

COLLECTIVE VOICES

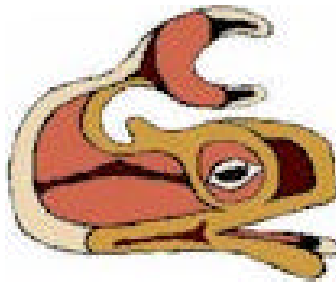
CONFERENCE NEWS - EXPERIENCES - REFLECTIONS - HIGHLIGHTS

Friday, November 14, 2003

Volume 1 : Issue 2

Alice Skenandore: Building Upon Our Community's Strengths

The Wise Women Gathering Place has grown from a group of mothers who met in the women's homes to study midwifery, breast-feeding and child-birth to a full-fledge non-profit organization.



"(It's) an actual office which provides a wide-range of resources for women and families in many areas around reproductive health including midwifery, breast-feeding, childbirth as well as alternative health methods such as herb study, aromatherapy, homeopathy and more," said Alice Skenandore, Founder and Executive Director of The Wise Women Gathering Place (WWGP).

Skenandore, a mid-wife for 26 years, said the organization has been a member of SisterSong since its inception.

"I am glad to come to the SisterSong conference this year because I believe that SisterSong provides a forum for people who have diverse views to discuss issues of reproductive health choices and rights," said Skenandore. "I am glad to see SisterSong say that it is NOT just about abortion, because, it has been a great sorrow to me that other health reproductive right choices

**"A RESOURCE FOR
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES"**

**WISE WOMEN
GATHERING PLACE**

such as home birth, breast-feeding, midwifery and abstinence have traditionally been ignored by the mainstream women's reproductive rights movements in the past. I plan to come armed with information and views that I can share with other women about these choices."

Skenandore, a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa of Northwest Wisconsin, said WWGP teaches eighth grade students at the Oneida Nation Tribal School and the Menominee Nation Tribal School an abstinence-only education called "Community-Based Abstinence Culture."

"(We use) a curriculum that

we developed called Discovery Dating," Skenandore said. "WWGP is all about helping people learn about healthy life choices, helping them to achieve goals through support, information and advocacy."

As described on its newly revamped website, WWGP's Discovery Dating project is a resource that young people can use right away to help them discern their date's character qualities and behavior habits. Skenandore feels that the Project's respect for traditional abstinence-based values is "very helpful in assisting our young people with making more deliberate decisions about moving forward with each other in a relationship."

Skenandore added that she has attended more than 730 births, including the births of her six children.

Reflecting upon her years of community service and activism, Skenandore shared, "I have trained other midwives through the ancient apprenticeship model over the years and have a strong motivation to continue to teach women about their own innate midwifery capabilities in order to keep this family centered experience available as an option for women who choose to have their babies by this method."

For more information on the Wise Women Gathering Place visit their website at www.wisewomengp.org or email easkdore@new.rr.com.

By Sararesa Begay

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Painted Quilt: Cara Page

Cara Page is a committed artist deeply rooted in the tradition and practice of art for resistance. It is her belief, as Women of Color gather for SISTERSONG: Reproductive Health & Sexual Rights National Conference, they must find ways to have communal and personal reflection time. "Sisters must allow for a creative transformation that reflects how our work is impacting the world," says Cara. "This seems a perfect opportunity and incredibly poignant time to capture as many voices and create an echo of change by using art to create a visual assemblage of the many powers and voices that are gathered here together".

Conference attendees that are filled with emotions and feelings from workshops and plenary sessions are invited to participate in a tactile, creative space to name their experiences, the "Painted Quilt for Women and Freedom". This will be an arts quilt, inviting any attendee to paint on a square or strip of cloth to create a vision of women and freedom, use a quote, a poem, symbols, etc. that best commemorate their time together at SisterSong and the struggles we continue to face. Cara hopes that people will trust their creative voices and put on the fabric what is on their mind. She will feel out the design of the quilt after viewing the donated cloth. "I was thinking about doing the elements: air fire, water, earth, or the four directions: north, south, east and west, but these are my projections, reflects Cara. "I want to sit back and see what evolves so that it will be an improvisational piece, reflective of the voices, energy and stories of the



women who contribute to the piece.

