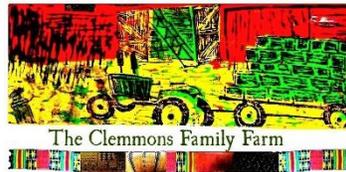


# ALONE TOGETHER WITH WORDS THAT HEAL

September 26, 2020

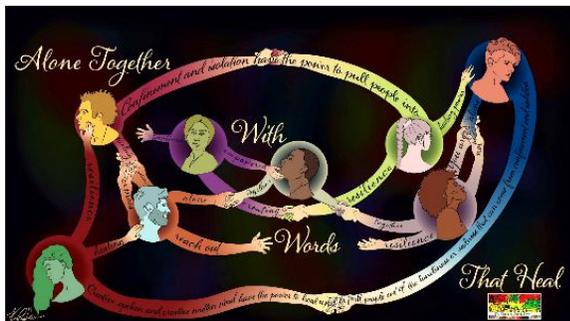


## Program Overview

In these historic times, COVID19, police brutality, racism and civil unrest may increase our feelings of stress and loneliness. Participants joined us for an interactive remote 90-minute program on Zoom with award-winning author Keenan Norris, and featured artists Omega Jade and Harmony Edosomwan, to explore how the creative spoken and written word have the power to help pull us out of sadness and confinement, and to help us heal-- alone and together. Directed by Pamela Donohoo, the program was held on Saturday September 26 from 3 - 4:30 PM.

Mrs. Lydia Clemmons, Senior, and her eldest daughter, also named Lydia, welcomed the participants to the program. Mrs. Clemmons shared her reflections about the experiences of her grandmother, Margie, who was an enslaved cook on a cotton plantation in Coushatta, Louisiana more than 40 years after the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Margie, a young woman, ran away from the white family who claimed they still owned her. She took her two small children with her, and they hid in ditches at night to evade their captors who pursued them.

As part of our ongoing community-building work, the program included a segment where participants broke into smaller Zoom rooms to engage directly with each other, and with two of our Vermont artists to create in response to given prompts. After the interactive element, participants came back together in a single Zoom room where Omega and Harmony shared some of their poetry and discussed their creative process.



Produced by the Clemmons Family Farm, *Alone Together With Words That Heal*, included a special greeting and words of wisdom from 97-year-old Lydia Clemmons Senior. Mrs. Clemmons shared the story of her grandmother Margie who ran away twice from a plantation and a white family in Coushatta, Louisiana. More than 40 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the family kept Margie as an enslaved cook on their plantation. Mrs. Clemmons' daughter, Lydia Clemmons, who is also president of the Clemmons Family Farm, opened the program.

**Note:** this was a remote interactive program held on Zoom. The physical farm has been closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Speaker Bios



## **Mrs. Lydia Clemmons, Senior (RN, CLNA, JD)**

Ninety-seven-year-old Lydia Clemmons and her husband, Jackson Clemmons, are two of Vermont's oldest living African American residents. She and her husband [purchased their 148-acre farm in Vermont in 1962 for \\$35,000](#) and have lovingly stewarded it over the years, never selling a single acre. One of the 0.4% of farms in the nation that is Black-owned, it is now transitioning into an African-American Heritage and Arts Center, with its arts, culture and educational programs run by Clemmons Family Farm, Inc., a 501c3 non-profit organization.

Mrs. Clemmons was the first African-American nurse anesthetist at the University of Vermont Medical Center and was President of the New England Association of Nurse Anesthetists. She received an honorary degree in Law (JD) from the University of Vermont in recognition of her service and achievements in Vermont and New England. With her husband, she served as co-president of the Charlotte Central School PTA in the 1960s. She also started the Charlotte 4H Club, and remains a vibrant member of her community. In addition to her career in nursing, Lydia Clemmons is a Reiki healer and pursued fulfilling vocations as a farmer, an artist, an activist and a world traveler. In 1984, Mrs. Clemmons launched [Authentica African Imports](#), the very first African art mail order import business in the United States right on the farm in Charlotte, which she ran for nearly 25 years. With a grant from Vermont Arts Council to cover her mileage, she put her favorite African art pieces into the back of her old station wagon and drove all around the state of Vermont to speak in K-12 classrooms and [bring her stories of the peoples and cultures of Africa to teachers and students](#).

