

ACTIVISTS LEAD CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

The AU Women's Issues Coalition and AU's Student Senate led the community across campus from the paved courtyard outside of Powell Campus Center to Hairpin Turn in a candlelight vigil on Sept. 12 to remember the victims of the World Trade Center disaster and related events.

"The vigil provided an outlet for people to grieve, come together and find solace in each other," said Angie Young, WIC's president.

As the crowd of about 200 gathered and lit their candles, a low murmur resounded. Young and Student Senate President Liz Reina welcomed the group.

Young said the evening's vigil served several purposes. Although the primary goal was to honor the victims, WIC and Senate wanted to encourage students to find a few peaceful moments within the recent chaos to support one another.

Individually, each candle creates a small light, she said. But together, they provide light for the entire group.

Reina, a New York City area resident, expressed her gratitude to the Alfred community for their support during this particularly difficult time. Several of her family members

were in New York City at the time of the attack.

Just before beginning the walk, Young suggested that students look to each other to relight candles extinguished by the breeze.



photo by Erica Robinson

A few students carried two or three candles to represent people who wanted to attend the vigil, but could not.

Above the sound of shuffling feet, voices rose in a small group singing "Amazing Grace."

The group nearly filled Academic Alley before stretching out in pairs and threes on the sidewalk in front of AU's Bartlett, Cannon

and Barresi residence halls.

A few students noticed the silhouette of a woman in the third floor hall window of Barresi Hall. She held her palm to the glass as the group passed by.

Young, leading the group with Reina, recounted the rush of emotion people felt as they looked back to see the trail of candles and dim faces stretching out behind them.

Once at Hairpin, Laurie DeMott, AU's Interfaith advisor, introduced a moment of silence.

"What happened yesterday was real," said DeMott. "But this light is real, too. This grass is real. We are real. Hold on to that," she said.

After a few moments, Young thanked the participants for showing

their support and invited them to stay at Hairpin as long as they liked.

While half of the crowd drifted quietly off, the other half clustered into small groups to sing or listen to solemn patriotic songs.

Young acknowledged the success of the event, while warning about the future.

"I urge people to give blood, give clothing, give anything they can to help the victims," said Young. "It isn't over."

— Ashley Brenon

MY FOUR-FOOT VAGINA

I've changed. My family has had to adjust. I'm not the same wife, mother, sister, or daughter-in-law. There is not one aspect of my daily life that my college education has not affected. Four years ago, before taking my first college course, I had a part-time job, a clean house, free time to watch television with my husband and our kids and a lot less fast food. It's different now. Now my husband catches me up with TV's headline news, my kids know the difference between flame-broiled burgers and fried burgers, and I have a whole lot more to talk about at the dinner table.

"Ted Turner and Jane Fonda split," Dave updates me.

"Oh yeah?" I point to the foil wrapped fish

sandwich, signaling for my son to pass it to me. "I heard she was just in a Broadway play."

David reaches for the double bacon cheeseburger. The kids sort the drinks, popping off plastic lids making sure theirs isn't diet.

"Did you know she performed in—" I stop mid-sentence. Don't say it! Please we're eating! That is not the type of language we use at the dinner table!

I begin again. Avoiding the title of the play, I say, "She performed in the play we are reading in my Women Writers class." Quick thinking! Good job! Nice going!

"What play is that?" my daughter asks.

What? Since when has any one of my chil-

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FROM THE DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

As this edition of the *Alphadelphian* goes to press we will be in the throes of end of semester work and gearing up for the holidays. Beginnings and endings. During the past three months I have been perhaps more acutely aware than usual of who we, Alfred's feminist community, really are. While we were already becoming better at taking the work of the classroom into work in the community, this year began with that premise. WIC chose to focus on issues of violence against women and children, considering both the local and global dilemma. They have already been fundraising and consciousness raising across the campus. With senior Angie Young as producer, we are planning to mount a V-day production of the Vagina Monologues in February all proceeds of which will go toward non-profit programs that address violence against women and children. At least 10 percent of the proceeds will go to women in Afghanistan.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, WIC led a candlelight vigil. Members of our community offered counseling, blood, international fundraisers and money for relief efforts. Professor Emerita Sharon Hoover traveled to NYC and volunteered her services for a week. (She breaded a lot of eggplant among other things.) In the classrooms, teachers performed miracles of balance by keeping focus while finding ways to draw lines of connection between the work of the class and the fearsome press of the outside world.

Our future plans include a two-year Timeline Project headed by Jennifer Pepper. This will result in an installation recognizing the global contributions of women to society, as well as events that have shaped women's lives since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Pepper will be asking all members of the community to contribute in different ways to the project. This will be a wonderful way for us to continue the work of connecting women's political and professional lives to the flux of daily life on a national and international scale.

— Susan Morehouse

FROM THE ALPHADELPHIAN EDITORS

The events of Sept. 11 have left an indelible mark on the face of America. However, in the wake of the tragedy, people have come together across the fault lines of race, class and gender to offer assistance and sympathy. Here at Alfred, students and faculty united to take a stand against the violence and to show support for all affected by the tragedy during a candlelight vigil organized by the Women's Issues Coalition and Student Senate. Student organizations have raised money and held food drives to benefit the Red Cross and the victims. Many students have also given blood to help with the effort.

In this issue of the *Alphadelphian*, some of Alfred's students and faculty respond to these recent events. Violence is a women's issue; it is also a human issue. Other human issues, ranging from cultural taboos to intimate relationships, are also addressed through personal essays, poetry and art work. We are pleased to offer you this assortment of women's voices from our community.

