



**Wishing you Peace, Hope, Abundance and Joy
During this Amazing Season of Light & Love!
Your Friends at Brookdale Orchard**

**Hear It Through The
Grapevine!
The Newsletter For
Brookdale Orchard
*Feeding the Mind Body & Soul***

Season of Light & Love
Imani Edition
January 1, 2024
Revised January 5, 2024

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**Mittie Imani Dreamweaver's
Ladybug Lessons, Litanies & Lyrics
*If It Ain't Broke...***

If It Ain't Broke...

I dare say that most of you reading this are familiar with the saying: *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"* I don't recall for sure where or when I first heard it, but it certainly rings of one of those simple West Virginia sayings that surfaced from generation to generation through my family. "If it ain't" broke... Or as my niece Valerie used to say, "some folk sure came complicate [stuff]!" I won't specify which folk she was referencing, nor that "stuff" was not her "s" word of choice.

I thought about that saying recently as I read article after article of organizations, institutions, and government offices – local to national crying the blues about the shrinking tree canopy throughout the city, state, and nation. It wasn't broke! You were the ones who chose to cut them all down to give way to concrete jungle development and now you're trying to fix it. (I guess it does not hurt that there are lots of government funds to plant trees. Hmmm...)

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LLL *If It Ain't Broke* missive was revised on January 5, 2024 to include recognition of groups missing from Mittie's network

First Fruit 4Real!



First Fruit of Brookdale Orchard

Full disclosure sounds better than confession, but either word, here I go!

Short of accepting requests to present on its historical significance or one of the Nguza Saba (Seven Principals), after celebrating Kwanzaa for over a half century, including hosting Imani gatherings for nearly forty years, I retreated from community festivities for the holiday eight years ago. I simply could no longer participate in the charade of celebrating a harvest for which we fall terribly short in seeding for productivity. Nor could I continue to engage in the annual ceremonial chants of *"harambee, harambee, harambee"* as I watched one black business after the other, including mine, shutter our doors for lack of support throughout the year from the *"all pull together"* community.

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These young “whipper snappers” who think that old folk don't know anything.... Two options (not saying that there aren't more, but...) Stop insulting our intelligence and respect our insight, or live long enough to finally get it right at the expense of everything you've had to glue back together in-between.

I don't recall being so, but I reckon that I was a young whipper snapper once or twice. Surely that's when my mother would tell me “*just wait, your day is coming.*” Grandma probably told her the same thing. It's all cyclical, and I guess it's all good. But seriously, folk. If it ain't broke, spare yourself the embarrassment and the time trying to fix it.

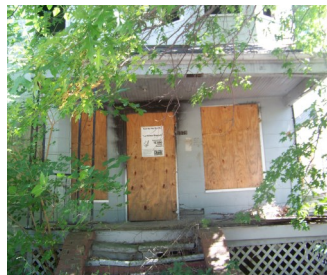
I'll tell you what isn't broken despite popular trends to think broader – our narrow-focused vision for Brookdale Orchard. It came to me as I was penning a letter of appreciation to those who responded to my appeal for financial support in our last *Grapevine* edition. By the way, if you didn't send a donation by Thanksgiving you will hear from the tarantula again! (Richard Pryor's Miss Rudolph fans are laughing!)

Too often, funding entities are interested in numbers, how many bodies have you, or will you serve. Truthfully, it's a precarious trend that sets the stage for potential organizational doom. My close friends know that my favorite board game is *Risk*. One that I truly hope and trust that Pentagon officials are carefully playing. Our armies can only be thinned so far before we become vulnerable and ripe for overtaking. In 2011 when a group of thirty or so of us gathered in the fellowship hall at St. Matthew to discuss the future of our community, we had no agenda beyond the re-stabilization of our immediate neighborhood – a fifteen block stretch centered between Superior and Wade Park avenues, given a little north and south of both. It was a neighborhood ravished by the abandonment of nearly 100 properties and high levels of criminal activity primarily associated with drug trafficking. Our priority focus was on demanding accountability – both by the property owners and the municipal government offices with missions and responsibilities related to our concerns.

