of blacks and other minorities and women from full participation in the church, as well as in the larger society.

Over time, I perceived that Phyllis gave up on the church as an institution. Always reluctant to give expression to her faith emotionally, she appeared to withdraw from identification with the Christian community. At the same time, she grew into a life that exemplified Christian character in both large and small domains. Within the larger community—her career centered in academia—she rose to a position of authority and leadership not primarily by conforming to the pattern of success laid out in that realm—but rather by insisting on promulgating a philosophy of education termed radical in this era in the way attention was paid to the needs of minority populations in terms they themselves expressed, and the persistence with which she encouraged institutions and movements and individuals to move toward the values of equality and respect.

The trajectory of her career is laid out in her autobiography in detail; what I can recount here are my observations primarily in the small domain of her life with family and friends. This is where the life of Jesus within her burned like a shining light. Unfailingly, she manifest consistent attention to what was true and honorable in the way she adjusted to physical suffering, the foibles of those younger, the disappointments and frustrations involved in dealing with others' imperfections. She might not choose to *articulate* the principles of a spiritual path; she *manifest* them.

So the dream tells me that this inner person of integrity and consistency is being presented to me as available through the dream figure of Phyllis. It is time for this part of me to come forward from the background. I am to "plunge in"—"using the materials" accumulated through these recent years of research—in my case, my exposure to a world of need I had not had to encounter directly before.

As the dream figure unfolds her writings and notes, "everything comes clear to me." It turns out that something about Phyllis helps me make the pivotal connection "between these teachings about God and Christ, and his sacrifice on the cross, and the sacrament of marriage."

The marriage within the dream is the bringing together of God's love coming down to me penetrating my *inner* being, and then letting that love be manifest to the *outer* world—symbolized in Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross.

Small wonder we call it the mystery of the faith. The creator in whom "all things hold together" entered human form in Jesus and died so that God could bring together—reconcile—all of us. The cross itself gives us the image as the vertical and horizontal lines intersect.

I know the vertical plane: "Love God with all your heart and soul and strength," and I am learning to embrace the horizontal plane, typified by the second commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In the dream I am able to grasp this mystery, and make it my own. I am not to *imitate* Phyllis. Rather, I am to *incorporate* the truth her life exemplifies. What seemed to be a relationship between two opposites has become actually a sign of the wholeness we are meant to live—honoring both the inner and outer journey.

Phyllis has gone Home; but her legacy is continuing in those she loved, first of all family, and then friends, and also in her colleagues in work. I am blessed to be among those who have learned from God through her.