

Everyone Has a Story

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Everyone has a story. And when that story holds the Cosmic Story within it, it is one to be revered and cherished. I have such a story, no credit to me, just one of the many unearned gifts of life. It is why I have become a storyteller.

My story begins with an apple, a personal genesis, my awakening into reality. It came at the end of a busy day when I plucked a great juicy apple off a tree in our motherhouse orchard, sat on a log under a maple tree with leaves falling, and bit into the apple. It was SOOO good! Then came the astounding revelation - I AM EATING EARTH! Everything in this apple comes from Earth. I AM EARTH! I knew it in the very core of my being, no longer a mere fact in my head. Truly I had eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge and I was filled with gratitude.

By consciously biting into a delicious apple, I had taken the first step on a wondrous journey. This journey would take me into the scientific and divine revelation of who we humans are on Earth, Earthlings. I would learn that we were connected, related to everything else in creation, that the long unfolding evolutionary story was OUR STORY. It is our New Creation Story.

“The first twenty years of my life as a School Sister of Notre Dame I was a conservative, timid person who worked hard at teaching the curriculum and pleasing those in authority. About the time of Vatican Council II, (1962-1965) teaching was becoming more wholistic, and new understandings of Scripture, Church and religious life were bringing change. The influence of companion Sisters, the rewriting of our Constitution and the explosion of scientific knowledge were important factors that made this an exciting time to be alive. I experienced a personal transformation.”

A great grace at this time, 1980 was to enter the world of Patricia and Gerald Mische, co-founders of Global Education Associates. Their publications were the first to carry the essays of Thomas Berry that were opening new vistas of creation and our place in it.¹ Berry is a Passionist priest, cultural historian, prophet and geologist of the New Creation Story and he became my foremost inspiration and teacher. We met for the first time in 1983. I remember feeling like I hardly knew what he was talking about, but I wanted to learn. Five days at his Research Center in the Upper Bronx, New York City was a blest beginning to a process of absorbing the unfolding evolutionary story. It is an

¹ I began this writing on November 9, 2006, the ninety-second birthday of Thomas Berry. I pray that the spirit that guides and fills him will bless this attempt to share the great grace of my life.

ongoing process that is continually deepening, growing in its profound meaning and drawing me ever deeper into its sacred aspects. There would be much searching, reading, and struggling to understand as I gradually absorbed more and more of this revelation. It would make a profound difference in my life. Everything would change.

It is with immense gratitude that I began and lived out my final career in the School Sisters of Notre Dame as director of the Upper Midwest office of Global Education Associates. The focus of our work was to tell the New Creation Story. This brought together the findings of science and the sacredness and beauty of our oneness with creation.

Once you know the Story, you cannot keep it to yourself. It belongs to every human and every being. It is our common story of existence. The GEA Upper Midwest office where I was working had materials for sharing with study groups using the books and videos of Berry and his friend and soul-brother, cosmologist Brian Swimme. This became the focus of our work, always learning ourselves. We studied and taught the scientific discoveries that revealed more and more of the cosmos. It was a rewarding ministry. It changed people's lives.

We began to see the world with new eyes, cherish new bonds within the human family as brothers and sisters all. We saw all living beings as our "cousins." The teaching of Jesus to love one's enemies took on new light. Even the enemy was brother/sister whom one could love, no matter. Every aspect of life began to take on new meaning. The world was ALIVE with manifestations of the Source of all Being, the Ultimate Mystery. All was worthy of respect. It was our human privilege to be the species that could pause in awe before the daily miracles around us. It required, as Thomas Berry said, the poet and the singer to more adequately express the wonder and gratitude.

Learning the Story in our sessions, Peter Mayer became its bard, creating songs like "Everything is holy now!" in which he finds miracles everywhere. The nature poet Mary Oliver became a favorite; she writes in "*Mindful*": "It is what I was born for / to look, to listen, to lose myself / inside this soft world." She adds not the extravagant "but of the ordinary ... the prayers made of grass." Sara Thompson creates many chants and songs we use in prayer and workshops that draw us into celebrating nature's mysteries.

Two years before we closed the Upper Midwest office of GEA July 4, 2004, the Board and I created a tool that would keep the Story going. This is a discussion book of readings on the Universe Story and its impact, with questions, poetry, rituals, and additional resources. We call it *AN AMAZING JOURNEY: The Universe and Me*. It has been made available around the country and even abroad and is now in its second printing.²

Just when humanity faces overwhelming crises threatening all life on Earth, the Story came to us, the great gift of the 20th century. It is our hope that we can do the "Great

² Edited by Global Education Associates Upper Midwest, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2004. Available at jandjhynes@tcq.net

Work” of our time. This *Great Work*, according to Thomas Berry, is to tell the New Creation Story bringing us out of the culture of death that is destroying us, into the culture of Life that forms community with all creation. Three things are needed, Berry says: the Story, living in harmony within Earth systems, and cultivating eco-spirituality that reverences nature and the Divine Source of all. There is energy and power, joy and inspiration found in this new mysticism.

The openness and generosity of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, especially in the Mankato Province, who have supported me throughout the past 20+ years of this ministry has been a blessing for me. As I near the end of my sojourn on this side of the veil that separates the worlds, (I’m 83 as I write this) my dream is that the SSND charism will be seen through the lens of the New Creation Story, that every School Sister of Notre Dame will have the opportunity to absorb this Story and become Storytellers in their own right, offering access to this Mystery to everyone they touch. Already there is joy and excitement in the possibilities. It gives new meaning to our role as “School Sisters,” as educators of the Cosmic Story.
