

# COLLECTIVE VOICES

CONFERENCE NEWS - EXPERIENCES - REFLECTIONS - HIGHLIGHTS

Sunday, November 16, 2003

Volume 1 : Issue 4

## Virginia "Ginger" Davis Floyd: SisterSong's Champion

Virginia "Ginger" Davis Floyd said she's doing the work of the spider by making the connections.

Floyd, a trained medical doctor, said she and her colleagues make the connections by working to organize the preservation and restoration of African traditional medicine and indigenous science.

Floyd, 52, said she's encountered people who practice traditional African medicine who seem to have ways to heal people who have HIV/AIDS, diabetes and high blood pressure. An Atlanta resident, Floyd said most of those practicing traditional African medicine are women.

Floyd is the Executive Director of PROMETRA USA, a non-profit international organization that is an institution of scientific and cultural research, medical practice and an instrument for African integration and international relations.

Floyd received a plaque of appreciation from the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective on Thursday, Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> during the SisterSong Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights National Conference's opening plenary. The other women

who were honored by the Collective were Byllye Y. Avery, Luz Rodriguez, Reena Marcelo and Mary Long.

Floyd shares that she has been involved since the early days of the reproductive justice movement as she lovingly touches her friend Byllye Avery's arm as she walks by Floyd.

"I'm here because of this lady," Floyd said with a smile looking at Avery. "I was part of this (movement) on the fringe."

Floyd said a majority of the early reproductive justice activists have had Avery as a mentor and as a dear friend. "For a long time, Byllye and I were the tag team," Floyd said as she remembered the early years of her reproductive rights work. "I did the epidemiology, and Byllye did her work (as an activist)." Floyd said she learned a lot from Avery, such as the practice of self-help that was developed by the Black Women's Health Project.

The enthusiastic Floyd said her life's journey has been interesting and credits God as her life guide. Floyd, a Cape May, N.J. native, said she's been at the right place at the right time on many occasions. Floyd cited her work at the Ford Foundation in New York City for five years as one of her career

achievements. It was at the Ford Foundation that Floyd was able to work on a number of projects with fellow SisterSong foremother, Reena Marcelo.

Floyd said her work at the Ford Foundation was a tremendous learning experience where she and her colleagues explored many issues, including high mortality rates for African American infants. Floyd's work emphasized community-based reproductive health organizations and those that worked on the issue of reproductive tract infections.

"Lo and behold, SisterSong was born," Floyd said with a gentle smile.

To Floyd, SisterSong is special because the Collective enables women of color to empower themselves and focus on reproductive health issues. "We looked at issues that impacted the health of minority women," Floyd said.

When at the Ford Foundation, Floyd had the opportunity to "sit at the feet of medicine people."

Floyd's face becomes more engaged and animated as she shares her fascination with and dedication for making the connection between traditional indigenous healing and the search to cure some of today's imminent ailments

such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes and high blood pressure. "I found out I was inadequately trained (as a healer)," Floyd said.

Currently, Floyd is a Visiting Scholar in traditional knowledge at Spelman College, and serves as a faculty member in the Spelman Independent Scholars Program.

Floyd received her undergraduate education at Spelman College and Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. She earned her Medical Doctorate from Howard University College of Medicine in 1976. Floyd completed her training in inter-

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## Ginger Floyd (Continued)

nal medicine at Emory/Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta in 1979 and earned her Masters in Public Health at Emory University in 1987. Floyd reflected upon her career and life achievements, and said, "I just love what I do."

For more information on the PROMETRA International Institution visit [www.prometra.org](http://www.prometra.org).

By Sararesa Begay

### CORRECTION ~ SATURDAY *Collective Voices*

The Editor wishes to correct an error in the article on Luz Rodriguez. Ms. Rodriguez works at The Foundation Center and not at the Ford Foundation as stated. The final quote attributed to Ms. Rodriguez should have read "to be teaching fundraising for free, it's very gratifying."

We sincerely apologize to Ms Rodriguez for these errors.

## SisterSong Inductee: *Womyn of Color Building Project*

### *Womyn of Color Building Project*

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November 13, 2003

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective  
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Organizers and Participants of SisterSong 2003 ,

I am so happy that this conference is taking place and although I was not personally able to attend, I have already benefited from this historic event. Because one of our board members was able to attend through her place of employment, I was able to engage and process the opening leadership session with her. Let me just say that it was delightful to hear her recap the day, very Powerful! Just knowing that it is going on fills my soul and makes me sure that now more than ever is the time to remember what we already know and demand our future be based on *our* needs.

