

WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWS

SPRING, 2003

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DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

DIANA SCULLY, DIRECTOR

Writing the "Director's Update" each spring, forces me to think through the past year and reflect on the accomplishments of the Women's Studies Program. This year that has been an especially pleasant task.

The BIS major in Women's Studies entered its second year and continues to grow with over 30 majors at the present time. As the first group of majors completed their senior seminar last spring, the Women's Studies Program initiated a new tradition, the First Annual Spring Potluck Party for majors and faculty. On a beautiful late spring evening, we gathered in my backyard where we sampled a bounty of delicious potluck food and were entertained by Sara Tandy, one of our more musical majors. The Second Annual Women's Studies Spring Potluck is scheduled for May 9, 2003.

In the fall, Leslie Feinberg, author of a number of books on transgender such as *Stone Butch Blues*, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, and *Transgender Warrior* addressed a large and very enthusiastic audience of VCU and community people. I am indebted to Rose Landrum Lee, instructor in African American Studies and Women's Studies, for arranging this very successful program.

For me, the highlight of the year was the Women's Studies sponsored study abroad trip to attend the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, "Women's Worlds 2002," at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. This trip was part of the Women's Studies continuing effort to provide international experiences for our students. Traveling with our group of 23 students, faculty, and mothers through Uganda and Kenya was one of the most challenging and rewarding learning and teaching experiences I have ever had. As

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REFLECTIONS ON AFRICA

KATHERINE A. LINK (WOMEN'S STUDIES MAJOR)

On July 19, 2002 our group of 23 departed for Kampala, Uganda to attend the Women's World 2002, Eighth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women hosted by the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University. The week long conference gave participants the opportunity to attend panel discussions on diverse issues including violence against women, women's roles in peace and conflict, gendering the family, gendering education, and the feminization of poverty. Participants were encouraged to attend cultural events showcasing traditional songs and dances from areas in East Africa.

At the conclusion of the conference, our group took a day trip to Jinja to relish in the beauty of the Bujagali Falls and to visit the origin of the Nile River. On the way back to Kampala we stopped at a roadside market for fresh bananas

and to take a hike through the Mabira Rainforest. In the forest we were able to walk among spectacular trees and seek out monkeys and butterflies.

Upon our arrival in Nairobi, Kenya, we were introduced to our tour guides who would escort us on the four-hour drive to the Amboseli National Game Preserve, located at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. During our stay we had the opportunity to go on several game

drives which brought us up close to a variety of animals including zebras, monkeys, gazelles, wildebeests, giraffes, lions, birds and particularly elephants which are prolific in the Amboseli. During our stay at the Serena Lodge we had a private evening bonfire lecture given by a researcher at the Cynthia Moss Elephant Research Center where we learned about elephant's matriarchal family structure. Even within the lodge we were able to experience wildlife first hand. The monkeys were very mischievous. They had a habit of frightening guests and attempting to steal our food. Although they seemed quite friendly, they were quite the little bandits.

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Opening Ceremony Entertainers in front of the Women and Gender Studies Building

A MOTHER'S VIEW

CAROL BUNZL SHOWKER (VCU ALUMNA)

Last July I traveled with my daughter (a current VCU student) and the Women's Study group to Uganda and Kenya.

Our first week in Kampala, Uganda, we attended the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women conference. Each day began with an early morning drive to the campus of Makerere University (the conference site), and ended with our delivery back to our hotel. One never knew how long the drive would take or what you might encounter. Vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians and animals crowded the roads. Missing were speed limits, lines on the roads and traffic signals; yet our van driver, Charles, delivered us safely each day.

Once at the conference, I enjoyed sampling many different sessions, ranging from peace and conflict to basic needs such as water. During many of the sessions, the discussions turned to the atrocities and daily hardships many women endure. For some, this is the only life they have ever known, and yet they still live with dignity and hope. Despite the immense plight of these women they speak out with power. The women presenting papers and attending the conference exhibited a spirit of sisterhood that was contagious.

Our morning and evening tea breaks (demonstrating the British influence in Uganda) were more opportunities to get to know people from all over the world. I heard stories from a mid-wife in Uganda who had delivered over 200 babies in her home. The local students were always friendly, and always looking for a way to come to America. The country of Uganda was both beautiful (countryside and people's spirit) and sad (the extreme poverty and injustices people have to endure).

