

Volume 45, Issue 1, Spring 2022

GRADUATE HUMANITIES

A multidisciplinary program bringing together students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds to collaboratively explore the interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

New Graduate Humanities Book!

When a story told by a child inspires an adult

Thirty-four years ago, a thirteen-year old girl, her literacy compromised by her traumatic childhood, dictated a story to her foster mother about being sexually abused by her step-father. She titled her story, "You Don't Have to Live that Way." Her closing lines explained, "I told my story so people would know they are not alone."

A man read that girl's story and, inspired by her bravery, founded a non-profit to help children (and their families) not feel alone and isolated. Which brings us to the newly published book we're highlighting in this issue of our newsletter. It offers a peek into how that man's non-profit, Step By Step, Inc., manages to accompany people, one step at a time. It has not done it alone. Currently, there are 115 people on payroll, 24 funders (growing a budget of \$1.2 million), and 40 active partners (including MU's Graduate Humanities Program).

The other three stories in this issue bear further witness to what folks can do when they know they are not alone. Either from their family's commitment to music, the poetry of others, or a grandmother who lived through hard times and made it look easy.

—Trish



Celebrate with us!

OCTOPUS Elephant Beehive

An Appreciative Inquiry into
a Thriving Step By Step, Inc.

Marshall University
Graduate Humanities Program
2018 Seminar on Nonprofits
Public Humanities Project

LOOK inside



Marshall University
Graduate College South Charleston
Graduate Humanities Program
Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, Director
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OCTOPUS **Elephant** Beehive

An Appreciative Inquiry into
a Thriving Step By Step, Inc.



Michael Tierney, Executive Director, Step By Step, Inc.

Octopus, Elephant, Beehive, edited by Trish Hatfield, and co-authored with Graduate Humanities Program students Royce Diehl, Bethany Buckner, and Tyler Lucas, is our latest addition to the Occasional Publications of the Graduate Humanities Program. The following excerpts, edited for brevity and clarity, appear from the original with permission.

Octopus, Elephant, Beehive as a Memoir, a Written Affirmation, an In-House Handbook

This book is an outcome of what Dr. Lassiter describes as “a kind of partnered teaching and learning—a ‘collaborative pedagogy’—that is two-way and reciprocal. It’s only possible when community and university come together to understand and address a commonly identified issue or problem.”

The “community” was Step By Step, Inc., a non-profit that’s been active in Southern West Virginia since 1988. Their mission is “to help people working together to achieve their dreams through dialogue, education and the arts, wellness, local leadership and resources, and service.”

The “university” was the MU Graduate Humanities Program. We have a long history of engaging in projects and partnerships that augment the Program’s mission and advance its tradition of outreach and civic engagement. And we have worked with Step By Step on projects since 2011.

The “issue” was how to document strengths within the organization to help create a strategic plan for Step By Step.

And for the graduate students involved, the goal was to fortify their confidence as scholars and community members.

This coming together of community and university occurred via a 2018 seminar (see “Work in Non-profits: Appreciating the Charitable Sector”), in which instructor Trish Hatfield, graduate students Royce Diehl, Bethany Buckner, Tyler Lucas, and Step By Step’s Executive Director, Michael Tierney, co-designed and implemented a research project. It involved interviewing Step By Step staff members about an exceptional experience in their work with children and families. The graduate students then transcribed the interviews in close collaboration with their interviewees and planned to publish them in a three-ring binder.

But a strange thing happened on the way to that three-ring binder. After the semester ended and I (Trish) began editing the interviews for publication, I realized these interviews were not only strategic, but often transcendent. Simply filing these valuable stories in a binder felt inadequate.

Could we print them in book form, still only available in-house for Step By Step? To celebrate their generous, persistent, and courageous humanity? Dr. Lassiter agreed with enthusiasm and Michael Tierney liked the idea, too. Three years later, (ta-da, drum roll please) we can share these excerpts from our interviews with Michael Tierney (see pages 3-5) and Kandi Workman, Manager in Training (see page 12).