Cara is an improvisational artist. Some of her work is inspired by true stories of life and sometimes her work is prepared and preset. "I believe that creativity is motivated by reflection, intuition and the creative spark in the moment," say Cara. "That is what pushes me to write or to sculpt or to perform." This quilt is an example of newer work in the communities based on documenting stories and using art as a tool of resistance. Cara will sew the strips and physically hang them on the wall to change the energy and space of the conference with the power and voices of the attendees themselves. Her goal will be to sew the quilt top by the last day of the conference and give the attendees a visual voice to the work and power that has gathered for the conference.

"Art has become elitist and individualized in this country and who is a 'true artist' is based on Eurocentric standards of art", says Cara. "As a cultural worker and a practitioner of the arts, I am trying to tap into what I see - art as a powerful tool of memory, healing and resistance that anyone can do. There is some connection that everyone has to cloth that reflects the way our stories interweave."

Cara says art hasn't been traditionally seen as a mainstay of organizing. It is still being experienced as something you do in private and not in public space. She is excited to have the installation going as part of the experience of the conference. "The depth of having this experience amidst the power and grace of SisterSong would be another way to bring voice to our struggle and permits conference attendees a time of personal reflection, muses Cara. "I am moved by all the possibilities of this conference and wanted the opportunity to bring a creative experience that can capture the power generated at this event."

Cara Page, the artist, is a multimedia performance artist, artistic director, consultant and founder of Deeper Water Productions, which promotes creativity, transformation and action through the arts. She is an African American, lesbian, writer, creative documentarian artist and fiber sculptor. She is a published poet and playwright and some of her plays include: [Giants in the Fields](#), [In the Blood of Black Women](#), and [Black Girl](#). She is a recent transplant to Atlanta by way Durham, Oakland, Washington D.C., and Amherst.

Cara Page will begin working on the Painted Quilt for Women and Freedom today at 3:00pm in the registration/exhibit area at the Renaissance Hotel. On Saturday and Sunday Page will continue her work in the conference registration area at Spelman College.

By Lisa Diane White

Byllye Avery: *Inspired and Inspiring*

Byllye Y. Avery, a 25-year health care activist, believes all women of color deserve to have the very best lives they can have.

Avery, a lively, strong 66-year-old said she's partly motivated by anger and her concern about the erosion of the welfare of reproductive rights.

"The health of the world depends on

the health of women," Avery said. "It all depends on the women. The struggle is going to continue."

Avery, along with five other women of color activists, received a plaque of appreciation from the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective on Thursday, Nov. 13th during the SisterSong Reproductive

"The health of the world depends on the health of women."

: Byllye Avery :

Health and Sexual Rights National Conference's opening plenary.

The other women honored by the SisterSong Collective are Mary Long, Luz Rodriguez, Virginia Davis-Floyd and Reena Marcelo.

Byllye Avery (Continued)

Currently, Avery, a DeLand, Fla. native, is a senior lecturer at the Department of Population of Family and Health, and the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

Avery teaches a class called, "Public Health Activists," where she focuses on cross-cultural methods and work. The award-winning Avery is modest about her numerous accomplishments, and quietly praises the Black Women's Health Imperative.

Avery founded the organization that was originally called the National Black Women's Health Project in 1981. The National Black Women's Health Project drove to improve the health status of Black women globally.

Since its creation, the Imperative has served as a non-profit organization committed to defining, promoting and maintaining the physical, mental and emotional well being of Black women.

Pioneering and socially conscious Avery has combined activism and

social responsibility to develop a national forum for the exploration of the health issues of Black women.

Avery also co-founded the Gainesville Women's Health Center and Birthplace, an alternative birthing center, in Gainesville, Fla.