It was a pleasure to travel with the VCU group. The trip was well researched and planned, and I enjoyed the chance to get to know today's students. This group truly appreciated the opportunity to travel and study abroad, and were undoubtedly enriched beyond their expectations.

Mature Female Elephants and their Young in the Amboseli National Game Preserve



GETTING LOST

JENNIFER L. HARRIS, (GRADUATE STUDENT)

As a sociology graduate student, I was lucky enough to attend the Women's World Conference held this past summer in Kampala, Uganda. While the entire Conference was a life-changing experience, there is one specific memory I doubt will ever fade.

It was the second day of conference events, and I set off on my own to find a particular session located across campus. The weather was humid and I was hot, sticky, and uncomfortable – even more so when I realized I was lost and no longer on campus property! I became flustered and angry, and succeeded only in traveling farther and farther from the university. The sight of a tall, red-haired, American woman walking at a feverish pace through the nearby village caused many locals to stop their daily chores and gape as I passed them. Finally, I rounded a bend and realized that I had walked in a circle. I was back at the university – but too late to make the intended

session. Instead, I settled on attending one that was in the closest building to my location. I snuck in the back and took my seat, winded from walking so far, and thoroughly annoyed at the events of my day, even more so when I realized the red clay of Uganda stained my shoes!

When I focused in on the speaker I realized I was in a session on war and refugees. The woman related the most horrific stories of suffering I have ever heard and tears started streaming down my cheeks. That day I cried for the vic-

tims' suffering, I cried for the blessings in my life, and I cried because I could not understand how a human could hurt another so bad.

There are many other experiences that etched on my memory – among them were eating lunch with two northern Ugandan women who told me more about the war, the male university students with whom I debated American politics, an African woman who secretly took my picture and then giggled when she was caught, the humanist group protesting the torture of witches, and the genuine friendliness of the participants. I struck up conversations with women from all over the world, often times learning more during lunch breaks than in the sessions

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Masai Women Greet VCU Group



The VCU Group

LASTING IMPRESSIONS: MOTHER'S UNION
KATHERINE A. LINK (WOMEN'S STUDIES MAJOR)

One afternoon at the conference, a chance meeting with a Ugandan women lead to an invitation to tour the Mother's Union located in Kampala. Mary Sumner started the Mother's Union in England in 1876. It now boasts more than one million members in 70 countries and is the largest voluntary worldwide women's organization. The Mother's Union is an Anglican organization focused on improving the value and quality of life for families through development programs and spiritual growth. The Mother's Union recognizes the importance of opening their programs to all people regardless of race, class, or gender.

In Kampala, we were given a tour of the Mother's Union hostel that provides temporary shelter for women and their children. In addition, the Mother's Union offers a number of vital services including childcare for women who are in job skill training classes, literacy programs for women and primary education for children, and HIV/AIDS awareness programs for women and children staying in the facility. The Mother's Union is active outside the hostel by funding self-help and locally based initiatives and also through the active participation by its representatives, particularly women, in national strategy planning and implementation.

It was particularly moving to see such strong support services for women and their children in a developing country such as Uganda. Even in more developed countries, there are few organizations like the Mother's Union that offer these types of resources with such a high level of commitment. There is a tremendous effort being made to promote the empowerment of women within this organization not only in Uganda but throughout the world as well.

Currently, many of the trip participants are organizing to send funds to the Kampala Mother's Union to express our support and to demonstrate our commitment to helping the women and children of Uganda.

Reflections, Continued from P. 1

The Amboseli is home to the Masai who are warriors and cattle herders. We visited a *manyatta* (Masai village) and were impressed by the openness and hospitality of the people and by the beauty of their crafts. Members of the tribe greeted us with songs and dances and encouraged us to dance with them. Led by their teacher, Joseph, the chief's son, school children eagerly sang for us and the women of the tribe displayed their beautiful jewelry and crafts in a bazaar where many of us purchased unique jewelry and beaded wedding necklaces. The time spent with the people of this tribe proved to be a profound moment for many of us during our stay.

Mombassa, the second largest city in Kenya, was the next destination on our itinerary. Mombassa lies on the Indian Ocean and is heavily influenced by Arab culture. It is also the oldest city in Kenya. While there we shopped in local bazaars and visited Fort Jesus which was built by the Portuguese in 1593 to protect their trade route to India. We also visited the famous woodcarver's factory and toured the old city, a maze of narrow streets with hand-carved doors and overhanging balconies. Many of us seized the opportunity to charter a boat to snorkel through the beautiful reefs along the coast.