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Despite the too often expected “numbers game” by funding entities leaning toward organizations that build “*high capacity and impact,*” we were neither interested nor capable of trying to save the larger seventy-four block / five avenue ward as defined by politically drawn boundaries. Rather, our focus was concentrated on physically stabilizing our neighborhood, and subsequently creating immediate and ongoing generational opportunities for our 2,000 plus neighbors. We had no clue of how far-reaching our ultimate vision and mission would go.

Although our scope was limited, our motivation was broad and strong – the hundreds of K-8th graders maneuvering back and forth from three schools through what looked like a war zone, without knowing that the physical and social environment with which they were left to navigate, was not normal!



Born into a neighborhood resembling blown-out Bagdad at the time, many into single-mother led households, in 2011 our children knew nothing of what those of us who sat in that room recalled from our childhood: quiet tree-lined streets and neatly kept homes with beautiful yards and gardens, community-centered schools complete with numerous afterschool activities, all nestled between bustling “mom and pop” businesses lining the avenues and providing employment opportunities for those who lived within. On that latter note, the sad reality is that many of our children have never seen a parent – neither mother nor father, get up in the morning to go off to work at **any** job, let alone one that earns them a living-wage.

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If It Ain't Broke (continued from page 2)

It was a simple agenda. And while we were already engaged with weekly afterschool activities, there was no vision for the in-depth during, after and summer school programming that we provide today, and there was certainly no vision for an education and production center supporting an orchard moving toward a commercial brand. When we gathered in that hall twelve years ago there was no vision for Brookdale Orchard! The gift of that vision came five years later, after the derelict properties were demolished and the ground literally became level.

The rest, as they say, is history and well documented in our *Brookdale Orchard Prospectus for Civic Support and Funding*, now in its sixth edition and the essence of brookdaleorchard.org.

While history speaks for itself, the future of Brookdale Orchard hinges on raising 1.2 million dollars over the next year to just get us on our feet, ensuring our ongoing operations, our enrichment programming, and, most critically, the establishment of Harriet Tubman Hall which will not only provide education and training for those who will maintain the orchard and produce the brand, but it will also institutionalize our vision beyond the lives of the dreamers.

Back to the simple, narrow notion. Twenty-five people. That's all for starts. Our immediate goal is to simply educate, train and employ twenty-five people to help put food on twenty-five tables and keep twenty-five roofs over the heads of twenty-five families in this immediate neighborhood. Somebody has to do it.

In our predominantly black and poor neighborhood where hundreds of millions of dollars are being brokered to build new infrastructures in preparation for new housing and commercial development, black men and women are not working. Martin Luther King, Jr. Plaza (which in truth, outlived its dignity a long time ago) has been emptied out and fenced in as out of state developers prepare to demolish it to give way to a \$200 million dollar 21st century version of what it was built to be fifty years ago: ground floor retail, upper floor apartments. If similar development going on in the immediate area is of any indication, this time the upper floors will just keep on going up, up, up with very few, if any black workers employed! The construction industry had the *Fannie Lewis Law* that ensured their participation thrown out by the state.

I'll tell you what else "ain't broke." Unlike me, many of the readers of this newsletter are not financially broke! You are my family and my friends – my network primarily comprised of my nuclear and extended family, my friends from my childhood and forward, East High Alumni, Smith Alumnae, Case Western Reserve Alumni, University of Southern California Alumni, Oberlin Alumni, faculty, and staff with whom I worked, Perkins School of Theology Alumni, my faith families—Star of Bethel MBC, Cory, St. Matthew, Northern Waters District and East Ohio Conference UMC, Lakeside Chautauqua, St. Luke *Community* and North Texas UMC, Deuteronomy 8:3 Café Books & Music and Kumbaya on the Shore patrons and friends, National Institute of Restorative Justice book and film discussion series participants; and while I am not a member of the "Divine Nine," every other black preacher I know is an Alpha or an AKA. (No disrespect to the others, but for some reason they end up in the clergy) I'm just saying... I'm trying to put Harriet Tubman's name on a building to benefit brothers and sisters who have not been privileged or positioned to pledge! *Blue Bombers*, shut down or not, it's about *Noblesse Oblige!*

Yes. We still have to *do the dance* with the corporate philanthropic community – entities both for profit and non-profit, but significant resources are in this reading through the big box store method – small dollars in large quantities. I get it that every non-profit is begging, especially on "*Giving Tuesdays*," but consider making a pledge and donating to our general operating fund and our Campaign for Tubman Hall and meet it gradually through monthly installments. We want to start knocking out walls in July!