We dedicate this issue of the *Alphadelphian* to all those affected by the Sept. 11 attacks, which is, in effect, truly everyone.

— Angela Young and Sarah Guariglia

The editors of the *Alphadelphian* would like to thank faculty adviser Robyn Goodman for her input and editorial guidance on this issue.

"This country hasn't heard from enough young feminists. We're here, and we have a lot to say about our ideas and hopes and struggles and our place within feminism."

— Barbara Findlen



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IN THE WAKE OF SLEEP

I can remember being five years old and tucked in under my pink quilted bedspread feeling the heat of fear sink in. I always kept the door open and would lie awake for hours praying that the tide of sleepiness would weigh heavily on my eyelids and that I would fall asleep before everyone else went to bed, a rare occurrence. In between my weighted breaths and the rhythmic beats of my heart I could hear the light switches flick quietly down, the letters on the switch reading OFF but the word left unseen in the thick, palpable dark. That was what scared me most of the dark, that there was so much left unseen.

I would turn on the light and in a panicked run would flee down the hallway into my brother's room. I would slide into bed with him, sleeping between the bed and the wall making certain not to disrupt the cocoon that he had wound around his tall lean body before going to bed. I'd lie there shivering with my face pressed against the cool grainless stripes of the wallpaper and fall asleep, assured that my brother would protect me should I encounter evil in my sleep.

Some nights when I was truly petrified I would flick all of the light switches ON in the upstairs hall and pass hurriedly by the tightly shut doors of my brother's and sister's rooms. The stairs rarely creaked when I passed over them because my weight was so slight; it was as though they were untouched. When I made it to my parents' room I would throw myself onto their bed, enveloping myself in their warmed comforter. Their room was a refuge, and they were safety zones where evil could not touch me. I held on desperately to ensure

this, wrapping my leg around my mother and anchoring her to the bed, to me.

My mother kept a framed prayer above the head of my bed as a child. A little girl, around my age, was portrayed kneeling at the foot of her bed with a pink ribbon christening her head.

"Now I lay me down to sleep ... I pray the Lord my soul to keep ... If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take ... May angels guard me through the night and keep me safe 'til morning light." I would chant this prayer every night three times before falling asleep for reassurance, a forewarning to evil spirits that I knew the word of God. I never thought of what the meaning of the prayer was, it was just added insurance, a weight that I had on my side.

At twenty years old I am still frightened of the dark, the ridiculous kind of fright inhabits me almost every night before I fall asleep. I long for someone to sleep next to, a warm body to comfort and abate my ludicrous notions of death from vampires and the wall opening and swallowing me. I want someone to tell me when I wake at three in the morning with a swollen bladder that it is okay to pee because a hand is not going to reach up through the toilet bowl and pull me through mile stretches of sewer pipes to a cannibalistic den. In that choking dark I crave the comfort of my mother's voice or the knowledge that she is nearby, an invincible protective force whose presence eases my fear.

What is it about sleep that makes us call out for our mothers? Many think that we spend

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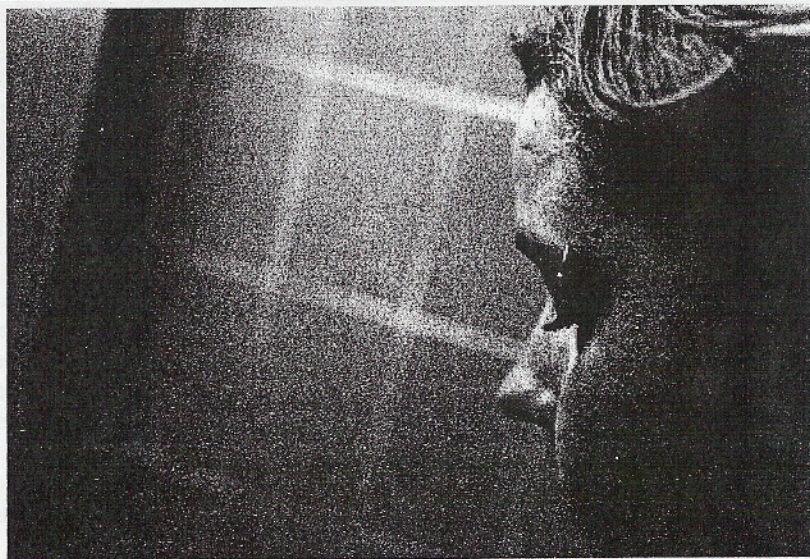
OFF OUR BACKS INTERNSHIP

The office of *off our backs*, the longest continuously published feminist news journal in America, is located in a non-descript basement, barely visible from D.C.'s 18th Street in the Adam's Morgan district. As a matter of fact, I walked past it several times the Sunday before my internship started, checking the address written on my little scrap of paper while perusing the bars, exotic boutiques and ethnic restaurants that would soon become my home away from home. I finally found the front door, nestled down a set of narrow stone steps and behind a heavy, locked gate. The window in the door was covered from the inside with a black garbage bag that rendered the orange "feminism spoken here" poster on the door barely visible. I smiled as I replaced my preconceived notion of the place – a finished, medium-sized building with a ground door entrance and a sign posted in the front, possibly in neon, announcing "OFF OUR BACKS" – with the reality, a sign-less, crumbling, dungeon-esque basement office with a cast-iron metal guard door in the D.C. bar district. I remembered that this is the non-profit world after all. There is no extra money for frills. I rang the doorbell to see if anyone might be in the office to let me take a look around. But again, this is the non-profit world. No extra money to pay for people to come in on Sundays. So I left the basement office and headed back to American University, where I was renting an exorbitantly priced room for the summer.