Avery's many notable accomplishments include receiving a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship for Social Contribution in 1989, and the Essence Award for Community Service.

In 1994, Avery received the Academy of Science Institute of Medicine's Gustav O. Leinhard Award for the Advancement of Health Care, and the Grassroots Realist Award by the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus.

In 1995, she received the Dorothy I. Height Lifetime Achievement Award and the President's Citation of the American Public Health Association.

In 1998, Avery was recognized by the Business and Professional Women with a New Horizons Award, and she accepted a Leadership Award from the

University of Florida's School of Medicine.

Avery has served on the Charter Advisory Committee for the Office of Research on Women's Health of the National Institutes of Health. Additionally, she has served two years as a visiting fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health. She has received honorary degrees from Thomas Jefferson University, State University of New York in Binghamton, Gettysburg College, Bowdoin College and Bates College.

Avery has a background in teaching special education to emotionally disturbed students, and has consulted on learning disabilities in public schools and universities throughout the Southern region of the United States.

Currently, the active Avery lives in New York City and Provincetown, Massachusetts.

For more information on the Avery Institute, visit www.averyinstituteforsocialchange.com

By Sararesa Begay

Lady Warrior: A Poem, A Tribute

LADY WARRIOR

Lori Piestewa found her place in the sun where she is a Lady Warrior

The Lady Warrior leaves us an inspiring example for us to lead as Americans and Native Americans

Her legacy transcends the numerous Native American Nations because her legacy has touched our hearts, spirits and minds across the country

We all unify in prayer for her grieving family and her Hopi Nation

When the Lady Warrior left the United States for her calling as a warrior, she entered enemy territory where she bravely protected all of us, Americans

Her strong spirit resonates in the rain and the snow that fell on Saturday in Tuba City

Not only did she belong to the Piestewa family, her children and her Hopi Nation

She now belongs to all of us

By Sararesa Begay



March to Save Women's Lives

Women in the mainstream abortion rights movement are organizing a "March to Save Women's Lives" in protest of the spiraling backlash against legalized and safe access to abortion for women. This March on Washington will take place on April 25 2004. Principal March organizers are the National Organization for Women, NARAL Pro-Choice, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the Feminist Majority.

Up until recently, women of color organizations have been glaringly absent from the planning for this March, including the decision to have a March in the first place. For many women of color, this is very reminiscent of numerous gatherings and mobilizations over the past two decades in which we have experienced the gross marginalization of women of color by white feminists. With the large mobilization of women of color at the SisterSong Conference, several players within the mainstream women's movement are recognizing the need to include the voices of women of color in preparing for this March. At best, they may realize that only women of color can and should speak for women of color and, at worst, they may realize that women of color organizations can play a critical

role in mobilizing women of color to participate in "their" March.

On Monday, November 3, 2003, Byllye Avery and Loretta Ross convened a conference call to begin a dialogue on how women of color should respond to the impending March. More than 40 women participated in the conference call to weigh in on this issue, including women of color activists from around the country and a few of the March organizers.

The SisterSong Collective has taken a stance in support of the March as long as specific demands for the inclusion of women of color in decision-making and assurance that the March be relevant to the lived realities of women of color are met (for more information, please refer to the SisterSong Statement of Solidarity that appears in



the Conference Program on page 22).

The SisterSong Collective would like to continue this dialogue and develop a unified strategy for the March. Even if we do not all agree (and it is expected that we won't), we hope to RAISE OUR VOICES AND BE HEARD!!!

There will be two opportunities during today's Conference activities to gain and/or share some perspective on:

- 1) whether or not women of color should participate in the March;
- 2) if so, how should we participate; and
- 3) whether or not women of color decide to participate in the March (as individuals or as a collective), how can we continue to advance **OUR** agendas for reproductive justice for women of color.