So, those of you who fall into any of the groups I listed above, expect to hear from me soon about how your individual donations can form a collective gift at a higher giving level, enabling you to become part of a group Safe House/Safe Sanctuary, or a North Star, or even a Freedom Ship donor for Tubman Hall. A lot of a little adds up to much! Until then, please know that I am thankful for each and every one of you who has taken the time to wade through this reading, and during a troubling time in a world deeply in need of peace, I pray and hope for yours. Finally, prayers and good wishes are definitely not broken, so here are mine for your Happy, Healthy, Hopeful, New Year!

~ Mittie Imani Jordan

Each year hundreds of folk parties from place to place eating free food, dancing to drums, shouting “harambee” then quietly disappear from supporting the struggling hosting venues and independent vendors, and – most significantly, failing to abide by the seven principals enabling the concept of productivity and harvest on which the holiday was established and still stands.

But on this first day of Kwanzaa 2023, thanks to the commitment of an immediate and extended community of practitioners of the Nguzo Saba, innately or not, Brookdale Orchard can truthfully celebrate “*matunda ya kwanza*” the “*first fruit of the harvest.*”

Planted in 2021 on the 9,600 square feet site bearing a lightening ravished pear tree (it was struck twice but kept producing), Eden was the first garden established in Brookdale Orchard, and this summer she bore her first fruit, a whole year earlier than expected! One of three gardens sponsored by The Cuyahoga Land Reutilization Corporation, Eden Pear Garden is the smallest of the five gardens currently under development on the Orchard’s 22 parcels spread over three streets. You can read all about the gardens and the fabled lightning struck pear tree that served as inspiration for envisioning the orchard at www.brookdaleorchard.org.

Established in 1966 by Maulana Ron Karenga, chair of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach, Kwanzaa is a seven-day festival of African American culture celebrated annually from December 26 through January 1. Inspired by African agricultural harvest traditions, during the holiday seven Swahili named principles (Nuguzo Saba) are expounded upon to encourage a way of thought and practice that lead to productive individual and communal living: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith).

While I remain somewhat suspect of the sincerity of some of the revelers checking the daily Kwanzaa celebration sites off their lists, I am truly thankful for those who continue to organize and participate in gatherings to uplift the principles and plant the seeds for the possibility of harvesting something productive, if we only put our communal practice to what we preach.



Faithful D8:3 Café patrons celebrating Kwanzaa

The few pears that Eden bore this year were not enough to produce the first jar of the Brookdale Orchard jam or juice brand. Rather, they are shriveled on our shelves as reminders of a momentous occasion, and emboldening our hope for the vision of our future if we only employ the seven principles and persevere. And always, find joy in the journey!

Mittie Imani
(with Kujichagulia (self-determination) and
Uvumilivu (perseverance) on the side.
December 26, 2023



Selfie of Brookdale Orchard gardening club members celebrating the first fruit of the Orchard.

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December 31, 1862 – Freedom’s Eve

“Wednesday, December 31, 1862, was a day of anticipation and rumor.

People gathered in little knots and tried to read the signs of the time.

That night, blacks gathered in churches and prayed the Old Age out and the New Age in.

There was no doubt about what Lincoln would do at the “watch meeting” held in the Washington, D.C.

“Contraband Camp.” An eloquent old “contraband” got up and told the gathering what time it was.

“Once the time was,” he said, “that I cried all night. What’s the matter? What’s the matter? Matter enough.

The next morning my child was to be sold, and she was sold; and I never ‘pected to see her no more till

the day of judgment. No, no more that! No more that! No more that! With my hands against my breast

I was going to my work, when the overseer used to whip me along Now, no more that! No more that!

No more that! We’s free now, bless the Lord! They can’t sell my wife an’ child no more,

bless the Lord! No more that! No more that! No more that, now!”

