

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN PAMELLA GIBBS AND JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET

It took five days for me to decant the material collected during our first meeting about this essay, Pam and I. We have known each other, worked together, been creative and political - activists - together for the last twenty years, and I am not at ease encapsulating her reality.

EARLY MEMORIES

In 2007, eight of us from the original Charleston Rhizome of Alternate Roots went to the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. They were in the middle of some social strife there. Armed forces everywhere, including in the registration office, where we ended up the first day. When our turn came to register, we introduced ourselves as Presenters [a public indigo workshop and the video project "You Comin'"]. The unimpressed cashier's first question was: "Where are you from?" Because, if you are from 'the SOUTH' - the Southern Hemisphere - the price is different than if you are coming from a developed country or are from Nairobi city. Immediately, Pam did not see it this way! Under the worried eyes of our sentinelles, she started with a raucous voice, insisting that our group pay the 'South' price because, of course, we were from 'the South'! Sweet Pam was rather flustered and adamant. But she got her way and saved us a pretty penny... Travelling with Pam is a very unique experience.

SOCIALIZING with Pam is very unique as well. For example, she has hardly ever come to a conNECKtedTOO community meeting without a whole load of large totes, filled with ... let's see, all the ingredients necessary to produce a pasta/tomato/oil-and-vinegar-dressing/mayo/peppers/hot sauce ... salad for ten - in no time. Add to this the occasional grated cheese, and her popular home-made brownies from Publix, the best of their kind. In her bags, every ingredient and item comes in separate containers (or is zip-locked). So much so that, at Devereaux, we now count on Pam forgetting one or two of them to refurbish our own inventory! Depending on the season, she would also leave behind an umbrella or an impressive water bottle, never the same one twice. Why? Pam is a very giving person!

When she comes specifically for a work session, then, she carries along a different set of totes. Filled with folders,

I am not at ease either. This project is a dialogue exercise. For me it is difficult because I usually do not respond to things about myself. If I have anything to add, it will be on the subject of commitment.

My memory about this Nairobi incident is more like: I did not know there were soldiers with guns behind us. I felt they needed to know that not all Americans were rich people, not only geography counts. There are low-income people in America.

construction paper, pencils, scissors, books and the legendary loose-page binding machine, without which neither **conNECKtedTOO** nor **TINYisPOWERFUL**, would have been able to put together those unique BOOKLETS, designed as ART TOOLS, so necessary to establish durable contacts with the TINY Businesses in the **conNECKtedTOO** network. Pam means business.

The bric-à-brac she carries around with so much determination is for sure one of the major and least recognized factors of the collective's durability. Soldiering along with all the necessities for fruitful community time, she embodies commitment.

And COMMITMENT she expects from others as well. Because, in Pam's mind, commitment goes hand-in-hand with BELONGING. Both are crucial in establishing durable common grounds, large or small. When Pam quotes the phrase "*Longing to Belong*", she expresses a heartfelt and mindful knowledge of the many binding agents necessary to satisfy her sense of sharing with others for the good of all. I am sure she spends a lot of time and energy articulating in her mind and putting into words, the components of our common social instincts (?) or needs.

When you have a conversation with Pam about this subject, listen, give her time, follow her body language. You'll quickly sense her passion. If she hesitates, goes back and forth, switches topics, only to return soon, (she calls this "Jumping Around"), it is because, trying to layer a constant flux of sentiments, feelings, hard facts, principles, stories and visions ... is quite a task. Many try and fail. Pam, ultimately succeeds. Having no patience for talk without content and/or action (commitment), certainly not coming from herself, she has been one of the initiators of some of the most significant projects by **TINYisPOWERFUL**.

Let's go over the **ANTI-RACIST BOOK STUDY**.

Although she retired from her work at James Simmons, she has assembled a group of former colleagues and some members of our Collective, to put together a list of important, must-read books around major education issues, relevant locally and beyond. Gwylène participates and when she showed me the first title on her list: "*Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*", I knew this was too technical for me! But I also understood that there had to be a plan at work here, namely establishing the science first, before reaching to the heart with "*The Color of Law*", "*Stamped from the Beginning*", "*Denmark Vesey's Garden*". All books concerned with the major obstacles to equity and truth, particularly in

As members of the group Jean-Marie, Gwylène and I in these iterations (conNECKtedTOO and now TINYisPOWERFUL) have been the longest participants in many collaborations of the Charleston Rhizome Collective. Alternate ROOTS has been often a guide for us.