A special plenary regarding the March will be held today from 5:00 - 5:45 pm in the Georgia Ballroom. The plenary will be followed immediately by an Open Mic Discussion from 5:45 - 6:30 pm. For those who plan to participate in the March, there will be an organizing dinner meeting from 6:30 - 8:00 pm in Room 590 West.

By Lynn Roberts

Brenda Hutchinson: AIDS Challenges Our Faith Communities

Toni Bond's story of having to get an abortion at an early age touched Brenda Hutchinson's heart during the Thursday morning plenary panel called "Building a National Women of Color Movement." Bond's moving honesty touched Hutchinson in a way that she couldn't hide her secret.

Hutchinson's husband is living with HIV/AIDS, and Hutchinson is trying to cope. Hutchinson's efforts to volunteer with this year's SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights National Conference is her way of reaching out for answers, support, healing and direction on what to do.

An Atlanta resident, Hutchinson, 46, said she hopes to help break down the silence about HIV/AIDS in the Black

church community.

"My concerns revolve around women and children being vulnerable to men infected by HIV/AIDS," Hutchinson said. "When people (living with HIV/AIDS) are coming inside the churches, we, women, get so involved in relationships and have no education of HIV/AIDS prevention."

Hutchinson, a license-ordained minister of a Pentecostal Church, said she observed that most religious organizations of color aren't involved with HIV/AIDS education.

"If people don't speak up, it will silently kill our people," Hutchinson said as her voice softened to reflect her concern about the spread of HIV/AIDS.

the silence mode," Hutchinson said. "Pastors can positively influence the congregation."

Hutchinson believes that breaking the silence around HIV/AIDS can influence behavior to promote HIV/AIDS prevention.

Hutchinson said she's learned that in the state of Georgia a person who is living with HIV/AIDS doesn't have to disclose their HIV-status to anyone or inform any organization of their medical condition.

Hutchinson believes that is wrong because her husband didn't tell her he was HIV-positive when he met and married her. Hutchinson, who tested positive for HIV 15 years ago, shared that she was 'healed by God' but now

Hutchinson (Continued)

has 'come full circle' because she must face HIV again.

So far tests have indicated that Hutchinson doesn't have HIV, but she recognizes that she is married to a man who is living with the disease. Hutchinson's search for information and support has brought her to SisterSong's Conference where she knows she can tell her story truthfully, and begin to heal innately.

"I want the truth to be told," Hutchinson said as she became emotional. "Tell it all."

By Sararesa Begay

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Aishah Simmons: 'Afrolesfemcentric' Filmmaker & Activist

Aishah Shahidah Simmons is the founder and president of AfroLez productions, a multimedia arts company committed to using the moving image, the written and spoken word to address those issues which have a negative impact on marginalized and disenfranchised people. As an award-winning African American feminist lesbian independent filmmaker, writer, lecturer, she has written articles and essays, taught workshops, guest lectured classes, and facilitated seminars nationally and internationally on both the process of grassroots independent media-making and how the intersections of racial, gender, and sexual oppression impact the lives of Women of Color. Her internationally acclaimed shorts "Silence Broken," "In My Father's House," and "NO! (A Work-In-Progress)" explore the issues of race, gender, homophobia, rape and

misogyny from a Black feminist lesbian perspective. As the producer, writer and director of "NO!", she's overseeing the post-production of this forthcoming feature-length documentary about intra-racial rape and sexual assault in the Black community. Simmons has been traveling across the country showing excerpts from her film to men, women and young people on college campuses and in other community settings.

In March 2003 a screening and public discussion around the film NO!, was co-sponsored by Hiphop Speaks and Black Men in Support of the Film "NO!" in conjunction with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. More than 200 people waited in line, on that cold Friday evening, for 30-40 minutes only to be told that the Schomburg auditorium was filled to capacity. Simmons credits the success

of that evening to the mobilization by the Hiphop generation, as she recounts "hands down, it was the Hiphop generation who promoted the event through emails, listserves, print and audio media. The majority of the Black Men In Support of the Film "NO!" are from the Hiphop generation. It was the Hiphop generation that created the space for an intergenerational (from as young as 7 years old to over 65 years old) male/female dialogue on exposing and addressing heterosexual intra-racial rape and sexual assault in the non-monolithic Black community in the United States". She is determined to complete this film despite being told by a programmer from a MAJOR cable TV network, "Let's face it, very unfortunately, most people don't care about the rape of Black women and girls."