*Before the Mayflower, Lerone Bennett
Johnson Publishing Company, Chicago 1961*

As I was finishing the writing of this first 2024 edition of *Grapevine*, a friend called to ask if any of our United Methodist congregations would be hosting a “watch night” service this year. Regretfully, no. “Us neither,” she responded, with the “us” being her Missionary Baptist congregation that my father helped establish in 1962. The rest of the conversation was pretty much a chastisement of us so-called believers too fearful to keep sacred traditions for fear of being shot up! On the “for real side of things,” it’s all too real! Come midnight, the congregational shouts of joy and prayers of thanksgiving that used to ring in the New Year have been all but silenced by the blast of bullets that shatter the urban nightscape, more and more from automatic, repeating weapons than single gunshots that used to celebrate the coming of a new day.

Fourth of July, New Years, and now Juneteenth. [Bombs] blasting in air. In the age of “shots fired,” that’s one way of letting the “Po Po” know where to find all the illegal guns. But when it comes to “protecting and serving” poor inner-city communities – especially those in the way of new development, they don’t care.

I dare say...

It was not the gunfire that replaced the prayers and praise of New Year’s Eve. They were replaced by our forgetfulness. Unlike other keepers of traditions, we forgot to tell our children to never forget!

The story that gave way to “watch night” began following President Lincoln’s Union Army’s September 17th victory over the Confederacy at



“Watch meeting, December 31, 1862 – Waiting for the hour / Heard & Moseley, Cartes de Visite 10 Tremont Row, Boston.” *Library o Congress*

Antietam, the site of “the bloodiest day in American History.” It is recorded that 23,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or went missing following the twelve-hour battle. The conquest not only ended the Confederate Army’s attempt to invade the north through Virginia, but it gave Lincoln the confidence to address the core issue of the war, the emancipation of over four million descendants of Africa enslaved in the Confederate south. On September 22, 1962, Lincoln penned a preliminary proclamation with the promise of freedom for “*slaves in states engaged in rebellion against the United States*” on the first day of the coming new year. (Are you writing this down Governor Nikki?)

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Clinging to the sweet relief of that promise and fearlessly defying laws of the land forbidding them to gather as such in the south, black men, women, and children huddled to sing, count, and pray down the moments to freedom when the clock struck midnight.

In solidarity, free black and white abolitionist in the north joined in the ritual, albeit more sedately so. In his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*, Frederick Douglass – who helped to broker the deal, recalled the atmosphere in Boston's Tremont Temple where he joined in a "watch night" meeting: "*We were waiting and listening as for a bolt from the sky, which should rend the fetters of four millions of slaves.*"

On January 1, 1863, "*like a mighty stream,*" a newly emancipated population poured off plantations by the millions with nothing but their freedom to begin new lives of "*no more that,*" as they inched their way toward Union Army soldiers waiting to read and enforce Lincoln's executive order, *Proclamation 95*, most notably known as *The Emancipation Proclamation*. It would be another two years before slavery would be Constitutionally, yet conditionally abolished with certification of the 13th Amendment on December 18, 1865.

Admittedly, by the time I consciously attended my first "watch night" service as a child, I saw it as just one more excuse for my parents to drag us to church all day and all night! In fact, because my mother had "old wives' tale" traditions of her own, the women and girls in our family had to be in the house before midnight, so our service culminated in prayer at home with my father and brothers arriving from church shortly thereafter with a loaf of bread in one hand and dollar bills in the other indicating provision for our family throughout the year. No matter how New Year's eve evolved over the decades, that tradition never ended, and my son carries it on with his family today, adding a Bible in hand, noting that "*if you got the Word, the rest will follow!*"

There were other household traditions in preparation for the celebration, some revered and some downright ridiculous! Other than trying

not to have dirty dishes in the sink – a daily routine anyway, the thing about the house being cleaned including furniture dusted and polished, and no laundry left unwashed went out the door years ago! Black-eyed peas with a silver dollar imbedded for good luck, greens for prosperity, cornbread and yams still complete my ceremonial New Years day meal. Having given up pork at age 15, corned beef replaced pickled pig feet and chitterlings on my table, which my mother also detested and since my father was the one who wanted them he had to clean and cook them! Skunked up the whole kitchen!