Thank you so much for providing this opportunity to women of color. I hope that in the future Womyn of Color Building Project will be more closely connected to SisterSong.

Sincerely,

Roxanne Anderson

Roxanne Anderson  
Executive Director  
Womyn of Color Building Project

## Laura Jimenez: *Seeing SisterSong Through Change & Growth*

Laura Jimenez is pleased to hear so many diverse voices during this year's SisterSong Reproductive Health & Sexual Rights National Conference.

"We've had an opportunity to hear so many voices," Jimenez said. "I feel positive about building the

(reproductive Justice) movement and Development Center in Washington Heights, N.Y. continuing."

Jimenez is the National co-Coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, the Development Officer at the Dominican Women's Resource

Jimenez, a New York City resident, said this conference is the fifth attempt to refocus and strengthen the women of color reproductive movement. From Jimenez's perspective, "there isn't

## Laura Jimenez (Continued)

really a discordance," and "women of color can do the work as long as they stick together in the process."

The 30-year-old Jimenez is a 10-year reproductive rights activist who has worked with the National Latina Health Organization. Jimenez, a Santa Barbara, California native, began her work as a reproductive activist when she was in college as a member of a student Latina women's organization called, "Mujer."

Jimenez shared that it was then that she learned about sexual abuse against women in the Hispanic community, but that community members and leaders were quiet about the abuse.

"That (experience) moved me, it was 'bearing witness,'" Jimenez said,



adding that her reproductive activism continued when she moved to the San Francisco Bay-area.

Jimenez worked with the National Latina Health Organization to educate Latina women, especially young women, about sex education and life choices.

"I mentored one (teenage) woman about pregnancy," Jimenez said, noting that teen mothers need

information about pregnancy and life choices in their own language.

Jimenez, the mother of 2-year-old Quisqueya, said there doesn't seem to be a lot of information about pregnancy and life choices for teen mothers.

Jimenez said she chose to do reproductive justice work because it's healing to her, and she has something to offer other women of color so that they too, can heal.

"Somehow I'm supposed to help them," Jimenez said. "I'm supposed to be a bridge." Jimenez added that she is strong for those women who need help, and that women don't have to heal by themselves. "All women heal together", Jimenez reflected.

Jimenez has an M.A. in Ethnic Studies from San Francisco State University.

By Sararesa Begay

## Microbicides: A Hopeful Alternative for HIV/STD Prevention

Twenty two years into the AIDS crisis and at a time when the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is reaching epidemic proportions, the only public health messages to women about the prevention of HIV and other STDs are "be monogamous" or "use condoms." But for many women, these messages are inadequate or unrealistic at best. At worst, they are life-threatening. Millions of women lack both the power within relationships to insist on condom use and the social and economic resources to abandon partners who put their health at risk.

Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, represent a women's health emergency. Not only are women at greater risk of acquiring STDs than men but, in most cases, the consequences of contracting STDs – including infertility, ectopic pregnancy, and cervical cancer – are more serious and permanent for women. Today, women are the fastest-growing population with HIV/AIDS, and most become infected through heterosexual contact.

Women need products designed to protect them against HIV/AIDS and

other STDs. Research is now underway to develop such products, known as "microbicides," -- substances that could substantially reduce the transmission of HIV and other STDs when used in the vagina or rectum. Microbicides could come in many forms, including gels, creams, suppositories, films, or in the form of a sponge or vaginal ring. They would provide an alternative method of disease protection for women and couples who, for a variety of reasons, cannot use condoms to prevent HIV/STD transmission.

Although microbicides would probably never be as effective as condoms in preventing infection, women who are seldom or never able to use condoms could lower their overall risk of infection by using a microbicide. Moreover, women want microbicides: a recent survey by the Alan Guttmacher Institute estimated that 21 million U.S. women are interested in a microbicide product. In other acceptability studies conducted in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and South Africa, both women and men expressed willingness to use microbicides.

With sufficient human and scientific

resources, a microbicide product could be available to women within five years. However, large pharmaceutical companies are simply not interested in investing in microbicide development. They are skeptical about whether microbicides would be profitable after the costs of research and marketing are met because such products would have to be inexpensive to be made available globally. They have also raised concern over issues of liability, since microbicides would promise to offer some protection against life-threatening illness.