Explanation of the Title

In his interview, Michael Tierney described Step By Step as an octopus in front of three or four kitchen sinks, moving things back and forth. “But the octopus has got to discipline her or himself and focus on three things and at least get two or three arms working in the one area at the same time. It takes too long to explain if you’ve got eight sinks.” (Laughter) “It’s an octopus for its diverse activities and system-wide capacity to adapt through constant learning.” Michael mentioned that someone thought of Step By Step “as an elephant, for its breadth of grassroots collaborations with over seventy-five partners.” And Project Manager, Michael Farmer, had in mind “the image of a bee hive: everyone has a role and everyone’s working within that role to see the betterment of the hive and of the organization to grow.”

Excerpts from Interviews

< **Interviewee:** Michael Tierney, Executive Director and Founder, Step By Step, Inc.

Interviewer: Trish Hatfield, Step By Step Board Member (Chair); Instructor, Marshall University Graduate Humanities Program, accompanied by graduate students Bethany Buckner, Tyler Lucas, and Royce Diehl

Recorded in Person, Tuesday, December 11, 2018, 5:30-7:30pm, Step By Step Central Office, Charleston, West Virginia

Graduate students Bethany, Ty, Royce, and I (Trish) met Michael at Step By Step's central office on Dickenson Street. The students and I had spent the previous 16 weeks studying non-profits from a humanities perspective and designing an Appreciative Inquiry project with Michael's input. We'd met earlier in the semester with Michael to generate questions for the interview guide and identify staff members to interview.

Now, at the end of the semester, after each of us had interviewed two or three other staff and board members, it was fitting to meet again with Michael.

True to board-meeting traditions, our two meetings with Michael began with a meal (Chinese take-out at the September meeting and Potluck in December).

Exceptional Experience

TH: Michael, can you tell us about a time when you had an exceptional experience in a Step By Step activity directed toward helping children thrive?

MT: When I came back to West Virginia, I was going to be a reporter. I'd worked with street kids for a while in Columbia and I'd done some different things. So, I decided I was going to do a piece on foster

care and the child welfare system. I started interviewing people tied in with a particular child welfare agency and I just kept on seeing possibilities—that if these kids were to tell their own story, it would be a whole lot more interesting than me writing an article.

I'd done writing projects with youth in a couple of other settings and so I suggested this idea to the non-profit. They helped recruit some kids and maybe eight kids showed up the first time. One girl, thirteen-year-old Maria A., brought in a story that she had dictated to her foster mother. Her own literacy was pretty compromised both from her traumatic childhood and then she'd bounced around a lot within the system.

TH: She sounds really courageous.

MT: Her story was called, "You don't have to live that way." It was her story of having been sexually abused by her step-father probably from five or six until she got out of the situation. She disclosed, how the school said they'd call the West Virginia DHHR, but they sent her home and the step-father heard that she said something and beat her up when she got home. And then one of the last lines in her story was "I told my story so people would know they're not alone."

Yeah, her bravery is really what inspired this organization. I think that no one should feel they're alone and nobody should feel they're isolated. With the right kind of support people can be incredibly brave, both in their own lives and the way they support other people.

Personal Discovery

And then a thread that I saw afterwards, although it was another impact of Maria's story, is that I was sexually abused as a kid when I was about eight and nine by a neighbor and I didn't recognize it actually until





we were touring a play on sexual abuse [over twenty years later]. And I off-handedly commented to a friend who was visiting that I wondered if some of those early experiences I'd had as an "adolescent," which was the way I phrased it, had had an impact on my ... my relationships were pretty fraught in the teens and twenties.

And I got this chill. At thirty-three, I had this revelation that eight-year olds are not adolescents. And I had put myself in a box, which is not an uncommon thing with survivors. Period. It's particularly not an uncommon thing with boys because the loss of power. ... For anybody, it's a loss of power. But in order to not feel like I was powerless, I had to reframe the experience as being not willing, but still a peer participant with that. ...

TH: You made yourself older?

MT: Yeah, in my head I made myself older. And redefined myself as an eight-year-old adolescent.

I now look back on it and I've had a career of creating safety for people. I did not realize it when I started Step By Step. I didn't realize it that day. *But now I realize that I wanted kids to tell their own story because I had no ability to tell my story when I was a kid.*

TH: When you had that discovery, did it change anything?