The next day, I came into the office at 10 a.m. (one of the perks of non-profit work is that the days often start earlier than in the corporate world) and was immediately greeted by Karla Mantilla and Vanessa McMullen, both employees of *oob*. The office was much larger on the inside than appeared possible from the outside, bringing to my mind the old aphorism "you can't judge a book by its cover." A delicious array of sassy feminist posters covered the walls, my favorite of which being one from The Body Shoppe in which an obese, nude Barbie doll lies artistically posed on a green divan with a caption reading "there are 3 billion women who don't look like supermodels and only 8 who do."

Within the walls of the office there was a palpable intensity; I could feel the power of the ideas, the sense of unity and the demand for revolution. Within the walls, there was also a very large mess – of books needing to be

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Will Linn, matte photograph, "Untitled" (from a series called "Armor")

"SUSTAIN"

As projects go, this one has probably been the most meaningful and has made the largest impact on my audience. What began as a relatively simple statement has now become intricately linked with the events of Sept. 11. The origins of my project have to do with a conversation I had over the summer with a very wise man who challenged me to artistically represent the concept of "sustainability." We spoke of humans' lack of interaction with nature and the environment and fragile dependence on everything man-made. In a strange twist of fate, one of the man-made images I selected was the World Trade Center. Never having been to New York City, I did not immediately recognize the image and didn't realize it was in my painting until the night of the attacks. I then realized that the meaning of my project had intensified. I think that it has become a piece that will have a different and changing meaning for everyone, depending on their perspective on the tragedy and whatever happens during the next few years.

- chrissanford



chrissanford, "Sustain"

MY FOUR-FOOT VAGINA

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dren wondered what I was reading? Kids don't ask parents the names of plays! That's a parent's exclusive brand of interrogation. Now I have to say the title of the play. Now I have to say "the word" right here at the dinner table in front of my husband, son and daughter. Be cool, take even breaths. Hey, it's just a body part. Just a name, no big deal, come on, you can do it, you're a big girl.

"Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues," I say, trying to sound as if I just said The Sound of Music. "Who wants fries?"

"Are there boys in the class?" my 14-year-old daughter Nicole asks.

"Yes." I laugh. No one else is giggling. Why am I? I'm uncomfortable, that's why. I hope the subject will be dropped.

"Does he have a part in the play?" she continues.

"Yes." I'm no longer looking at her. I try not to encourage any more discussion.

"That's funny." Now my 18-year-old son speaks up. This is the kid who hasn't spoken at the dinner table since the seventh grade.

"Why is that funny?" I ask. I'm anxious for this topic to change but now I want to hear Dwayne's thoughts on this subject.

"It's funny because he doesn't really have a part in the play. He doesn't have a vagina."

Everyone lets out a "yeah" type of laugh.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SISTERHOOD

Note: I wrote this some years ago while thinking about my ex-sister-in-law who refused to divorce herself from her ex's family and who had just been a big help to me following my divorce —

Dear Gene:

We have, I think, the kind of closeness women earn when, at some point in their lives, they drop all habitual guards, and reveal their inadequacies to each other or when, in a crisis, one claims the necessary devoted attendance of the other, knowing that at some later time these roles may reverse.

From that time on, the interest they feel in each other's well-being is not feigned; neither is it a political statement or an alliance against the masculine world. Whether ever referred to or not, this ongoing concern is one of the firm realities in their unconscious perceptions of existence, it is a tensile, animate connection supporting the more commonplace events of their once-again orderly lives.

A phone call, a postcard, a brief visit — and the dormant memories of past needs and responses revive — the bond is re-established...

So that is my definition of Sisterhood. I only wish I knew how to extend these feelings to all women, including those whose politics and/or life-styles I do not understand, and even those who seem to lack compassion for anyone who does not fit their definition of Sisterhood!

— Carol Burdick

We're all a little tense now.

But Dwayne is right. It's ironic that a male will be reading the monologue of a woman finding her vagina, her center, her identity, after living around it for over 40 years.

"Then I'll make him one," I tell my family. Now my entire family thinks we better change the subject right away.

So what exactly is this female body part down there? The vagina. It's approximately four inches in length. Certainly not very big to have a book and Broadway play produced in its honor. In fact, it resembles a collapsed tube. Not exactly a glamorous description. It's the passage that connects the vulva to the uterus. The vulva is purely for pleasure and the uterus

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MY FOUR-FOOT VAGINA

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is for reproduction, and right there smack in between a sensual woman and a nurturing female is the vagina. It connects our two worlds. Layers of muscle and connective tissue surround the vagina. The vaginal walls stretch and contract during intercourse. During childbirth the vagina will expand to permit the delivery of a baby. Vaginal secretions keep the vagina clean and help maintain proper acidity levels to prevent infections. Vaginal secretions also provide lubrication for intercourse. The vagina is amazing.

"May I help you?"

"Yes, I'd like two yards of this red-dish-pink fleece," I tell the clerk at the fabric store.

"Six feet of fabric?" my daughter asked, amazed.

"I want it to cover Jason," I answer. "He'll most likely be sitting the whole time, so it must be at least four feet, plus some extra for seam allowances and the hem line."