Our final destination was Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. We took a guided tour of the city and traveled to the former home of Karen von Blixen. Written under the pseudonym of Isak Denisen, *Out of Africa*, a memoir of her life in Kenya, is her most famous work. We all enjoyed our visit to the Langatta Giraffe Center, established to preserve the Rothschild's giraffe; their existence was once threatened in Kenya, but the population has now grown to about 600. We were amazed at how close we were able to get to the giraffes as we feed them from our own hands. We also had the opportunity to observe a feeding at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust orphanage for elephants and rhinos in the Tsavo National Park. Here teams of caretakers care for orphaned elephant and rhino babies until they reach maturity and are able to survive on their own.

The trip was a life changing experience for me and for others. I would like to share a journal entry that I wrote shortly after we returned. *As I reflect on all that I saw and experienced, I have to balance my perceptions. Yes, there is so much that is beautiful in Africa—the rainforests, the rivers, the wildlife, the culture, and especially the people; but there is also abject poverty—people living in hovels, poorly fed and clothed children, and rudimentary education at best for the majority of the people. I think about how dissatisfied we can be with our lives, how much we complain about the little inconveniences. It is with these thoughts in mind that I am reminded how truly fortunate I am to have had the privilege to travel to such a fascinating place. I hope one day, I will go there again.*

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THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING FOR LESBIANS: LESSONS LEARNED AT WOMEN'S WORLD 2002

HOLLIE S. MANN, STUDENT

I am a lesbian woman in my mid-twenties. I am a feminist and a social activist. I am a college student attending Virginia Commonwealth University. I am privileged in the society in which I live by both my skin color and my class status. I am a Westerner, an American to be exact.

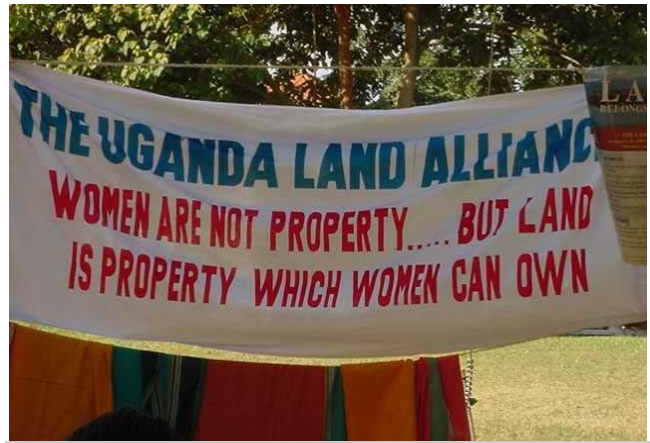
Almost immediately after my feet touched the ground in Africa and for most of my time at Women's World 2002, I experienced a major shift in the social relevance and even the personal presence of several of these identities. Identity disorientation was the primary mode by which I experienced and navigated culture shock while in Africa. It was not the food, the foreign places, the differences in native tongue, the diversity among all of the cultures that came together at the conference or anything else that caused me as much confusion as did this sense of identity displacement.

I am happy to say that this experience changed significantly the day before the conference was over. I was breezing through the Women's Studies building on the Makerere University campus when I noticed several announcements posted for various caucuses that would be held later that evening. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there would be a Lesbian Caucus. My mother and I decided we would miss the special evening of cultural events planned for that night and instead attend the caucus. This turned out to be the most profound evening for both of us during our time at WW02.

As I reflect on the value of lesbian international networking and the challenges that lie ahead of the global feminist movement, the following themes emerge: (1) Lesbian issues and struggles, which are part of a much larger LGBT/Queer social movement, are not specific to the West. (2) Through international networking, lesbians can begin to speak with a strong voice, thus making themselves and their concerns heard at future conferences like WW02. (3) Networking is an important first step in coalition building and



Leslie Feinberg, author of *Transgender Warrior* and *Stone Butch Blues* among other books, addresses an enthusiastic VCU audience last fall.



Sign at Women's World 2002

thus working towards a global lesbian feminism project. (4) Lesbian networking in the context of such a conference allows for a wider range of perspectives to play a part in constructing international feminisms. This is valuable, not only to the global feminist project as a whole, but also to women who consider their sexuality an important factor in shaping their worldview.