MT: There's a bunch of things that came together ... there's phrases that I look back over my life's work and Maria's comment, "*You don't have to live that way*" ... stories of people that are alone. About the time that I was having that revelation of how I fit in with this, and that I was part of this community, too, one of my neighbors on Big Ugly made the comment, "*The problem around here is that they don't teach you how to dream.*"

So, these kinds of things coming together made me think a lot about: How do you change the community? How do you make the community

strong enough so this kind of thing doesn't happen to kids, so they can take for granted that there will be caring adults that will support them? And, everybody deserves that. I admire the kids that I've known over the years and the adversity they've come through and, in retrospect, I admire my own survival and am proud of that.

But it shouldn't be the job of kids to do that. And if it's not going to be the job of kids, then the adults in the community have to step up. But a lot of the adults have had a very traumatic past themselves and they need some support and healing in order to be able to step up.

TH: How does your work cultivate future leaders?

MT: Well, our kind of foundational values are a radical belief and respect that everyone has abilities and something to contribute. And to do our best. And that you don't have to be alone.

I am so much more interested in going into a room and not knowing what the decision's are going to be coming out. ... I just love the synergy that happens and I really love it when I'm totally surprised. And that no one person can say, 'I made this happen alone!' ... But seeing what can emerge from a group of people and that lots and lots of people have a sense of ownership and that lots of people can say, "I was part of making that happen."

TH: You know, Michael, we were thinking about it as being individual future leaders. (The students nodded their heads in agreement.)

MT: If you really felt that to be a leader you've got to be standing in front of everybody, either you become incredibly narcissistic and everything's about you or you become incredibly lonely and stressed out and are always



wondering when you are going to fail.

There's a song that I wrote about my model of children's advocacy, Janusz Korczak, who was a combination child psychiatrist, physician, and author. He wrote this kind of Eastern European equivalent of *The Little Prince*, a book called *King Matt The First*, a boy king who fires his regents and forms a children's legislature, a radio program to advise parents. ... Korczak formed democratically-run orphanages, children's homes. And they had their own courts, their own government, their own newspaper.

TH: This was before WWII, right?

This is all in the 1920s and 30s, and tragically his last children's home was in the Warsaw Ghetto. He had tons of chances to escape, even the day they were being marched to the trains to Treblinka, one of the guards was once a kid in one of the orphanages he formed, who'd come up through his home, who wasn't Jewish, said, "I can slip you out of here." And Janusz Korczak refused. He accompanied his orphans to Treblinka.

The chorus of the song I wrote about Janusz Korczak is:

*We stand before the children,
we cast shadows on their road.
If we fall too far behind them,
they're alone in this world.
The measure of this nation is,
the children of the land.
We must stand by the children,
walk beside them, take their hand.*

TH: Can you sing this for us?

MT: Sure. ...

Through the stories Michael was sharing in the interview, the graduate students, Ty, Bethany and Royce, could glimpse more of the range of his experience and depth of motivation.

But to hear him sing, in his deep, vibrant voice, the lyrics and melody of a song he wrote in tribute to his hero and role model, Janusz Korczak, took us all to a new level of appreciation for what Michael embodied and for what non-profits could be about.

As the instructor, I couldn't have asked for a more perfect closure to the seminar. We sat for a moment in silence, honoring the gift he had just given us.

And then Michael picked up where he had left off, describing the deep influence Korczak had on his career, his life. >



All images in this article were taken from Step By Step's website and Facebook pages.

See excerpts from Kandi Workman's interview on back cover.

Appalachian Culture, Traditions, and Heritage



I have a strong need to share
the joy of music



To complete her Appalachian Certificate in 2021, Megan (Darby) McKnight, Glenville State College Professor of Music and Bluegrass Music Program Director, wrote a children's book manuscript, "Growing up at 203."

Megan, or "Miss Megan," reveals in the foreword her motivations for tackling such a multilayered project: "I am an eighth-generation Appalachian on both my paternal and maternal sides. For generations, we have embraced strong religious beliefs. We've dedicated our lives to preserving America's purest form of music and family traditions.

"In addition, we appreciate patriotism, hard-work, and perhaps most important to me, expression through music. Regardless of physical location, through these principles, a sense of place can be created anywhere.

"There is a need for strong, true, and passionate illustrated children's books that represent Appalachia in a positive light.