Absent leadership by major pharmaceutical companies, a number of universities and small, independent biopharmaceutical firms have taken the lead on microbicide research. However, researchers estimate that it costs up to \$50 million to complete research on an existing compound (and twice that to start from scratch with a new compound) -- far more than many of these small companies and nonprofit entities have the capacity to invest.

Public funds are necessary to fill the gaps in the research and development process and to create incentives for greater investment by private industry.

## Microbicides (Continued)

Without federal leadership and funding, a microbicide is not likely to be available anytime soon. Less than two percent of the budget for HIV/AIDS-related research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is now being spent on microbicide research.

Public health officials and members of Congress need to wake up and take notice. A dramatic increase in the number of potential microbicides under investigation has occurred in just the last three years. *We have everything we need to bring a microbicide to market within five years – except the money.*

Congress can remedy that by directing

NIH to increase the resources (staff and funding) it puts toward microbicide research. Such increases would make it possible for topical microbicide development to proceed as efficiently as possible, without delays in the research pipeline.

Microbicides will give women all over the world one more way of protecting themselves against the ravage of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. The time for them is now.

Information provided by the Global Campaign for Microbicides. For more information, visit the Global Campaign for Microbicides online at [www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org)



## A Profile in Service: Nkenge Toure

We, as women of color reproductive justice activists, have come a distance, said veteran activist Nkenge Toure. The politically conscious and strong Toure has been involved in community organizing and activism since she was a 14-year-old student at a predominantly white school.

The 51-year-old Torre served as a facilitator for the Friday's special plenary panel titled "March to Save Women's Lives, April 25, 2004".

Torre noted that this year's SisterSong Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights National Conference has inspired her and that she is hopeful about the future of reproductive justice. Toure shared that during the conference she has appreciated the opportunity to see, hear, meet and reconnect with many pioneering reproductive justice activists.

She also noted, "I'm very encouraged by the young women and the college students who are here," Torre said, adding that she is pleased to see 15-year-old Marisol Meijia, the youngest conference presenter, attending the event.

Toure highlighted that there are women from different socio-economic classes, and a lot of "newbies."

Torre said "newbies" are women new to the reproductive justice movement. She observed that numerous women activists at the conference have combined their formal education with activism.

"Some women were able to integrate their academics and their activism," Torre said, noting that in the early days of the reproductive justice movement there was a strong dichotomy between "academic women" and "activist women".

Torre's involvement in the Movement includes anti-rape, domestic violence awareness and women's health work, as well as the Black Panther Party. Among the many she has worked with along the way, Torre noted that she once worked along side sister activist, Loretta Ross, at the Rape Crisis Center in Washington, D.C.



Toure reflected on a memorable women's gathering called "Third World Women Against Violence," that was held in Washington, D.C. in 1980. Only 60 women from across the country attended that event. From that women's gathering, Torre said, "the reproductive justice movement has grown".

For Toure, one of the highlights of her activist career was participating in "The World Decade of Women" in 1985 in Kenya. At the time, the gathering in Kenya was the biggest gathering of women of color that provided women an opportunity to network, communicate and work together to address their specialized concerns.

Talking with Toure, one gets a clear picture of the accomplishments and struggles of the women of color who have committed to this work. From the 70's, through the 80's and 90's and to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women of color have continued their work, often without recognition or adequate support. It is humbling to think that one day activists might recall this year's SisterSong conference as an important and empowering time for the women of color reproductive health and rights movement.

By Sararesa Begay

## Collective Voices: *To Be Continued ...*

*Collective Voices*, the SisterSong Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights Conference newsletter will continue to be published (albeit not as frequently) after the Conference.

This will allow the SisterSong Collective to share important developments that occur on the last day of the conference, as well as to allow us all to stay in touch with each other to network and advance our agendas for reproductive and sexual justice for women of color.

The post-conference issues of *Collective Voices* will provide updates on the work of the caucuses and

talking circles that met during the Conference. Those of you who facilitated caucuses or talking circles, are asked to send your notes or any action plans that resulted from your meetings to the Conference Documentation Team by emailing: [info@sistersong.net](mailto:info@sistersong.net).

We also invite Conference participants to share essays, articles or poetry that express your thoughts about the Conference, specific workshops/plenaries or your individual or your organization's plans to further the reproductive justice movement.

*We look forward to hearing from you!*



## Inspiration: *Until Today!* by Iyanla Vanzant

The greatest service I can offer is ... living my life in grace.

