

Acceptance Speech: Mary J. Rouse Award, 2009
Marjorie Cohee Manifold, Indiana University

Early Influences

One of my earliest pleasant memories was of waking up on a summer morning to see red and white chickens pecking in the sun-splashed lawn beneath a canopy of maple leaves at my grandparents' home. I grew up in the country, on a farm, in hilly southern Indiana.

It was an idyllic life experience. Summer days were spent wandering freely through the woods and meadows, splashing in creeks. In the evenings my brother and I chased fireflies in the yard, while listening to stories of the 'old days' my grandparents told as they rested on the veranda. During fall and winter, I attended a little eight-room country school that housed grades 1 through 12, with no special art or music teacher.

Living far from museums or galleries, my exposure to visual images was limited to calendar art and wonderfully illustrated storybooks – from Kingsley's *Water Babies* to Stevenson's *Treasure Island* - borrowed from the library during our monthly trips to the small town county seat. Yet, I didn't feel any lack of beauty in my world. Beauty was all around - in bright quilts and comforters, delicate crocheted laces, woven rugs, cool earthenware crocks, and in glorious landscapes that changed with the seasons. Also, my grandparents appreciated and shared the narrative arts and shared their love of poetry and literature with me.



My Grandparents: Floy and Lincoln Allee

One of my chores was to take jugs of water to my grandfather in the mid-afternoon as he worked the fields. When I appeared with the refreshment, he would lift a jug to his lips and down three quarters of a gallon with (what seemed) a single draught, and splash the excess over his face and neck. Then, glistening with water and perspiration, he would take brief respite from his work to entertain me with a recitation from a Shakespearean play or an obscure passage from some ancient Vaudevillian drama, or a text from

Longfellow or Tennyson. I rarely understand a word of these soliloquies. Yet it was obvious from the rhythmic gesture of his voice and body that – for him – these held reverent significance.

I adored my 5th and 6th grade teacher, Mr. Benjamin Franklin Dyer. He was a storyteller who wove the histories of our families and community into lessons of math and social studies. But, I approached the beginning of the 7th grade with apprehension. Mr. Frank Morris, the 7th and 8th grade teacher had a reputation for being a stern and exacting pedagogue, who rarely wrapped lessons in unnecessary story. What I did *not* know was that Mr. Morris was an *artist*. I was astonished on entering his classroom that September, to see an extraordinary image of an autumn scene drawn across the blackboard in colored chalks. I scarcely heard any of his ‘start of semester’ directives, because my thoughts were fixed on how I might get him to teach *me* how to create images like that. Over the course of the next two years, I did finagle some little lessons in perspective and shading – and immediately put them to work trying to capture images of the world around me.



*Watercolor and ink paintings of Floy Allee and Lincoln Allee with Stevie Truax,
By Marjorie Cohee-Manifold*

During the summer after 8th grade, my grandparents retired from farming and moved to the county seat, where they believed my brother and I might get a broader education. An art class was offered in the high school and I signed up for it. There, I was exposed to images of art by ‘great artists’ of the Western World. Seeing these works both thrilled and left me with the sad impression that however much I loved art or became a proficient artist, I was never likely to become a ‘great artist’. After all, no significant artist had ever come from small town, rural Indiana. (*I had not heard of T. C. Steele or the Hoosier Salon artist!*) Great artists were born in exotic places like Rome, Paris, or New York. Still, I held out enough hope to enter the university four years later as a Fine Arts major. Alas, after two semesters of studying art history using Anthony Janson’s famous text *History of Art: The Western Tradition*, I was even more discouraged. Not only were these artists from distant, exotic cultural centers, but in two thousand years of Western Art

(according to Janson) less than a handful of women existed who could be considered 'great artists'. It was time to quit dreaming impossible dreams and settle down to real life.

So, I married and began a family, while teaching art to K-12 children – first in rural and then in urban communities.



Alan and Marjorie Manifold with Tony, Vince & Pina

Research and Teaching

I wanted to provide my students with opportunities in art making and expose them to art and artists in ways that had not been possible for me. Yet, I frequently found myself questioning the relevance of my art instruction to their everyday lives. For example, I recognized a nagging disconnect between art of the mainstream art world and that which they experienced and understood as art – or *beauty*. Curiosity about this disjuncture grew with each passing year, urging me to leave the k-12 classroom and return to the university to study and research the problem.

My dissertation was a descriptive study of the artists and craftspeople in a small rural Midwestern community, not unlike the one in which I had spent my childhood. I was astonished to discover the community teeming with art and crafts that – in my youth - I had not noticed as *Art*. This set me to wondering what other aesthetic sensibilities and art making experiences were being practiced and valued in the extracurricular, everyday lives of students?

My children – (and more recently my granddaughter) – began introducing me to communities of art engagement that were not bound by geography but roamed freely across social, national, and cultural borders in a cyber world. These youth joined in *storylining* groups – (creating original stories in which they interacted in the roles of their fictive personnas) – and fandom's where they shared interests in favorite stories from popular culture and copied, or adapted, images of these favorites in their own artworks.



Fanart by Erin "Erithe" McChesney, and Cosplay by Josephina "Pina" Manifold and Melissa Deavers at Terminus Harry Potter Conference, Chicago, August 2008

In my inquiries into these domains, I asked questions like: "How do young people shape learning for themselves and their peers in their own youth culture and/or interest group communities – and to what purpose?" "How do they master skills and knowledge necessary for giving form to their imagic ideas." "How can this knowledge inform us – as art educators – about strategies and goals for teaching 21st century youth in real and virtual (online) classrooms?"