"Oh, isn't this cozy? Such a warm, happy color. Are you making a robe?" the clerk asks as she flips the bolt over and over, thump, thump, thump, on the cutting counter.

My daughter is enjoying this moment. Nicole knows I'm buying this material for my Women Writers class. She knows I'm planning to sew this into a semi-circle, as if it is a cross cut section of a vagina. This fabric will create a background for Jason's scene in the play. Nicole waits for me to answer the clerk. She smiles, looks at me, looks at the fabric, looks at the clerk and looks back to me. Her eyes are laughing at me. She wants to see if I will tell the clerk my purpose for buying this fabric.

Now I must decide. Do I tell this kind clerk, who looks as if she lives down the road from Dorothy Gale's Auntie Em, that this cozy, warm, happy fleece is for my four-foot vagina? My four-foot vagina that will be going around the young man in my class who doesn't have his own? I watched Nikki's eyebrows arch high waiting for me to tell the clerk why I'm buying this fabric. I see the letters h-y-p-o-c-r-i-t-e skip across those two little bridges above her watery blue eyes. I know she is remembering all of those mothers-daughter talks about 'all natural' and

'nothing to be ashamed of.'

"No, not a robe," I say. "I'm making a prop for a play."

Names are powerful words. Even nicknames can alter the world's impression of you. My parents named me Rebecca Marie Gates. Growing up, my family called me Becky.

Rebecca, the woman who authored the papers they assigned. I liked hearing the way they said Rebecca when calling on me in class. Knowing they thought I could support a rich, strong, formal name as Rebecca made me feel worthwhile.

Dave and I had two sons, ages 4 and 5,

when our daughter was born. When it came to "naming parts," my husband and I were always anatomically correct with our sons. 'This is your penis' and 'No, you don't have a tail' and 'I don't care if Zack down the street calls it a wee-wee, that's not what it is.' Then came Nicole.

"Whoa! Where'd her penis go?" the boys wondered as I changed her diaper for the first time after returning home from the hospital.

"That's her girly-body," I told them.

"WHAT?" David said in disbelief.

I turned to David confused. He didn't expect me to really tell our 4 and 5-year-old sons that she has a vagina! The word is sacred, not to be said aloud. In fact, I don't remember hearing the word until I was in middle school.

"Our sons have a penis and our daughter has a girly-body?" Dave was shocked.

He was right. It has a proper, formal name. I was being unfair. Unfair to Matt and Dwayne, but mostly unfair to Nicole. Unfair to myself. Softly I told the boys, "That's her vagina," and I continued diapering her.

With the sewing machine on the dining room table and six feet of brilliant red fabric spread out on the floor and two hula-hoops cut in half waiting to become the supporting wall of my vagina, there was no

way anyone in the house could avoid this creative project. My dining room is physically located in the center of the home. My family receives nourishment here. One has to pass through it in order to access any other part of the home. I can see the front door from my chair behind the sewing machine. Everyone must go through here before experiencing the rest of the world. Without realizing it, I had picked the perfect place to make my project. My dining room is my home's vagina.

EXCERPT FROM "TAMPONS"

A STUDENT ESSAY

In my experience, almost everyone (both male and female) with whom I've discussed the topic of menstruation believes periods are a painful, gross, dirty and unhealthy burden.

Not only is the menstruation process perceived as negative, so is the part of the body through which we bleed into the world: the vagina. When researching origins of the word "vagina" and the branching euphemisms, I was disappointed (although not surprised, when I think about our society's beliefs about menstruation) when I found that the euphemisms, now considered insulting and derogatory, actually do more justice to women than "vagina."

For example, the word "cunt." Although women shudder at the sound of it, it is directly related to words of the same meaning from India, China, Ireland, Rome and Egypt. All of these words were either titles of respect for women, priestesses and witches or derivatives of the names of various goddesses.

Etymologically, "vagina" originates from a word meaning sheath or sword. This link relates to our history of phallic worship, especially in early Western religions such as Catholicism. The penis is seen as strong and weapon-like, if functioning properly. The vagina is seen as a passive hole, waiting to be completed by the insertion of a penis. In the words of Inga Muscio, the feminist author of *Cunt*, "Ain't got no vagina." Like Muscio, I'm not going to call such a fabulous part of my body by a name suggesting it's passive, incomplete and powerless. I'll take my "cunt," thanks.

— Meagan Bisbee

Becky sounds perky, less formal than Rebecca. My dad called me Little-Bitty-Beck. I liked it when he called me that. Marie is my mother's name. She was called Mary. Once, when I was 6 years old, my sister called me Boolah-Boolah. I cried. When I was 36 I enrolled at Corning Community College. I signed my papers Rebecca G. Fowler. The professors did not know me as Becky, Little-Bitty-Beck or Boolah-Boolah. They did not know any of the details of my life leading up to my enrollment. They knew me only as

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NEWS FROM FEATURED WOMEN'S STUDIES FACULTY

Cecilia Beach continues to study social and political theater by French women playwrights. Her article "Marie Lenéru and the Theater of Ideas" is forthcoming in Women in French Studies, and she is currently preparing a paper titled "Witnessing War in Women's Theater" to be presented at the International Colloquium on Twentieth-Century French Studies in the spring.

Carol Burdick claims the highlight of her summer was attending the first annual Rachel Carson conference at East Boothby, Maine. Nearly 100 attendees made a most gregarious mix of writers, academics and environmentalists. She greatly enjoyed giving a paper in which she talked about her "Place in the Universe" environmental lit class, Allegany County landscape and the fight against a local nuclear dump siting.