My belief in the values espoused by conNECKtedTOO is strong. I am committed to seeing TINYisPOWERFUL reach the next level of sustainability. To see TINYisPOWERFUL succeed is deeply rooted in my sense of fairness in the world.

I think we need groups like TINYisPOWERFUL, groups who continue the effort of making Social Justice real and not just words.

See my text "...AND HERE WE ARE" in TINYisPOWERFUL #12 newsletter
<https://mailchi.mp/831b5357e8bd/connektedtoo-tinyispowerful-newsletter-12>

JAMES SIMONS school in Charleston, a public Montessori Elementary and Middle school has been a partner in this Anti-Racist Book Study. Hopefully it will be continued soon when work to adapt to online and in-person classes will have been settled.

education. From Science to History, from macro to micro - Gwylène is fascinated, she constantly reads excerpts to me and we enter into great conversations. Pam's auspices. The process is working.

THE MONSTER PROJECT?

... A monster project which starts with a fairy's question: *If racism was a monster, how would it look?* When I heard it for the first time, I was visiting Kit Loney for an essay on her work, similar to the present one on Pam. She showed me a discombobulated marionette of milk jars and twist caps. She remarked it was only a first brew (!) and I understood that, whatever the final version of said monster, the endgame was to sensitize children to racism. The presence of Jason Gourdine, our in-team video artist, also told me that, together, they were surely producing a set of educational videos to be proposed to schools. Very much the way the same team (Pam, Kit, Jason and Victoria) are producing a series of short films on art techniques for young children, confined at home during covid.

Presently we are in collaboration with East Cooper Montessori School and hope to initiate there a conversation on race and anti-racist education.

Another filmmaker may be also involved.

"IT IS URGENT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION"

Why has Pam stuck for so long, through thick and thin, with a couple of older artists and their ventures, although she claims not to be an artist herself?

Pam, it does not take painting, sculpting or dancing to be an artist! "*Jumping around*" qualifies as an artistic endeavor, sorry! In fact, any activity qualifies, which reaches beyond the ordinary, advocates for liberation, envisions transformation through creative education. Your exasperation before news of politicians still weighed down with pockets-full of prejudice and privilege; corruption; citizens blinded by propaganda and fake news; newscasts replete with clichés and lies? You have successfully transformed it into a green, renewable fuel, which makes you a serious ally, a severe enemy, a powerful agent against all the cultural norms which exhibit sediments of supremacy.

Yes educated kids, new policies, school by school, rather than thinking of saving everyone all at once.

On the morning of this July Fourth, I was listening to James Reynolds, a young thinker, activist and writer of children literature. Quoting Ibram X. Kendy, authors of one book on the Anti-Racist list above, (*'Stamped from the Beginning'*), he was explaining - this is my interpretation - that racism could be ended with a simple declaration: racism does not exist. Wasn't America also started with a declaration: the Declaration of Independence? Preamble: ... all men are created equal ... except that neither women nor people of color were considered to be "man"! Racism, a lie? Extrapolating in my still-very-French mind, I ask: today, many

believe that the 2020 presidential election was stolen ...
Could a Declaration affirm this? In which case, a new era of
American history would be founded on ... a lie?
On this 4th of July then, as I was ratiocinating (!), you were in
my mind, Pam. This mental firework around racism and the
birth of America was just for you!
Because you are moved by such existential questions.
That's why you reach to the heart of **TINYisPOWERFUL**.

POST SCRIPTUM:

This essay definitely "jumps around". Is it why, in its disorder,
it has overlooked a major topic, so fundamental in Pam's
work: FAMILY?

It is very clear that her family network is also her safety net.
Thanks to it - as she is assured that her two sisters, (her
closest friends), and herself share, quote: "*an unconditional
love*" and "*the same core values of helpfulness, integrity,
kindness and respect*" - she feels strong enough to venture in
the world to change it. Quote: "*It allows me to fight for justice
in an unjust place. It has allowed me over the years to choose
friends who believe as I do that change is not only possible
but inevitable. It makes me feel that I belong in all spaces and
I have important things to say. I love the feeling of freedom
and community I get from my sisters and my extended family
of friends.*"

And so, Pam strides on. She evidences the human warmth
within the light cast by FAMILY (and friends) over the
common space where they interact. And all of us too. She
makes BELONGING her agent for change.

*TINYisPOWERFUL cannot let go, or
else what do we have to speak to?
Temporary breaks only can be
necessary. And always new starts,
multiple starts, are necessary to
expand at our scale the Movement
for Social Justice.*