

*Founders Day: The Weave of Community*

*As woven by*

*Members of the English Department*

“Life in the school sisters’ community is a giving and a receiving of love and respect, a living together in trust, openness, sincerity, and forgiveness.” As a reluctant student at Mount Mary College in the early 70s, I wasn’t about to have any of that. I balked at my teachers’ efforts to draw me in to academic experiences and class discussions – actually any involvement in the college community. Oddly enough, I saw myself as super creative, bright, outgoing, a cool and talented person. I didn’t see the immaturity that others mentioned.

But my teachers all modeled the patient qualities of trust, openness, sincerity and forgiveness. They were insistently stoic souls.

The giving and receiving of love and respect worked their magic and I credit these school sisters for developing a hungry mind and guiding me to become engaged in my life and the lives of others. Each teacher was responsible for helping me discover the transforming value of community through their example. When Sister Antony Mary read Old English poetry, that language filled my heart. When Sr. Joan insisted she could only give passing grades to students who actually attended classes; she taught me responsibility when she assigned me the formidable task of telling my parents I would indeed receive an F in the one course they expected an A. College Composition. I recall the patience and quiet intellect of Sr. Luetta as she would wait for students to speak, making sure we knew that personal response was thoughtful response to Sylvia Plath’s

poetry. Sr. Ellen Lorenz loved lively discussion in her classroom and it was difficult to remain silent when she would innocently ask who might, or might not, deserve education. Her hands, like butterflies, would flutter and float as she pointed to one then another student to speak up and discuss how entitlement and privilege fail in a less than perfect community.

Before long, I was editing the school newspaper, ARCHES. It was as a student editor that I discovered the value of communal prayer when I heard tapping in the sculpture room next door. I learned this was Sr. Regina at prayer. I often tell of the transformative experience of hearing the tap, tap of her hammer against chisel, creating wood sculptures for church altars. I would listen for those taps and pray along with her.

Over time, I discovered that just as her sculpture fed Sr. Regina's heart with prayer, my own prayers began to feed my writing. This lovely cycle became my way to pray.

It was such an easy decision to come back to this community of Mount Mary College in the late eighties as a writing faculty member to work with the very people who showed me how to step into their community. I have been so fortunate to share my literature and learning and love of community with others as they've also joined Mount Mary College. They are my colleagues. They are my role models. They are my friends and they make up a community that I truly admire. I love the weave of our lives.

*--Ann Angel*

I had just finished discussing James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist and a Young Man* with my class when Sister Joan asked me to consider this question of community. In

Joyce's piece, the protagonist (Stephen Daedalus) rejects ties to his family, his religion, and his nation in favor of a self-imposed exile. He joins no groups, allows himself no intimacies with others. This exile and independence, he believes, is vital to the life of an artist. Stephen declares, "I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning" (269). Joyce's protagonist voices one image of the artist or intellect—a person set apart and essentially alone. Community would be viewed as a threat to this model.

I have always found this part of *Portrait* (when Stephen insists on his exile) unconvincing (and frankly annoying), but it wasn't until recently that I realized Stephen's ideal was one of a Young Man, as the title informs us. Joyce's title is very specific, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The lone, isolated, hero is an immature vision of the artist or thinker. No one creates in isolation. No one can. We each contribute our own strand to a piece that was started long before our birth and that will continue after our death. It is impossible to be an intellect without joining your thread to the work of others.

Community is vital to the work we do as scholars. The community at Mount Mary invites all of us to add to a rich and vibrant tradition of artistic and scholarly work.

-- Paula Reiter

When asked, Jesus told us that the greatest commandment was to "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and then, and this is the often harder part, "to love your neighbor as yourself." This "looking

out for your neighbor as yourself” is what Mount Mary College aspires to and what we do well. I remember the first time I ever came to campus, for an adjunct position, and I remember standing in the arches looking at the board and to the left and to the right and then at the board again, wondering which building was Caroline and which was Notre Dame, when Isabel Piana walked up to me—I know it was Isabel because she was wearing her name badge—and asked if she could help me. This one first experience at Mount Mary is representative of what I see every day on this campus. Such acts illustrate both the “work” of community and enacting love. In the midst of all of the other labor and business of our day—and we have a lot of it—we don’t just pass by when we see someone in need, we pause and offer our help. Such acts engender community, weave community.