Vicki Eaklor loves her new office in Kanakadea. Her article "Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going, and Who Gets to Say?" was just published in Modern American Queer History (Temple University Press, 2001), a textbook edited by Allida M. Black. Black was our 1998 Riley lecturer. She has recently written four book reviews for the NWSA Journal, Journal of the History of Sexuality, New York History, and the CLGH Newsletter. She recently attended the Annual Conference of the Oral History Association in St. Louis.

Robyn Goodman is writing an article on how to improve the teaching of women, minority and the media classes. She was appointed to a presidential task force that will work to make the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication as international as possible. She also spoke on how to improve coverage of gay and lesbian issues at the annual National Lesbian and Gay Journalism Association convention in Dallas, Texas.

Rie Hachiyangi recently conducted a six-week research project on Japanese papermaking in Japan this summer and visited several papermaking villages. In the fall, she had a solo exhibition at Robert C. Williams American Museum of Papermaking in Atlanta, GA. The solo exhibition and her interview were broadcast on CNN International in October.

Sharon Hoover sent the final manuscript for her book Willa Cather Remembered to the University of Nebraska Press. The following

week, she traveled to New York City to serve as a volunteer, working to feed rescuers there. She worked at the American Friends Service Committee to develop a list of helpful web sites as resources for people who wish to respond to the attacks of Sept. 11.

Linda Mitchell was in the UK this past summer for five and a half weeks on an AU summer faculty grant to work on a book project. This autumn she gave a paper on didactic imagery in illuminated English Psalters at the Mid-Hudson Medieval Group. She will be going to St. Louis for the Midwest Medieval History conference (she is program chair for the 2002 conference) in a couple of weeks. Mitchell continues to work on a new book on noble families and the creation of the English political community.

Gary Ostrower spent much of the summer campaigning for his wife, the first woman ever appointed County Court Judge in Allegany County. His, and her, efforts were unsuccessful as she sought election to a full term. He also wrote an article on internationalism for the Encyclopedia of American Foreign Relations, which will be published by Oxford University Press.

Jennifer Pepper was the recipient of an AU summer research grant that allowed her to travel to the West Coast of Ireland to continue research work on "Threads of Identity: The Aran Islands - Inis Mor, Inis Meain and Inis Oirr." There, Pepper was also a guest lecturer at Anam Artists and Writer's Colony in Eyeries, Co. Cork, Ireland. She also participated in a Group Exhibition at Mill Cove Gallery, Castletownbere, Co. Cork, Ireland and received a Funded Artist in Residence Fellowship from Fulton Street Gallery, in Troy, NY.

Karen Porter recently attended the annual meeting of the New York State Sociological Association where she and Bill Hall, Dean of the LAS College, delivered a paper titled "Domestic Violence: His and Hers." Comparing violent characteristics of "domestic incidents," Porter and Hall found that women offenders are not as violent as men offenders, contradicting the literature that argues that gender symmetry in family violence exists today.

Becky Prophet spent her summer in the theatre. Following a high school one-acts festival at AU, she also directed a theatre day camp for children. The two-week camp concluded with a camper-created pair of plays, one based on

Cinderella and the other based on *The Snow Queen*. She also spent two weeks directing a "whodunit" farce titled *The Butler Did It!* at Bristol Valley Theatre in Naples. Immediately following that, she directed a staged reading of *The Good Doctor* for Alfred Community Theatre. Then she spent two weeks in Ireland with her family. Upon returning to AU, she began directing *The House of Blue Leaves*.

Zakia Robana gave a paper last May on Tunisian women at a conference in Cincinnati, and also submitted it for publication. Last summer she spent three weeks on the island of Jerba in Tunisia interviewing two older women on the celebrations of the oral tradition. She is in the process of translating the interviews from Tunisian Jerbian to English. At AU, she is working closely with foreign students to help them make their own place on campus. Lately, she has been talking to area schools on Islamic culture with a special emphasis on Muslim women.

Pamela Schultz is teaching classes, hanging out with her amazingly brilliant and beautiful daughter, and continuing work on her manuscript "The Other Side of Silence: What Child Sex Offenders Say about Their Crimes." At this point, she has it two-thirds completed and is beginning to search for an agent and/or publishers.

Fiona Tolhurst's major project this year was to revise and expand an article on how historical and literary sources in the Middle Ages represent Eleanor of Aquitaine. The article examines how literary and historical depictions of women with political power tend to fall into similar patterns of praise or vilification. She is currently finishing two other articles, one on female figures in Chaucer and one on male-female relations in Malory.



Alfred's Women's Issues Coalition meets every Tuesday at 5:20 p.m. in the Multicultural Suite on the first floor of Powell Campus Center. Everyone is welcome to attend.

IN THE WAKE OF SLEEP

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our lives trying to recreate the comfort and stability that we experienced in our stay in our mother's womb. This explains why people desire to live close to a body of water, the tide and the sound of water being reminiscent of the tempo of our mother's body. If we spend the entirety of our lives searching for this, then why are we so quick to separate ourselves from our own children? We divorce ourselves from our children, parts of us, robbing them of familiarity and place them in "comfort"; a mobile plucking out the foreign chords of "Rock a bye baby" a substitute for our mother's voice, and thick blankets in place of the human warmth and cradle that arms offer.

When we are born most of us are placed in a crib or cradle of some sort, separating us from our familiar environment, disconnecting us from the comfort of sleep we knew before. Why have we as Americans perpetuated a one-hundred fifty-year habit of placing our children in cribs instead of having them sleep next to us and hear our own heart beat?