I discovered that many young people simply enjoyed *playing* with aesthetic possibilities and testing their skills of art making through social interaction and the manipulation of popular story. Others became engaged in art making as a means of trying out, or constructing self-identities and developing social competencies in a world. While sharing interests with youth in distant or unfamiliar cultures, many were inspired to explore what was unique in their own real local environments, that they might bring something personal to collaborative discourses about common interests. I wondered, "how might we teach differently if we had a clearer understanding of the role art plays in youths' social lives?" I began to ask this question of my art education students. Also, I urged the pre-service art teachers who were my students to consider how art education and aesthetic experiences might feed the needs of creative, imagination students who – have not seen their needs being met in traditional art studios and who typically have not been seen by art teachers as having artistic interests or potentials.

I am particularly drawn to work with art education majors who come to my academic university feeling like strangers in a strange land. These may be non-traditional or first-generation undergraduate students who haven't 'learned to play the game', or they may be graduate students from international communities. I grew up in a small real community where teachers knew us and our families and cared as much about our emotional growth and well being as our intellectual growth. I bring this belief in the importance of nurturing the spirit as well as the mind into my classrooms.

Leadership

I had begun my undergraduate studies during a time when some young women were demanding and being allowed new freedoms and roles of leadership. In my naiveté, however, I was not sure what this meant for me. How did burning one's undergarments translate into real freedom? Who, how, and toward what end could I be a leader? As an undergraduate, I was fortunate to have met, if only briefly, Mary Rouse, whom this award honors, and I admired her as a strong academic leader. Also I was urged by fellow classmate, Enid Zimmerman, to become active in professional organizations, although I did not yet see the benefit of engagements in collaboration and service.

Years later, when I returned to pursue a doctorate degree, I found that Enid had ascended to the position of program coordinator. She along with Gil Clark and Guy Hubbard became my mentors. Enid, Gil and Guy believed in, encouraged, and supported the best in their students and urged us all to become empowered leaders who might make positive differences in the communities where we lived and taught and where often we might be one of just a few or perhaps the sole representative of 'culture' to members of the larger local community.

I continued to learn strategies of leadership from colleagues like David Burton, who offered wisdom and advice to me as a new faculty member at VCU. He encouraged me by setting up opportunities for me to participate in interactive university and community projects and serve leadership roles in the state art education association. Other mentor/leadership strategies were modeled by Sharon LaPierre, Mary Stokrocki, and Maryl Fletcher DeJong who invited me to join USSEA and welcomed me into the 'inner sanctum' of professional service, thus paving the way for my ascent to a leadership role in that organization. Leaders in my current state art organization, AEAI, including Leah Morgan, Connie McClure, Brad Venable and others, drew me into interactions with art teachers and educators throughout Indiana. As Professor Emerita at Indiana University, Enid Zimmerman continues to mentor me – as do many former brother and sister alumni of IU and wonderful colleagues from many universities nationally and around the world.

These strong mentor/leaders all share a common characteristic that is fundamental to good leadership. Each is guided by a strong moral compass – an instinct and commitment to acting ethically in their dealings with others. They were and are courageous in this regard.

I have been fortunate in knowing many people in my life who have modeled this simple but essential quality of leadership. Yet, it is a gift I learned first and most intimately from my grandparents and - my mother.

My mother was not a person whom others in our community might have described as a leader. She was fragile – physically and psychologically. For several years, during my infancy and childhood, she was hospitalized with a severe form of schizophrenia. She suffered recurring bouts of this bewildering, terrifying illness throughout her life. During my youth I frequently found myself resenting – and alternately repressing or expressing

anger - at what I saw in her as weakness. When not suffering catatonic symptoms, she was timid, self-sacrificing, and reluctant to impose her own needs upon others. Nevertheless, she was quick to offer a kind word or come to the aid of anyone in need.



Dorothy Elizabeth (Allee) Cohee

One afternoon, when as an undergraduate I was home relaxing during Spring Break, my mother entertained a group of ladies from her church group the *Ruth Circle*. The ladies, dressed in their spring fineries of lace and chiffon, were sipping tea and munching bits of angel food cake (my mother's specialty), when the conversation turned to gossip. The topic of young "Suzie", a local "fallen woman" arose. One or two ladies clucked at Suzie's scandalous behavior and snickered at her recent "come-uppance". Others giggled at having found a target of ridicule. My mother set her teacup down firmly and rose from her seat speaking as harshly as her naturally gentle demeanor permitted. "You will not ridicule Suzie, in this house! Had we been more attentive and caring, had we reached out to her, she might not be suffering for her mistake. Her blame is ours too." The room fell silent with the weight of shame that settled on all those who had been willing – seconds before – to cast stones.

Standing up for what is right and offering support for others who are in need is not easy. Sometimes it requires a kind of resistance to popular consensus that will not be perceived as lady-like, polite or 'professional' – (*I have become suspicious of the term 'professional' for I have too often seem it applied as means of manipulating protection for status quo power structures or masking a multitude of devious, unethical behaviors*). Certainly, standing up for what is right is not always politically safe. Yet, all too often, we may find ourselves having to make decisions between – in the words of J. K. Rowling's Professor Dumbledore – "what is right and what is easy".

I have recently passed through a very stressful period of my academic career. By unapologetically speaking out against attempts of local colleagues to impose power and control rather than encourage creative, intellectual freedom among students and faculty, I found myself a target of reproach and faced obstacles that at times seemed insurmountable. The courage and support of true colleagues (within and beyond my university), who exemplified the purest and best qualities of leadership, permitted a successful resolution to these struggles.

In the end, I have come to understand that great leaders are not measured by the power they wield; great leaders are measured by the mentoring, supportive encouragement they give to others. This is the legacy I have inherited from many mentoring/leaders before me. I dedicate myself to passing this legacy on to others.

Thank you sincerely for this award and this opportunity to tell my story.