Mrs. Clemmons and her family were part of the Great Migration of more than six million African-Americans who left their lives in the rural south and moved to the north, Midwest and California to find better opportunities and safe places to raise children and thrive. Her family were among the millions of Black farmers who lost a combined total of 93% of their land assets since the 1920s. Her grandparents, uncles and cousins escaped with their lives when a mob of jealous white farmers burned their farm to the ground in Louisiana. But that's [another story!](#) She is the mother of five children and the grandmother of 13 children. She is also a gifted storyteller who blends gentle humor and humility with vivid descriptions of the people, places, and events in her long and adventurous life.



## Keenan Norris, Co-host

**Keenan Norris, PhD, MFA** is on leave as a member of the faculty of Goddard College where he taught creative writing on the Port Townsend campus. He currently teaches American Literature and Creative Writing at San Jose State University and serves as an editor for the Oxford African- American Studies Center. He is a Headlands Artist-in-Residence and a Yerba Buena

Center for the Arts fellow. Keenan's recent Confinement Chronicles interview series explores how writers entrapped by circumstances beyond their control channeled those experiences into art.

Keenan's novel *Brother and the Dancer* won the 2012 James D. Houston Award. He served as editor for the anthology *Street Lit: Representing the Urban Landscape*. His story collection *by the lemon tree* was published in 2018. His political essays have been published in the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Review of Books, Seattle Times, Alta magazine and Boom: A Journal of California. His next novel, *The Confession of Copeland Cane V*, will be published in June 2021.



## Omega Jade, Featured Artist

Burlington-based **Omega Jade** is a musician, comedian and mother specializing in lyrical hip hop. Coming from a family of singers and choir members, Omega has a long-held passion for poetry. Blending her West Coast roots with her evolving skill of spoken word poetry, Omega's artistry integrates old-school hip-hop vibes with real life lessons. A Vermonter for 21 years, Omega is originally from San Diego, California and began her career as a stand-up comedian. She discovered that she had a talent for comedy. Omega considers herself "a musician who uses comedy to get over my stage fright." She credits her therapist as having been the one to push her, with the memorable words of: "If you don't pursue this, you will be back."

Omega hasn't gone back. She has moved forward to create "Rhyme and Unreason," a show that integrates music and comedy alongside other professionals in the field, and released her first album, Wounded Healer, in October 2019 with Equal Eyes Records.

Omega is a Clemmons Family Farm teaching artist and will be featured in our *Windows to A Multicultural World* K-12 arts engagements on African-American and African diaspora history and cultures.



## Harmony Edosomwan, Featured Artist

**Harmony Edosomwan** is a Nigerian American author who was born and raised in the Bronx, New York. She is currently a student at the University of Vermont where she studies English and American Sign Language. Harmony is passionate about social change and has been balancing her studies, creative work, and leadership in racial justice activism. She is known state-wide for her racial justice activism.

In 2019, Harmony published her first book, [Sad Black Girl](#), a collection of poems, tips, and pictures about being a young Black woman who struggles with mental illness.

She is a collaborating artist with the Clemmons Family Farm.



## Pamela Donohoo, Director

Vermont artist **Pamela Donohoo** is the Clemmons Family Farm's Director of Programs for The Storytelling Room arts and culture online series. She is an international performing artist (aerialist, acrobat, dancer, and choreographer) and has worked with performing arts organizations throughout the US and internationally. She has done commercials, award shows, large-scale events and spectacular acrobatic shows. Pamela received her degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology from Stanford University. She completed field research projects and worked with nonprofit organizations throughout Africa, India, Latin America and the Caribbean. Her research interests

include: social justice, peace-building, sustainability and the environment, folklore, culture, and history. Pamela specializes in creating socially relevant and globally engaged acrobatic performances. Her vision is to generate art that inspires people to think critically and contribute positively to their world.

Pamela is also a collaborating artist of the Clemmons Family Farm and appeared most recently as our featured artist in *Juneteenth in the Air*, the first of our Storytelling Room series. She is founder and Artistic Director of her own company, [Awaken Circus and Dance Theater](#).