Although my first illustrated children's book does not reflect my personal childhood, I hope my daughters grow up remembering this current chapter of our lives, making wonderful memories at 203.

"While writing this book, I specifically sought an illustrator who represents Appalachian youth. Lauren Thomas, a mentee of mine in traditional music, is only 14 years old. In addition to being a fiddle and mandolin player, she is an amazing young artist who is a proud West Virginia native."

Here are six of Lauren's illustrations (out of fourteen) from Megan's manuscript:

GROWING UP AT 203

Our Appalachia



By: Miss Megan, Ed.D.

Illustrated by: Lauren Thomas

At 203, we carry on family traditions,
such as cooking with Momma, just like
she did with her Momma and Grandma.



Our Mamaw says, "Choose to be happy!"

And we do!



Folks have been teaching us that the combination of Scots Irish, African, and European instruments influenced what we call "traditional" music today.

We are learning that music and art often tell our stories and help us express our feelings.



How many of these instruments do you recognize?



In our town we see and hear a lot of old-time, early country, and bluegrass music. Dancing to traditional music spreads joy.





Independent Research

~ Falling in Love with McNeill's Poetry ~

Dr. Calisa Pierce ('21) is a faculty member (English and Humanities) at BridgeValley Community & Technical College in South Charleston where she currently serves as an Associate Dean. Calisa recently completed an MA in Humanities with a focus on Literary & Cultural Studies. For this issue of our newsletter, she agreed to let us include these excerpts from her paper, "Louise McNeill and G. D. McNeill: Complementary Appalachian Voices."

(She also loves motorcycle touring with her husband, Jim. The mountains behind them are the Grand Tetons.)

< In her poetic memoir, *The Milkweed Ladies*, Louise McNeill writes, "Some of our tales were old and old, going back into time itself, American time." She is speaking of her family, including her father G. D. McNeill, a writer and teller of tales worth reading in his own right. Together, the two McNeills created an important body of work.

When I chose Louise McNeill's "Gauley Mountain: A History in Verse" from a list of report topics in a graduate class, I did not expect to fall in love with it.

Poet Irene McKinney describes McNeill's poetry memorably, "It is harsh and sweet, like the taste and burning sugars of raw honey, strong and dark like black molasses. It pulls hard at the tendons of the heart like the high wheedle of fiddle tunes, a music that carries lyric and history together."

When I read *The Last Forest: Tales of the Allegheny Woods*, by G. D. McNeill, I fell in love again.

The tales are part-memoir, part-legend, part-history, and yes, near-poetry in their vivid imagery. The story collection speaks to the Appalachian spirit in me and evokes a timeless setting of the Appalachian woods that now inhabits a space in my imagination both in the past and just across the next mountain range, lying hidden in the mist like Brigadoon.

The two writers both focus on their connection to the land and its hold on them. Louise McNeill writes in her memoir, "So it was with us, and is with us still, over two hundred years and nine generations of the farm keeping us, and we believing that we keep the farm. But that is not the way it is in the real truth of it, for the earth holds us and not the other way. The whole great rolling earth holds us, or a rocky old farm down on Swago Crick."

Speaking of her childhood, Louise evokes this sense of the earth as eternal: "Then I knew just the earth itself: the quiet measure of the seasons; the stars in the sky; the wheat field in August, golden: darkness and day; rain and sunlight; the primal certainty of spring."

Of course, both McNeills fit well within the characteristics of Appalachian literature, a literature that rarely garners the attention it deserves as part of the American canon.

They write of the connection of the land and its particular people, stories passed down within their family through its generations-long connection to a cherished place, and they write in a double-idiom of native speech rhythms and dialect, enriched by an educated mastery of syntax and vocabulary. Yet both authors also write within that Appalachian context about larger American issues such as environmentalism/climate change, the fears of the atomic age, and, implicit throughout Louise McNeill's memoir and body of poetic work, the role of women in American society.

