

The background of the cover is an abstract composition. On the left, there are vertical, jagged red shapes that resemble flames or a textured wall. On the right, there are large, overlapping blue and purple circular and semi-circular forms. A white grid pattern is overlaid on the entire scene. Small red dots are scattered throughout the blue and purple areas. The title 'Bon Vivant' is written in a white, elegant cursive font at the top left, and 'Colorado Springs Fine Arts Monthly' is written in a white, sans-serif font below it.

Bon Vivant
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Monthly

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Pam Shipp

leading the good life

Her hair often has a pixieish swish, a flip that reminds me somehow of Doris Day. There is a sweetness to her disposition, too. But you shouldn't mistake that easy smile for weakness. I've seen her wade fearlessly into group situations—she works almost exclusively with non-profits—where emotions are on edge and nearly everyone else is ducking for cover. Everyone except for Pam Shipp. Somehow when things seem most volatile she manages to assuage cranky egos and bandage wounded pride. At the front lines of non-profit leadership development she's frank and no-nonsense and insightfully honest. She gets people focused on what's truly important and has that uncanny knack for getting people to want to reveal their best. Afterwards, it's like a sudden afternoon storm has passed. The air is calm and clear and with a deep breath you realize, with a welcome sense of relief, that no damage was done. In fact, everyone having survived this organizational gale now seems even more at ease and open. This fear behind them, Shipp's real work of getting the organization to function at a higher, more effective level can begin.

Shipp was born in East St. Louis, near where the Mississippi River is now splashing over its banks. Her mother, not seeing much future for either of them in St. Louis, moved to Denver when Shipp was five. There, an only child, she grew up and attended East High School. With her mother's encouragement and the strength of her academic record Shipp enrolled at Colorado College.

She still remembers her first day at CC. She was trying to enroll with all the other freshmen. But the process seemed scary and overwhelming, and at one point, she simply stopped as tears welled up in her eyes. Sitting at a nearby table, professor Rick Beidleman noticed her, paralyzed and crying. He motioned for her to come over and asked her what was wrong. She explained, and he got up and helped her through every step of the process. "He was my guardian angel," says Shipp. She took his biology classes, although she majored in political science, and throughout her college years he was a trusted mentor and friend.

She graduated, one of the first in her family to do so. Immediately after college Shipp went to work for AT&T as a customer service representative. Maybe it was there she acquired her almost unflappable patience. Soon she had a teaching certificate and for 15 years worked at District 11, first as a teacher and eventually as a counselor. It was during her last year as a counselor at Palmer High School that she enrolled in a Ph.D. program with the hopes of teaching psychology. It wasn't long after getting her doctorate that she heard from a sorority sister that a new organization, the Center for Creative Leadership, had moved to town and was hiring Ph.D.s exclusively. She began working at CCL while maintaining a private counseling practice. Eleven years ago, she joined CCL full-time as a Senior Program Associate, where she has worked with Fortune 500 clients from around the world.

Shipp is deeply aware of her past and heritage. Her great grandparents were slaves and, while Shipp believes much progress has been made in the area of civil rights, she is a passionate advocate for continued progress and change. When Colorado was torn by the passage of Amendment 2, a deeply divisive law targeting gays, she and others at CCL felt they needed to do something to help bring the community together. "The city was just so polarized," says Shipp. "We wanted to use the Center as a springboard for kicking off a series of powerful community experiences." This led to the forming of the Colorado Springs Leadership Institute where community influencers could come together and learn about themselves and each other in a supportive and non-threatening atmosphere. "We were able to teach many in the community some really positive ways of working together," says Shipp. Riding this success Shipp co-founded the Black Leadership Forum, a platform for bringing non-traditional leaders together. She's also been a member of the Pikes Peak Community Foundation and a past board member of the Penrose/St. Francis hospital system.

Last year she left CCL, and for a while said she was retired. This morphed into "semi-retired" and now she simply says she is self-employed. Shipp's commitment and work with local non-profits is unabated. For her, helping those who help the community and those less fortunate is her passion and mission and stems from her earliest childhood experiences. "My mother deeply believed in helping the homeless and would always be welcoming and open. One day when I was still quite young, I remember I was rude to a homeless person, a hobo and I can remember how mad my mother was," says Shipp.

"Service is the rent you pay for living, for being alive," says Shipp. "My mother believed and exemplified that. Whatever you give comes back to you. You don't have to worry about giving too much, because you get back so much more. You just never know when things come back to bless you." BV

—Michael Gardner

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