And while I suspect that it was concocted to protect women and daughters from the wiles of drunken men reveling from pillar to post on New Year's Eve, somewhere along the way I broke loose from the superstition that I, being female, somehow would curse the house with bad luck if I was not in by midnight and for the rest of the new day. As for the bread and bills, I learned a long time ago to depend on my own.

As I aged, I grew to appreciate the gathering of believers on December 31 to tell the "freedom's eve" story, sharing modern day testimonies of overcoming obstacles – individually and communally through the passing year, and singing songs of victory and joy in anticipation of a new day, a new dawn, and the emergence of a new year. And while there are still congregations who do so, I miss the more intimate traditions of my family gathering at home: the count down, (with Dick Clark and the ball drop in later years), the elder's prayer, the Christian Brothers Brandy toast which eventually graduated to champagne, followed by my mother quietly retreating to a private space to pray.

Time tells that short of a few, these things weren't broken. They certainly were better and far more inspiring than the new day tradition of firing off repeating rounds of gunfire beginning before the stroke of midnight and lasting for hours on end.

Lord, have mercy and free our children, elders, and everyone living in the tyranny of war zones – simulated and real, throughout the world.

This is my Freedom's Eve, my New Year's Day prayer.

MIJ December 31, 2023

Join The Mission!

Without fanfare that we cannot afford, we have launched a funding campaign to raise \$500,000 to restore and retrofit a 1921 building anchoring Brookdale Orchard to serve as our education, training, and brand production center. While jumping through the algorithms and deadlines of philanthropic entities, without financial resources for fund development staff (it's a "catch 22"), we want and need to include funding support from individuals, congregations, and social organizations, and offer several levels of giving corresponding with the Orchard's signature symbols of the Underground Railroad Quilt Codes of Freedom.

We are especially hopeful of significant support from the black community as the building will be named Tubman Hall in honor and recognition of Harriett Tubman, who committed her life to the physical, emotional, and mental emancipation of enslaved – and some free – black people in America. Everyone's gift will be publicly recognized on the branches of the "Tree of Life" sculpture to be displayed in the lobby.



Are There 50 Members Who Can Contribute \$100 each to Help Your Organization Become A Tubman Hall North Star? Or Perhaps 100 Members to Contribute \$25 Each to Become A Safe House/Safe Sanctuary



\$5,000 Conductor's Navigating North Star

No GPS, no compass, so they followed the star. They learned to look toward heaven and *Follow The Drinking Gourd*. It was a combination of good old-fashioned astronomy and geography combined. Traveling mostly under the cloak of darkness, knowledge of the location of the North Star within the Big Dipper constellation, was critical for conductors. If your freedom, indeed your very life depended on it, do you know which way to go to head north?

UGRR Quilt Codes of Freedom: The North Star pattern was critical in keeping freedom seekers moving north toward freedom.

Pattern block from Brookdale Orchard Dedication Sampler Quilt by Friends Quilt Together



\$2,500 Safe Houses / Safe Sanctuaries

From the infamous First African Baptist in Savannah, Georgia with its floorboard airholes in the pattern of the Kongo cosmogram, all the way far north to First Presbyterian in Green Bay, Wisconsin, congregations and the homes of ministers served as some of the first safe houses on the Underground Railroad. Like many on the National Park Service UGRR site, the house still stands in Ripley overlooking Ohio's "Jordan River" where Rev. John Rankin, his wife Jean, and their children welcomed freedom seekers with an oil lamp in the window lighting the way from 1822—1865'

UGRR Quilt Codes of Freedom: The Log Cabin informed freedom seekers that the person at that location was safe to speak with. It could also be a signal that they needed to seek shelter. In most cases, it indicated that it was a safe house where they would find shelter, food and rest.

Pattern block from Brookdale Orchard Dedication Sampler Quilt by Friends Quilt Together

For more information on The Campaign for Tubman Hall Giving Levels and our other funding campaigns, please visit brookdaleorchard.org/education/