By Lynn Roberts

Reflections: Conference Participants Express Themselves

I FELT...

- Honor, proud to be as one with so many women and men. Sadness for my body and my babies lost by miscarriages, abortion – I love you
- I am amazed to see all these Beautiful women of color. So different and unique in their own right! We have much to learn from each other!
- A sense of connectedness even though I came alone to this conference.
- The morning exercise was very spiritual for me.

I LEARNED...

- A Collective of consciousness – a collective concern with cultures of diversity as on mind, heart truth
- Lots of love, compassion a different approach to do a conference, celebration of our work. Luz' listening exercise was great and very touching
- women of all colors who had a story behind their everyday face
- I learned that Sister Song was the 5th organized movement of color

Day's Highlights: Friday, November 14th

PLENARY PANEL 5: IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT ABORTION: WOMEN OF COLOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES

9:00-10:30 ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 29 of Conference Program

Alice Skenadore ~ Midwife ~ Wise Women Gathering Place: Midwifery in the Native American Community

PLENARY PANEL 6: EACH ONE, TEACH ONE: SHARING YOUR WORK AND EXPERIENCES

10:30—12:00pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 29 of Conference Program

Alejandrina Montoya and Neusa Gaytan ~ Mujeres Latinas En Acción: Fuerza Unidas: Mothers and Daughters Discussing Sex and Reproductive Rights

PLENARY PANEL 7: REPRODUCTIVE OPPRESSION: CONTROLLING OUR FERTILITY

1:00-2:00pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 31 of Conference Program

Kemba Smith ~ Drug Policy Alliance: The War on Drugs and Impact on Women of Color

Stormy Ogden ~ American Indian Advocate and Activist, Volunteer ~ Legal Services for Prisoners with Children: The Prisonification of Indigenous Women

PLENARY PANEL 8: NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

2:45-4:00pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 31 of Conference Program

Laura Jimenez ~ Dominican Women's Development Center: Self-Help and Internalized Oppression: Mentoring and Experiential Learning for Reproductive Health and Activism

SPECIAL PLENARY PANEL: MARCH TO SAVE WOMEN'S LIVES - APRIL 25, 2004

5:00-5:45pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 32 of Conference Program

SCREENING OF "NO!" A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT RAPES AGAINST BLACK WOMEN

7:30-9:00pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Pages 32 and 57 of Conference Program

"No!" is a forthcoming feature-length documentary film that addresses the collective silence of the Black community when Black women and girls are raped by Black men and boys. The film creates a sacred space for Black women and men who are committed to challenging the Black community to look inward and confront this issue. The film takes a powerful look at Black women's lives through a holistic lens addressing the violent manifestations of racial, gender and sexual oppression. Filmmaker Aishah Shahidah Simmons will be present.

SOJOURNER ~ AN EXCERPT FROM "WHORES TO MATRIARCHS: BLACK WOMEN SURVIVORS ON THE EDGE" THE "RIVETING" ONE WOMAN SHOW ABOUT SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAT PUTS TO REST THE STEREOTYPES THAT HAVE CLOAKED BLACK WOMEN IN SILENCE, SHAME AND INVISIBILITY.

9:00-9:30pm ~ Georgia Ballroom ~ Page 32 and 59 of Conference Program



The logo for SisterSong features the word "Sister" in a large, elegant, blackletter-style font, with a small heart symbol above the 'i'. Below it, the word "Song" is written in a similar but slightly smaller font. The 'S' in "Sister" is particularly large and decorative.

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