It is proven that infants who sleep next to their parents spend less time in level III sleep, the state of deep sleep in which apneas are prone to occur. Babies breathing habits are maintained by those who surround them. The breathing of a healthy parent could prevent the tragedy of SID occurring. As members of our mother's womb we fall asleep and rise to the beating of our mother's heart. We are in sync with the tide of heartbeat.

The only pictures of my maternal grandfather that I have ever seen are of him sitting on a cement porch, long trousered legs extended, and my mother, a pixyish five-year-old, seated between his open knees. His face appears handsome and timeless but I can't tell if it is because of the grainy black and white photograph or the structure of his face, a long oval, graced with deep-set lonesome eyes.

My mother told me that every night before she would fall asleep her father would brush back her dark, crooked bangs and kiss her pale forehead where the sun couldn't leave its colonies of freckles. He would pull the blankets to her chin, tuck them over her narrow shoulders and turn out the ceiling lamp. She said that he would often return later on, in the opaque dark of night, and turn on the hall light so that his long body was a dark frame illuminated in the blanched light of the corridor.

My grandfather was married to another woman before he met my grandmother. Together they had a daughter that died when she was seven. She was playing outside her home using her roller skates, a birthday pres-

ent from my grandfather, and had fallen and hit her head on the sidewalk. My grandfather, seeing no blood and his daughter appearing fine, sent her to bed early that night when she complained of a headache and fatigue. He probably tucked her in and kissed her forehead (did she have bangs like my mother?) and told her goodnight. Maybe he hummed her his favorite Irish lullaby that my own mother hummed to me, or maybe he told her a fairy tale of golden knights and maidens. She died during the night of a cerebral hemorrhage, and my grandfather found her lifeless body mocking sleep under her handmade afghan.

Letting Go

This hunched, black-mantled
miser of the past
so long intent on hoarding
the fool's gold of memories,
must drop the cloak
and turn away from the piled heap,
its gleams of blame, bitterness,
unclench the fists,
stretch the huddled bones,
stand empty-handed,
and test the daylight,
shivering with release.

Carol Burdick

When he checked on my mother at night did he monitor her breaths, counting the seconds between inhales and exhales to make certain that her diaphragm would rise and fall? My grandfather did this every night until my mother was seventeen and he passed on. He was trying to make up for the one time when he didn't check. He was trying to shield his daughter by guarding her from his own fears, lest they come true. The problem is that people cannot be kept safe, and children are mortal. We all grow from children to adults and we dissolve our ties of reliance and security.

At night, and in the indeterminate darkness of early morning, is when we are the most vulnerable. This is the time when potential occurrences bother us the most, things preying and feeding on our conscience. Is this because we are left to our own psyche and the darkness that it provides? The thoughts that swim through our liquid subconscious are powerful. They wake us from sleep and provide the moisture from which our insecurities grow.

It was normally about five in the morning when I would hear my sister Kathryn rise, dress herself and creep silently down the hall and the stairs to the front door for her morning run, her steps measured and concise. After the door would close I heard my mother rise from her bed and patter around the kitchen, rearranging canisters and sweeping the dust into anthill piles on the floor, making trails with the brittle straw bristles. She would sweep it into a dustpan and throw it away, cleaning up the debris that living things had left behind, decomposed particles of life. Right before Kathryn would swing open the front door my mother would scatter swiftly back to her room and shut the door.

Kathryn would appear at the breakfast table haggard and slumped. Her face had begun to look pinched, as though her bones were too sharp to stay inside her thin skin. It was as though there was an absence of flesh and blood between the two surfaces. She would sit in front of her bowl of cereal, allowing the colorful rings to separate and disintegrate into the runny skim milk that she insisted my mother buy. It was a watery blue and it was beautiful the way the colors would bleed into the thin liquid.

Kathryn would never eat it, leaving the cereal to sit there like a swimming collage. My siblings and I were bent over like animals to a trough, slurping the milk over the round lips of the bowls and wiping our milk mustaches with the cuff of our sleeves.

One morning I heard Kathryn wake up and as usual she walked almost silently in her ritual procession, but I didn't hear the door open. Instead I heard a muted cry and the draw of a gaping breath. It was staggered breathing, with long periods of silence between the inhales and exhales. I crept down the hall and peered between the bars in the banister to see my mother crouched on the steps in her nightgown weeping into Kathryn's white T-shirt. Kathryn was being cradled in my mother's arms like an infant, her gaunt legs draped over my mother's knees. Her back was facing me and through the light cotton of her T-shirt her knobby spine was exposed.

My mother never said a word, not that morning or any one that followed. Kathryn left for college, fragile and hollow looking. The day she left my mother took me onto her lap, my knees hooked over her own and held me a little too tightly, squeezing my waist, trying to hold on to some kind of human touch. There would be years of hospital treatments, nutritionists, breakdowns and counseling to follow. There would be so much hurt, long

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MY FOUR-FOOT VAGINA

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"Hey, Dave can you help me?" I call out. He comes in from the TV room. "Hon, could you hold up my vagina up while I insert the hula-hoops? I want to see if I sewed it straight."

"The hula-hoops keep slipping out the end. I think you'll have to staple them into the sides," Dave tells me. I get the staple gun and begin to staple while Dave holds the fabric straight.

