

Courtney Wise

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Structured Reflection: What has grown in your garden this quarter?

Friendships

I was interested in taking the class *A Seat in the Garden* because I craved to know more about how to truly get to the root of things and shower Mother Earth with love. What an opportunity to be surrounded by people who wish to grow closer to both the earth and their peers! Walking into the classroom on the first day, I wasn't familiar with anyone in the classroom, but as tenth week approaches, I feel like so many friendships have blossomed from my experiences!

I garden with Kate, Kelsey, Indigo, Morgan and Trung. All of them are absolutely splendid in their own way. We either drive in Kate's car, become a biker gang when we all ride together down West Michigan, and a couple times Kate, Kelsey and I have run there. No matter what way we have gotten there, one thing is certain – all of us are always so cheerful to be taking part in something so wonderful.

Each of us adds his or her own flare – Kelsey is so perky and ready to tackle any challenge that Dale or Tomme give us. Trung is always down to get dirty and wants to finish his work for the day before leaving. Kate gets so excited to see Olive and you can see her glow when she sees our garden flourishing. Indigo is such a positive person and constantly thinking of new ways that she can help. Morgan does his best to put a splash of humor in all situations (and is very much appreciated for doing so)!

I would very much consider Dale and Tomme to be our personal friends. I can't think of a time that they haven't tended to the garden with us. They love to watch us make

connections with the texts that we're reading with the garden that we're growing, and are so engaged in the process of us becoming one with the earth.

There are also many community members that we have had the opportunity to get close to. There is Katie from the Land Bank of Kalamazoo who is trying to get Trybal Revival everything they could possibly want, whether it's land, seeds or a greenhouse. There are the people who rent tools from the community shed that we've had several conversations with. Then there are the woofers travelers – Dale and Tomme offered up their home to two Danish young men (Melva and Mickel) who were interested in urban gardening and needed a place to stay. And then there are the random people who drive by the open road next to the gardens, who honk and wave in support of what Trybal Revival does.

Plants

For the first couple weeks, we spent most of our time weeding in the community garden, putting down mulch and getting the plant starts ready and growing so that they can be put into the ground. I hadn't felt super connected to the community garden because there are individual plots that people tend to and we didn't have one to call our own. Around late April we were granted "a little piece of earth" that we could love and nurture of our own – we were all ecstatic to call a plot of land our own and to develop it into whatever way we wanted!

Our garden was placed in the permaculture garden. It was ours from the very start; we dug a big oval out of the grass so we could begin cultivating the dirt. We put a mulch path right down the middle so we would have somewhere to walk and be in the middle of

the garden. We planted everything slightly diagonally so it would look aesthetically pleasing. We decided to plant sunflowers, tomatoes, peppers, spinach, basil, kale, Swiss chard, thyme, dill peas, and I'm sure I'm forgetting more. Because we planted the peas at the center of the garden, we decided to name it the "Peas (Peace) Garden" because it looks like a peace sign (and because Kelsey absolutely adores peas). Already, the plants have started to grow; Kelsey thinks it's partially because we have a grandfather snake protecting our garden from harm. The progress of what is growing in our garden is astounding, and Kate will be in Kalamazoo over the summer to see our plants flourish!

Animals

Whilst gardening, we have come across many animals. The first and most important animal interaction we've had is with Olive, Dale and Tomme's wonderful yellow lab. She is constantly smiling and ready to dig in to any project. Now, let's be clear – I am not a dog person (I love cats way too much to usually even appreciate dogs), but I love Olive. She's just a giant fluffy ball of sunshine, and even when I'm exhausted because of a long day of weeding, seeing her wag her tail happy to see everyone gives me the strength to fight through my tiredness.

Then there are the bees. Ah, the wonderful bees – how brilliantly feminist of creatures they are. When Dale finally got them in early May, we were overwhelmed with how busy they were right off the bat! The queens were laying eggs like crazy, and to see them buzzing around a three mile radius was quite impressive. Kelsey and Morgan have had the opportunity to inspect the hives, and I suspect that Kate and I will be able to before our time is up is up as well.

Then there are the worms that break down the compost and make the soil fertile so all that we plant in the dirt can be rich. The little spiders, centipedes, roly polys and lady bugs all help with the process as well!

And recently, even kittens! The other day there were three little black kittens, and one precious orange one, no more than three weeks old, hidden behind a rock in the forest behind the community garden. All of them seemed to be meowing in unison and saying, “Love us! Love us!”

Spirit

When we met Dale and Tomme, we were all quite overwhelmed with how calm, serene and totally one they were with themselves. We could see the glow of happiness from their soul shine brightly through their eyes and their smile. They saw the process of nurturing the Earth and the process of nurturing themselves as the same thing. Within the first day of having a conversation with both of them, the K gardeners had all concluded that they were purely and simply beautiful people.

We wanted to be like them – to love ourselves and see our nourishment and growth in the earth whenever we came by to garden three hours a week. We craved to look up at the sunshine and the stars and to be in complete awe and blessed to be in such a wonderful world every day like they do. We’ve had conversations about the circle singing Tomme organizes in the silo and what it means to him that people gather about drumming and singing together. He talks about how good it is for him to sing and how giving others the opportunity to sing makes his soul feel alive and well too.

Watching Dale and Tomme has truly been inspirational and has allowed me to grow closer to my spiritual roots as well. I'm not a religious person by any means, and before coming to garden with them I was so against even the idea of religion. But I think there is something to being close to the earth and honoring Mother Nature in the way that the Native Americans do as well. I believe that thanks should be given for all the opportunities and the magic that occurs here on this earth.

Person

I have grown so much as a person in these past weeks. My mental health was in severe decline winter quarter, having learned of an abundance of quite unfortunate news. I was striving to find something that made me okay with what was out of my control. I couldn't control the fact that my parents were out of love and about to divorce, but I could control the relationships I was building with my classmates in and out of the garden. I couldn't control my sister living in Germany for good, but I could control the water and nourishment that our plants in the garden were getting. I couldn't control my grandma's Alzheimer's getting worse and worse, but I could control how many weeds I would pull out of the community garden. I couldn't control my sporadic lifestyle and unhealthy tendencies, but I could attempt to understand them and be one with myself by using the earth as a place of meditation and reflection. I can honestly say that I have grown into a person who is more accepting, loving and optimistic because of my time spent in the garden. My experiences have been truly rewarding and I will undoubtedly be going back to Trybal Revival in my remaining years at K. I know that I cherish all of the time I spend there now, and that I will continue to for ages to come!