"Hill Daughter" is perhaps one of the best-known McNeill poems; it encapsulates many Appalachian themes, including the female identity issue. Editor Maggie Anderson characterizes McNeill's voice in the poem as "a crazed goddess in a way—exalted but angry." Anderson notes that it speaks to "the requirements that patriarchy imposes on women, or of what it means to be a woman who must offer her son up to that system." In McNeill's poem, the speaker addresses the land and her ancestors with anger while still acknowledging her connection to both the land and her people:

*Land of my fathers and blood, oh my fathers, whatever
Is left of your grudge in the rock, of your hate in the
stone;*

*I have brought you at last what you sternly required
that I bring you. And have brought it alone.*

....

*Here is ease for the curse, here is cause for the breaking
of silence. You can answer me now.*

....

I have brought you a son.

The anger McNeill did not express overtly in her memoir finds expression here in this poem.

Definitions and characteristics of Appalachian writing are plentiful; however, author Silas House explains them most memorably:

*The mountains will live on my tongue all the days of my
life, alive and vocal in their beauty and ugliness, in all of
their dark, lush complexity, the same way those creeks
and rocks have taken up residence in my blood and
bones, the same way my people chatter on in every cell of
my body.*

*I—and my dialect—will not be silenced and will not
be put into a neat little box for anyone. I'll defend my
people to those who call them trash based on the
way they talk. And I'll defend my ability to see beyond
the mountains with those who demand that we must
cower in the shadows and defy the rest of the world
to retain our identity.*

House's words speak to the characteristics of the McNeills' writing and all good Appalachian writing—fixed in geographical place, tethered to generations of family and history, rich in that double idiom of native Appalachian dialect and "educated" syntax and diction. >

Besides being an administrator and instructor at BridgeValley, Calisa is a member of the Equity and Inclusion Committee and a co-leader of the school's book club.

Along with being a motorcycling enthusiast, she's been serving as trail crew for her husband, Jim, a.k.a., "Stormy Weather," during his attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail. She drove 13,000 miles last summer when connecting with Jim periodically on the trail and earned her own trail name of "Hot Wheels."

When she accomplished her big goal of climbing Mt. LeConte, the t-shirt she wore under layers of insulated clothing read: "Sloth hiking club—We will get there when we get there."

Calisa loves to write short narrative/descriptive pieces and take photographs (see below)—she is gradually warming to the idea of pulling together some of her work into a longer format.



< My husband and I started out on the Hell's Canyon Scenic Byway under very dark skies. The road was narrow, roughly paved, threading through a narrow canyon beside a stream. We passed a sign that warned that the road was not maintained from October through June 15—today was June 14. Tall pine trees pressed in on both sides.

Then, the rain started. We had no place to pull over and were both quickly soaked. Next, mothball-sized hail began pelting down. We finally found a dirt shoulder where we threw on our rain suits and covered the luggage. We set off again in a steady rain.

Soon, hail began again, accompanied by thunder. Finally, Jim spotted a side road—I was covering my face by this time after a direct hit on my bottom lip—and we pulled over again. I put on my boot covers, even though a puddle of water was sloshing in each boot already. At last, the hail ebbed to a stop. The drive and the weather were both challenging, but we saw so much beauty that day. > —Calisa Pierce



Appalachian Studies

Making the Life of my Grandmother Remain a Memory with Meaning

Diana Bailey ('21) is a Reading Interventionist. She works with students who have trouble with reading skills, such as letters/sounds, sight words, and comprehension skills. The Appalachian Studies certificate was important to her because "I am better equipped to incorporate what I have learned about culture and Appalachia with my students. In addition, as I continue to work on my genealogy and find other sources about my family, I will better understand them

and their Appalachian characteristics and know them better than just names and dates."

Note: This piece is a work in progress and has been edited for brevity. There are three "voices": Diana's reflective voice (italicized) and as the narrator (regular); Diana's dad, (James, Jim or J.R. Spencer); and her Grandmother (Frances, or F.L. Spencer). These last two voices are in regular font and followed by attributions.

< INTRODUCTION

Over time, people can become a list of names without a true life or meaning. ... We can search for things about them to make them real; to bring them back to life, so to speak.

With these documents and memories, I am trying to make the life of Frances Lee Askew Spencer, my grandmother, remain a memory in the front of the minds of those that knew her. For those family members who didn't know her, I want them to feel as if they did know her.