If someone had told me four years ago that because of a Women Writers class one day my husband would be in the dining room holding my four-foot vagina while I tried to staple it, I would have been offended and very worried. I am superstitious. I'm sure I would have remembered that premonition and made sure never, ever to sign up for any kind of Women Writers course. But here we are.

"Be careful, don't staple your finger," Dave says. "What would we tell the doctor? 'Gee Doc, I was holding up my wife's vagina while she was stapling it but she missed and got her finger?'"

In class, as Jason sits on a chair and reads the monologue, I stand behind him holding the four-foot tall fabric sculpture that is a cross section view of the vagina. He reads straightforwardly, matter-of-fact, about a woman who never accepted that her vagina was her identity, her center. As Jason reads this woman's story, as this woman locates her vagina, this fabric vagina creates a semi-circle that surrounds his back and his shoulders. Jason is centered, just like the woman he is reading

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Online Resources: Women in Afghanistan

<http://www.rawa.org> - This is the web site for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. This site offers information and suggests several things we can do as activists to help the cause of women's oppression in Afghanistan.

<http://www.wluml.org> - This is the web site for Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an informational site regarding women whose lives are governed by Islam. The purpose is to promote autonomy for women in Muslim countries.

<http://www.feminist.org/afghan/intro.asp> - This is a part of the Feminist Majority's Campaign to stop gender apartheid web site that offers much information on the plight of women in Afghanistan, as well as activist resources.

<http://www.amnesty.org> - Amnesty International's web site. This site offers several different sources of information on Afghanistan and the Taliban.

<http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2001/10/02/fatima/index.html> - This website offers an article on a woman who is part of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), and other women who are risking their lives to subvert the Taliban.

about. Not one person in this classroom, male or female, can deny the presence and enormity of this fabulous body part.

I have changed. My family has changed. Sometimes change hurts. Sometimes change

helps. Who could have ever imagined, four years ago, my children asking me at the dinner table, "Well, Mom? How did the class like your vagina?"

— Rebecca Fowler

OFF OUR BACKS INTERNSHIP

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organized and filed into the library, of letters needing responses, of articles to sort. I was a little surprised at the state of things, but again, this is often what the non-profit world looks like – messy and a bit disorganized, often because there is no money to pay for these things to be better kept.

On the first day, I met the six young women I would be spending my summer working with – young women from all over the country that were committed to feminism and ending the oppression in this country and all over the world. To this day we still keep in touch – and I would definitely say my favorite part of my summer experience was meeting these women and getting to work with them.

One of our first tasks was getting the office into order. The six of us each received different tasks to take care of; like organizing the back issues, sorting graphics and updating the

databases. With all the extra help, we slowly but surely organized the office organized and created a functioning library and up-to-date mailing database.

All of the interns were also encouraged to write articles. For the July issue, I helped put together news on women's issues around the globe. Then, for August, I discovered my favorite perk of the job: press passes. Thanks to press passes, I was able to see Ani DiFranco and Dar Williams for free, provided I write an article covering the shows. Along the same lines, I was also able to obtain books and music pertaining to women/feminism for review absolutely free provided I write a review. I was able to expand my feminist literary knowledge immensely this summer through the books I had access to at this internship. I highly recommend *Breathing Room* by Patricia Elam and *Gut Symmetries* by Jeanette Winterson. I also highly recommend that everyone listen to Alix Olson, a lesbian feminist spoken-word artist

and folk singer.

However, as much as I learned from the new books and music I was exposed to at *off our backs*, I must say that I learned the most about feminism and life from the people. Karla Mantilla and Vanessa McMullen, our bosses, had much wisdom to share. Vanessa, a Women's Studies graduate student at George Washington University, was close to our age and helped the interns work on bridging the gap between Second and Third Wave Feminism, one of the newer goals of *off our backs*. I feel good about contributing to the longest continuously published feminist newsletter in the country and doing my part to bring *off our backs* into the twenty-first century.

For more information, please check out *off our backs'* web site at <http://www.igc.apc.org/oob/index.htm>, or, better yet, subscribe to *off our backs* directly from the web site!

- Angela Young

NLGJA DALLAS CONVENTION

As a young lesbian with a passion for writing, I was overjoyed when I heard that I had been accepted into the Student Online/Print Project of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association's annual convention. The convention, which was held Sept. 6-9 in Dallas, Texas, was a fantastic opportunity for me to meet gay journalists from newspapers, news stations and magazines across the country. It also gave me a chance to try out my journalism skills because the students acted as reporters and covered all parts of the convention in a daily newsletter for convention-goers. What I did not know was how amazing the experience would be.

I had heard about the convention during the summer when I was an intern for NLGJA in Washington, D.C. NLGJA is an organization

dedicated to promoting fair and accurate coverage of lesbian and gay issues in the media. The group was started by gay journalist Roy Aarons in 1990 and has since blossomed into a nationwide organization with 19 chapters and over 1,000 members. One of my projects as an intern this summer was categorizing the organization's archives, which thoroughly familiarized me with NLGJA's history and impressive accomplishments, among which was fighting for and getting domestic partner benefits in most major news corporations. However, my job, once I got to the convention in Dallas, proved to be much more interesting and exciting than sorting archives.

At the first meeting, I met other students from across the country who were there for the

online/print, broadcasting and radio projects. I also met the mentors for each of the three groups, tenured veterans of the media industry. The three professionals who mentored the online/print project were Michelle Johnson, former editor of the *Boston Globe*; Judith Collins, lead sports designer for the *Daily Press* in Newport News, Virginia; and Bob Weston, Systems Editor at the *Associated Press*' website, *The Wire*, in New York. It was very informative working with these professionals; they gave excellent advice and were very helpful in critiquing our writing and editing.