*-- Wendy Weaver*

I am teaching a course on African Literature this semester, so my reflection today is inspired by a Nigerian proverb that says, “...the wise build bridges, and the foolish build dams.”

Though it is tempting sometimes to wall ourselves off from others, to talk only with those who already agree with us, to confirm to ourselves that what we believe to be true is right...

...it is important that, instead, we reach out to others, make new connections, and challenge our individual truths – to build bridges, to weave community.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Founders of Mount Mary College have a tradition of building bridges. This year, at Mount Mary, students, faculty, staff, and members of the administration are also building bridges by participating in an initiative called the Building Bridges Program.

To build community, we must recognize and celebrate not only our commonality – the mission and vision shared by all those who are part of the Mount Mary community – but also our differences – the strengths that each of us brings to this community.

*-- Andrea Hilkovitz*

Barb Chappell, one of our adjunct faculty, explained to me the process of weaving and parts of a loom.

When you look at a loom, the threads that form the WARP are the vertical threads; these are the stronger threads and run through the whole fabric, from beginning to end.

The fabric is woven on the structure of the WARP threads.

The WEFT are the filling yarns – they run horizontally; they can be more delicate, more varied, and can be changed out.

The interlacing of WARP and WEFT create the beautiful patterns in a piece of weaving.

When we look at something woven, we don't see individual threads.

Instead, in our eyes, the colors combine, so that the appearance of one color or thread influences how we see its neighbor.

When I considered the qualities of the WARP threads, that they are stronger and run through the whole length of the fabric, I naturally thought of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

The School Sisters founded Mount Mary and continue to provide breadth and vision to the Mission of Mount Mary, to support promising young women who may otherwise face barriers to education.

More than 10,000 women have already graduated from Mount Mary.

Together, the rest of us create the WEFT, the filling threads that provide color. Weavers can change out the threads in the WEFT as they see the pattern emerge. Similarly, students, professors, administrators and staff may change over the years, although the commitment of the School Sisters never wavers.

If we look at how the loom works, the WARP threads stay stationary and provide a framework for the fabric. Meanwhile, the threads of the WEFT are carried on a shuttle back and forth across the WARP.

After each pass of the shuttle, the weaver pulls the beater forward to lock the threads in place, and pushes it back again. The process is very rhythmic, like the school year, but what's important is that the weaver doesn't use both tools at once –

First the shuttle passes, then the beater is brought forward, so that in either part of the process, one part of the loom is at rest.

This is true at Mount Mary as well. Depending on our role, the rhythm of our busy time varies.

For students, the end of the semester is grueling;

for professors, grading after the last exam and project has been *turned in* is grueling.

Staff and administration may follow the typical rhythm of Monday through Friday,

while for residence life and athletics, the busy time is in the evening & on the weekend.

For those of us who come to campus in the morning, we benefit from the *earlier* risers on the buildings and grounds crew who snow plow so we can park to come in to our classrooms and offices.

Thus, in the rhythm of weaving our community,

all the different tool parts of the loom are vital in their function.

In fact, weaving is woven all the way back into the early history before the School Sisters' founding.

Mother Theresa of Jesus established an industrial school for girls to teach them textile skills to support themselves. Her mentor brought bales of cotton and wool so these students could spin fibers into woven cloth,

thus weaving a community in her school through the weavings of her students.

*Just as Weaving is a structured process, Mother Theresa structured these young women's lives,*

*with times for prayer, for work, for rest, and for play,  
similar to the earliest divisions called for by St. Benedict,  
and Benedict's spirit is one that was highly attractive to Mother Theresa.*

St. Benedict is noteworthy as an advocate for balance in weaving the hours of our days.

In *Benedict's Way*, Lonni Pratt writes that Benedict says,

“that the [tools] we touch (and the people we touch) are to be touched reverently.”

So, whether our loom is physical or metaphorical, the tools we use to craft the fabric of community –

and the people who make up our community – are to be treated with reverence.

Pratt writes, “Benedict knows that when we begin to accept and treat gently our *tools*, we will begin to accept and treat gently *ourselves* and *others*.”

Such gentleness and reverence are part of the fiber of our Mount Mary College community.

*-- Nan Metzger*