PROCESS

... Most families have an abundance of photos from family events. Photos can be digital if taken with a digital camera or a phone. Older pictures can be scanned into a computer and saved. Families share pictures through email, Facebook or other websites. ...

Interviews or other written documents from family members and/or friends can be used to describe a person's life. Other written documents would include journals and letters.

I will be using my own memories, my grandmother's journal, and a self-written document from my father. There was also a journal type writing

from my dad, her oldest son, James (Jim).

METHODS

... I searched the Internet, mostly on Ancestry.com, where I found confirmation of dates and family



Frances Lee (Askew) Spencer

members dating back to the 1700's through census records and ancestry hints. I also found a marriage announcement that initially started with an internet search and eventually led to finding the article in the newspaper. The newspaper is now out of print, but can be found in the

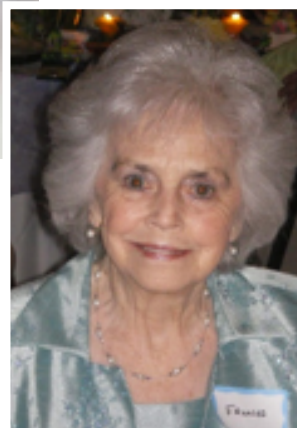
archives at the Culture Center in Charleston, West Virginia.

FINDINGS

Frances Lee Askew was born on February 7, 1922 in Birmingham, Alabama (Ancestry.com, 1930 United States Federal Census). She was the second of seven children, following her brother Andrew Leslie Askew, Jr., and the first of three daughters of Andrew Leslie Askew, Sr. and Nettie Muriel Helton Askew. Between February of 1922 and March of 1924, the family of four moved to Borger, Texas, in Hutchinson County.

Frances wrote in a journal later given to her granddaughter: "My life was never very exciting, it was average as any other. ... I was raised in the depression, and it made things a little hard at times. I never remember being

hungry, but had very little to wear. I went to school and tried to learn, and I believe I did very well with the three R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic.



"I quit school in the ninth grade. I didn't have the clothes and anyway Mama needed me to help with my little brothers and sister, Caroline, who was born March 5th, 1936, when I was fourteen. Then Betty came in 1938 (1939 according to Ancestry.com). I became the second mama.

"My father worked for a gas company called Phillips 66. Because of little work and a wife and seven children, there was little money" (F. L. Spencer 2005).

Frances' son, Jim noted: "Have you ever put cardboard in your shoes to plug the holes in the soles or wear dresses made out of feed sacks?

Have you ever had to raise your own food in order to eat? Have you ever ironed clothes all day for a quarter? Have you ever used an outhouse for a bathroom which is a hole dug in the ground with a shack on top of it for privacy? Have you ever taken a bath in a homemade cement bath tub?

". . . When the stock market crashed in 1929, my mother's family lost about everything except their morality and their love for each other. Growing up, I (Jim) witnessed their love first hand. When we visited Grandpa, Grandma and her brothers and sisters in the summer, the hugs and kisses were unstoppable. It was worse when we were preparing to leave. The Askew family showed their love outwardly. As a young boy, I would try to run away from all those hugs and kisses that I really appreciate now" (J. R. Spencer 2010).

In 1939, Frances met a young man, Harrison Junior Spencer, who was staying and working with her neighbors, Karl and Lucille McKinney (Ancestry.com, 1940 United States Federal Census). "We were living in a house owned by the carbon company daddy worked for. There were several built around us. That's when I met my darling husband.

"He came from West Virginia and boarded next door with a West Virginia family he knew. He actually rode freight trains from West Virginia to Texas. Of course I was very attracted to him. I found out when his birthday was and by then we had been talking, so I made him a birthday cake. You know, as it has been said the way to a man's heart is through his belly. (It worked!!) He got a motorcycle and of course I rode with him some, without mama and daddy's knowledge" (F. L. Spencer 2005).

Around this time, Frances worked with the Tennessee Valley Authority. (Wedding Announcement 1943).

After Pearl Harbor, war was declared. Frances worked for Walgreens, then found a job with the Tennessee Valley Authority who were hiring women to replace the men who were drafted. . . Harrison became a Marine on February 6, 1942. After graduating from heavy equipment school, they were married on April 13, 1943, in Kinston, North Carolina.