Have you ever had the experience of doing something you really love for an extended period of time, only to discover that you no longer want to do what you are doing? For no reason, you are suddenly unhappy being where you are or doing what you are doing. Yet for some reason, there is a gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach that where you are no longer serves you. You may even feel bad because you have no *logical explanation* for it. However, the reason may be that the grace and the blessing have been lifted.

When God's grace and blessing have been lifted from a situation, you will no

longer be able to stay there. Once you have fulfilled the purpose, once you have grown, learned and *gifted* all that is required of you, according to God's purpose, grace is then lifted. When you are in a good situation, the lifting of grace may make you feel guilty. You may want to stay because you don't have a *good reason* to leave. Here's a good one: to stay once God has let go of a situation may take you *out of grace with God*.

There are many ways to know when the grace has been lifted from a situation. The excitement, enthusiasm and fulfillment you once received may have vanished. Perhaps your energy and effort are no longer yielding fruit, or you are achieving a *diminishing return* for the energy you are

expanding. Grace makes your way easy. Grace opens closed doors. Grace will also close doors when God's purpose has been served.

Until today, you may have thought you needed a good reason to leave a good situation even when you don't feel good about being there. Just for today, get still and ask the Holy Spirit to tell you whether or not God's grace has been lifted from where you are. You may not like the answer you get, but it can only serve your best interests to consider it.

*Today, I am devoted to confirming where I must be and what I must do to be covered by grace!*

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## Day's Highlights: Sunday, November 16th

### OPENING CEREMONY

Alice Lovelace, Myth Maker/Word Wizard ~ Director ~ Atlanta Partnership for Arts in Learning, Inc.  
8:30-9:00 ~ Cosby Auditorium ~ Page 48 of Conference Program

### WORKSHOPS IV ~ OUR HISTORY AND OUR RESISTANCE: DEVELOPING A WOMEN OF COLOR MOVEMENT

#### Black and Blues: Violence/Sexual and Reproductive Choices for Young Black Women in the Era of Hip Hop | The Coloredgirls' Burden: Black Women Talking Back Through Their Reproductive Choices & the Visual Arts

Lori Robinson ~ Author, *I Will Survive: The African American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault*;  
Malika Redmond ~ Women's Human Rights Coordinator ~ National Center for Human Rights Education;  
Sharon Powell ~ SLP Services  
9:00-10:30 ~ Cosby Room 214 ~ Page 48 of Conference Program

#### Race, Gender and Justice in the Gene Age: The Politics of Human Biotechnology and the Prospect of a New Eugenics

Marcy Darnovsky ~ Center for Genetics and Society; Committee on Women, Population and the Environment; Rajani Bhatia, Martina Robinson and Marsha Darling  
9:00-10:30 ~ Cosby Room 219 ~ Page 49 of Conference Program

#### Queer Issues and Reproductive Rights

Kierra Johnson ~ Choice USA; Melissa Gordon ~ Tennessee State University Gay Students Association  
9:00-10:30 ~ Cosby Lower Level 27 ~ Page 50 of Conference Program

#### Immigrant and Refugee Women's Access to Reproductive Health

Gemma Ribeiro ~ Immigrant Women's Network ~ Center for Women in Government and Civil Society ~ University at Albany; Mangala Sharma ~ Refugee Women's Network; Eunice Cho ~ National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights; Glory Kilanko ~ Women Watch Afrika  
9:00-10:30 ~ Cosby Lower Level 28 ~ Page 50 of Conference Program

#### Building Our Movement: Organizing in Asian/Pacific Islander and South Asian Communities

Asian and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health: Priyanka Sinha ~ Raksha, Inc.; Dana Ginn Paredes ~ Senior Organizer and Sujatha Jesudason ~ Senior Projects Coordinator

### PLENARY PANEL 11: DEVELOPING OUR COLLECTIVE ACTION AGENDA AS WOMEN OF COLOR

10:30-11:45 ~ Living and Learning Center 2 ~ Page 52 of Conference Program

### SISTERSONG MEMBERSHIP INDUCTION CEREMONY & CONFERENCE CLOSING CEREMONY

11:45-12:00pm ~ Page 52 of Conference Program

### SISTERSONG COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

Membership Lunch ~ 12:00-1:00pm ~ Atrium  
Post-Conference Follow-Up Meeting ~ 1:00-5:00pm ~ Atrium  
Page 52 of Conference Program



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