

Indigo McCollum

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Structured Reflection: Growth

Working in a Garden is a new experience for me and so far it has been a very valuable one. It has not only taught me about the physical act of gardening but also about the significance a garden may play in a struggling neighborhood. I have been working in the Trybal Revival Community Gardens. Dale and Tomme run this garden and they decided that the best way to create a sense of community was through a community garden. This experience has showed me the invaluable roles a garden may play in a neighborhood.

Through talking with Dale and Tomme as well as the representative that works for the Kalamazoo Land Bank, I have learned about the problems that Kalamazoo residents living in the poorer neighborhoods are facing. Hundreds of houses and lots are being foreclosed in the Kalamazoo area. Many houses go into the Land Bank, which aims to bring the properties back on the tax role while also bettering the communities. On Dale's and Tomme's street alone several houses that have been foreclosed and turned over to the Land Bank. The Land Bank saw what had been done with the Trybal Revival garden and they decided to give Dale and Tomme some foreclosed lots for a small price (around 20\$). They plan on making these lots into a community garden in which the members of the community can find a place of beauty in hard times. It will also work as a place in which the residents can create a sense of community through a common objective: to garden. The garden is a drastically better use of the land then abandoned houses that are falling into disrepair.

The garden itself is made up of two separate lots. The first lot is the community garden that Dale and Tomme have been working on for over two years. It is a small fenced off area that contains around ten raised beds for community gardens. There is also a gazebo area that was created as a place that community members could meet and spend time together. When we arrived at the garden in the beginning of the quarter, the garden seemed very bare. All the beds were empty and the only green was from the grass surrounding the beds. For the first couple of days we worked on preparing this area for the community gardeners that would be coming in to plant their own fruits and vegetables. We weeded, raised beds, and dug up the soil in front of the garden in preparation for some perennials. These activities were monotonous and laborious but I hardly felt the fatigue. The act of gardening with Dale, Tomme, and my fellow Kalamazoo student gardeners brought on feeling that I had only felt before in team sports and Land Sea. Through gardening I really felt a strong sense of community. We were working together toward the same simple goals, whether it was the small goal of weeding out all the grass or the bigger goal of readying the garden for others. Last week I went back to the garden and it looked so different. Since our first time in the lot, people from the neighborhood had begun to plant

in the beds. Short green stalks were poking their heads out of the fertile brown soil. Gazing at the small buds I felt a sense of achievement and amazement at the magic of nature. Working in the garden has been very beneficial for me. As a freshman it is very easy to never leave the Kalamazoo College campus. Getting off campus to go to the gardens has been a great way for me to relieve stress as well as become integrated into a different community.

The second lot is a new project for Dale and Tomme. Recently they had obtained two lots from the land bank that were located next to their house. The dream for this area is to create another picturesque community garden with beds for planting as well as some experiments in horticulture. Last week I witnessed the opening of the Community Garden Resource Shed on this land. Over 50 members from the community came to the opening and the mayor cut the ribbon. The community garden shed lends out gardening equipment to members of the community that would like to garden but do not have the resources needed. This is another example of the great work that Dale, Tomme, and the Land Bank are doing for the community. This opportunity has shown me how the goodness and dreams of two people can better a community and the power of gardening for the individual and the community.

I have also been noticing connections between Gardening in the Trybal Revival Garden and the books we have been reading in class. The most central connection I have noticed by working in a garden is the magic of nature. In all of the works we have read in class there is a certain unknown power of nature. It works as a way to heal (*The Secret Garden*, *Gardens in the Dunes*), bring together people of different cultures (*Gardens in the Dunes*, *Seat in the Garden*), and bring beauty into life. Watching the small green stalks growing in out of the earth really made me start to think about the magic of nature. The fact that beautiful green life can sprout out of small round seeds never ceases to amaze me. I felt like Mary as she watched the plants in the secret garden grow or Indigo as she travelled around the world and discovered new amazing gardens. I have also noticed how the Trybal Revival gardens brought people in the community together. In *Seat in the Garden*, the garden indirectly works as a way to bring the Native American people and the American settlers closer together. I have also begun to see the garden as not only an aesthetically pleasing area but also an area that is able to provide sustainable and healthy foods. The gardens I have grown up in were like the California living gardens from the essay *The Social Meaning of Residential Gardens*. I considered them as more of a playground than a garden. Now I am able to understand the full importance of gardens to a character like Sister Salt from *Gardens in the Dunes*, as way of producing food and therefore surviving in a harsh world. The Trybal Revival Community Garden primarily grows vegetables and herbs that are all taken and eaten by the members of the community.