The convention itself included a job fair, in which many media groups like the *New York Times* and the *Associated Press* were present,

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IN THE WAKE OF SLEEP

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nights of sleeplessness. Why couldn't she help? When had there become an impermeable barrier between a mother and a child? How could she allow her child to experience so much tragedy?

My mother is still a light sleeper, waking at the slightest detection of movement. Can she sense the presence of her children, or is she already awake waiting for one of us to need her?

At least one-third of the American population complain about some sort of experience with insomnia. Stress, environment, noise, depression and being female are noted as causes for this type of sleep disruption. What is most striking on this list is that females are more prone to develop insomnia than men, especially during and after menopause. Could this be due to a desire to procreate again or to have a child to sleep next to?

My mother gave birth to nine children in a span of eighteen years. Most of us are grown and gone, growing out of our safe shell of home. Sometimes I picture my mother lying under her heavy and intricately stitched quilt with her long fingers laced over her empty womb. Her flannel nightgown is thinned and

sometimes in the morning light of breakfast time, transparent.

The hot flashes that keep her up at night burn under her pale, freckle-spattered skin that is so similar to my own. What does that heat feel like? Is it the kind that makes sweat seep through the hairline like small drops of water,

fueled by her children? Is the anger burning because after literally years of being pregnant, carrying weight in her own body and taxing her back, her body, sacrificing her youth to morning sickness, car seats, baby vomit, and midnight feedings she is left as vacant as an evicted building, with demanding tenants

beating at her womb, sucking at her breasts. How often did she look at me with tenderness while I was in her arms, nestled and belonging? Does she lie awake while the ungrateful children that she nurtured for so long sleep the sleep of the content?

Does she feel withered and bitter after we have ravaged her? Or does she fold the quilt back quietly, so as not to disturb my father's stony slumber, in a perfect isosceles triangle and let the heat rise from her and ascend to the stiff bedroom air.

At night I am

still visited by terrors; it isn't uncommon that I wake up several times in the night grabbing the air beside me for a body to hold on to. Everyone craves the heartbeat next to them to reassure them that things are real, that we are living, breathing, existing.

—Deidre Moore



Angela Young, pearl photograph, "Untitled"

or is it intense and feverish?

Does she turn to my father in her frustration and nudge his cold, turned mountainous shoulder? Does she crave someone next to her that she can claim as her own? I wonder if she has wants to infantilize her children, clothe us in swaths of cheery colored soft cotton and hold us in the cradle of her arms wanting to make us dependent upon her again.

Or is she angry? Is part of the burning

NLGJA CONVENTION

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and several panel discussions, plenaries and programs. I covered at least one plenary a day for the paper. The most interesting plenary session was titled: "Are We Guilty of Bias in Covering Critics of Gay Rights?" This controversial plenary hosted three anti-gay speakers, Brian Camenker, president of the Parents Rights Coalition; Michael Johnston, president of Kerusso Ministries; and Peter LaBarbera, director of the Americans for Truth project. Slight chaos ensued when the three panelists

began making inflammatory statements.

Unfortunately, this was not the only time during the convention where there was anti-gay activity. Fred Phelps, founder of www.god-hatesfags.com, was also there protesting outside the hotel with his family. The youngest anti-gay protester was Phelps' granddaughter, age 6. NLGJA turned Phelps' hateful protest into a good thing, however, when its president came on stage and announced that pledges would be taken to benefit NLGJA for each minute of Phelps' protest.

A few of the students from the online/print

project were assigned to interview the protesters, which proved to be a traumatic experience when insults were hurled at the students. These student articles can be found, along with the rest of the Online/Print project, at www.nlgja.org/convention/dr2001.

The convention was one of the most fun, educational and rewarding experiences of my academic career. I highly encourage anyone interested in attending next year's convention as a member of the student project to contact NLGJA directly at www.nlgja.org.

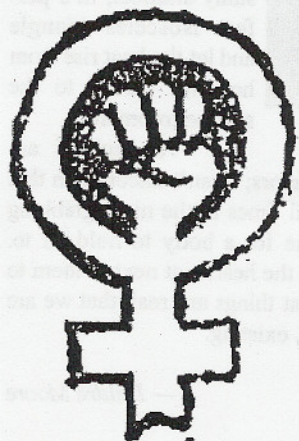
- Angela Young

WOMEN'S STUDIES COURSE LISTINGS — SPRING 2002

WST 105 001	Women in Society	3:20-5:10	M W	Eaklor V	04
WST 206 001	Poetry Workshop	3:20-5:10	T Th	Burdick C	02
WST 254 001	Women Writers (A)	9:20-10:10	M T W F	Dill E	04
WST 300 001	Topics: Major Figures in Lit — Faulkner and Morrison	2:20-3:10	M T W F	Mayberry S	04
WST 305 001	Psychology of Women	1:00-2:15	M W	Maiden P	03
WST 348 001	Sociology of Families	1:20-3:10	M W	Porter K	04
WST 350 001	Topics: Gothic Fiction	10:20-12:10	M W	Grove A	04
WST 377 001	Women in Art	9:20-10:10	W Th F	Anderson M	04
WST 380 001	Women, Knowledge and Reality	3:20-5:10	T Th	Dobie E	04
WST 460 001	Topics: Gender and Film	3:20-5:10	M W	Schultz P	04

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"Be radical, radical to the core."

— Abigail Allen