Frances wrote: "We applied for a license, and since he was a marine, we had to have physical exams. We couldn't find a preacher home and we were married by Justice of the Peace. Our witnesses were strangers off the street. I couldn't remember what they looked like or names. Of course their names are on our



Photo taken at Camp LeJune Base right after Harrison and Frances were married.

marriage license" (F. L. Spencer 2005).

Frances' son, Jim, wrote: "If there was a war hero, in my mind, it was my mother. Though I know there were thousands just like her" (J. R. Spencer 2010).

SIGNIFICANCE

Stereotypes about people associated with where they are from often defines a person. We often have an idea about a person by the state they are from, or maybe even the neighborhood they live in.

Sometimes people fall into a stereotype they did not realize they belonged to, yet do not exactly fit the characteristics of that stereotype.

Based on the places that she lived, one could think of Frances as a Southern (Alabama), gun-toting (Texas), hillbilly (West Virginia). The truth is, Frances was a Southerner, but not gun-toting nor a hillbilly.

The significance of her life is that even though she struggled at times, she was the matriarch and a beacon of light to her family.

Frances Lee Askew Spencer was an example to all that knew her on how to live through hard times and make it look easy. >



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Octopus, Elephant, Beehive (Continued from page 5)

< **Interviewee:** Kandi Workman,
Manager in Training, Step by Step, Inc.

Interviewer: Bethany Buckner, Student,
Graduate Humanities Program.

The interview occurred by phone
Wednesday, October 24, 2018,
3:15-4:05 p.m.

**BB: Kandi, can you tell a story about
a time when you had an exceptional
experience at a Step by Step
activity geared toward helping
children thrive?**

KW: I had planned an activity for
the ESL teachers [at WVSU] to bring
thirteen Chinese youth to the Big
Ugly Community Center for one
day during the summer. Some of
these students couldn't speak
English very well and some were
fluent.

I recruited eight youth from Big
Ugly, mostly middle-school age, to
be "teachers" for the ESL students.

There was one girl named
Olivia, thirteen at the time, who
was excited about doing the crafts.
But when she saw the Chinese
students, she got nervous and a
little judgmental, not meaning to,
but it's our nature when something
or someone is different. She pulled
me to the side and said, "Kandi, I
don't think I want to do this today."

I said, "Olivia, talk to me about
this and tell me why you don't
want to do this."

Her answer was "I can't
understand them, they can't talk to
me, I can't talk to them. They're just
different and I don't know if I want
to do this today."

I told Olivia, "Well listen, will you
try to do one set of activities? ... And
I'll check on you and see how you're
doing? If you're still uncomfortable,

then you can back out of it and I'll fill
in or find somebody else to take
your spot."

I was trying to make sure she
felt she had the option to do this. It
wasn't something she was being
forced to do.

By the end of the day Olivia
hugged me and said, "Thank you so
much for giving me that
opportunity. I was so scared, and I
didn't think I could do it, and that
was one of the best times of my life,
being able to work with them and
have that experience." And she
talked about the study of language
and learning languages and about
"different" people.

This was truly one of my favorite
experiences with working with
youth—being able to put Olivia in a
leadership role.

One of my greatest goals in the
future is to help expose our kids to
more diversity. I think that's so
crucial in order to change minds.
The more experiences you have
with people different than you, then
the more accepting you will be of
their humanity. I know that was just
one kid, but it was definitely
impactful that day on both of us. >

Summer & Fall 2022 SCHEDULES

See [Upcoming Seminars](#) on the
Graduate Humanities Program website

Recent GRADUATES

Shannon Cook '21

MA in Humanities (Arts & Cultural
Studies) & Certificate in Appalachian
Studies

Project Title: "Helvetia in the West
Virginia State Museum: Learning
through the lens of the West
Virginia State Museum Collections
Processes and Educational
Programming".

Kyle Warmack '21

MA in Humanities (Historical Studies)
& Certificate in Public History

Project Title: "More Than The Sum: The
Missing History of COGS
[West Virginia College of Graduate
Studies] and What You Can Do About It"



Portion of a large
wall mural by
children
attending after-
school programs at
Step by Step's Big
Ugly Community
Center near Harts,
West Virginia.