I am reminded of the indescribable feeling I took away from Women's World 2002, as I read over my journal entry on the evening I connected with so many other women from all over the world: *This evening has led to a reflection on the theme of this year's conference, "Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges." As is true of many issues regarding women, the constraints placed on women's sexuality and same-sex love in my own country seem to pale in comparison to those in Africa. And I feel guilty for complaining about the rights I don't have, rather than rejoicing in the rights that I do have...As we shared experiences and listened to one another this evening, especially Elizabeth and her unbelievable testimony, we felt as though we were listening to our shared history being told. It didn't matter where we each came from in that moment or where we would return to when it was over. We all felt a part of history in the making. More importantly, I think, was the hope that we would be a part of something even greater in the future of lesbian feminism across the globe. This will be our greatest challenge.*

Getting Lost, Continued from P. 2

themselves. Since my return, I have found myself more open to other people, more apt to approach a stranger, and more curious about other cultures.

However, it is the day I got lost that I think of the most. I can remember that day clearly – the yellow flowered skirt I was wearing, the clouds in the endless sky, the women sitting in the audience of the session, the light filtering through the classroom windows, and the smell of the room. On days when I forget my good fortunes, I recall the mental snapshot and cry again. Ironically, getting lost enabled me to find the path to perspective, greater understanding, and appreciation for life.

STUDENT AND ALUMNA NEWS

ALUMNA NEWS

We would love to hear from you.
Send us news about yourself for
Women's Studies News!

Hi Dr. Scully,

I just received my Women's Studies newsletter and I wanted to let the department know that I have been accepted into Eastern Michigan University Women's Studies Program. I also wanted to congratulate Aphrodite on her Black History in the Making Award (2002) from the department. I was a recipient of that award in 2000 from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

I will keep you guys at VCU informed of my achievements at Eastern Michigan University and hopefully I will be able to give the VCU Women's Studies Program the same support it has given me.

Charnessa K. Paige (Alumna)

April, 2002

Hi Dr. Scully,

I just wanted to let you know how much I always enjoy reading *Women's Studies News*. It's SOOO exciting that there are graduates who majored in Women's Studies! When I read that in the last issue, it really made me happy! I am still working as a counselor in the YWCA domestic violence shelters, which I love. I am working on my LCSW, which I expect to test for in June. I married my partner of four years in October of 2001, though not much has changed since we tied the knot. I just wanted to let you know that how grateful I am to you and the program.

Chelsea Patterson Kazmier (Alumna)

April, 2002

Director's Update, Continued P.1

the articles in this newsletter will attest, many of us felt that our lives were altered by our African experience and particularly by the wonderful people that we met at every point in our journey. For the students, most of whom had never traveled outside of United States and none of who had ever attended an international conference, Women's Worlds 2002, with its international themes and participants, was an experience they will never forget. I am especially pleased with the post trip accomplishments of many of these students who through activism and writing are keeping their African spirit alive. It will be a pleasure to again travel with four of the students to New Orleans in June for the annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association where they will present papers on a number of themes related to the "Women's Worlds 2002" Kampala conference.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Deborah Moore

**Black History in the Making
Women's Studies Award**

and

Hollie Sue Mann

**College of Humanities and Sciences
Outstanding Women's Studies Student
Award Winner!**



Deborah Moore

Hollie Mann

ALL ABOUT FAN

HOLLIE MANN

The Feminist Action Network (FAN) is a Virginia Commonwealth University student organization committed to advancing the status of women on the VCU campus and in the surrounding community. Founded in 2000 by an amazing group of female students and activists, FAN has grown leaps and bounds in just three years. This past fall FAN held a panel discussion titled, "The Intersection of Multiculturalism and Feminism." We were lucky to have Dr. Njeri Jackson, Director of African-American Studies Program and professor of Political Science, Dr. Deirdre Condit, professor of Women's Studies and Political Science, and Dr. Mark Wood, professor of Religious Studies and African-American Studies, speak on the panel. The event was a great success and FAN packed the room with roughly seventy students and members of the community. FAN also participated in Love Your Body Week at VCU in collaboration with the Richmond chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). This year FAN member, Hollie Mann, represented VCU at the NOW Roe vs. Wade Anniversary Vigil when she spoke on "The Importance of Abortion Rights and Reproductive Technologies to Lesbian Women." FAN is also looking forward to hosting another panel discussion this spring semester titled, "Reproductive Politics in 2003." FAN meets weekly in the VCU Student Commons at 6:30PM. We invite all interested student who are interested in working for the equality of women on the VCU campus, in the surrounding community and worldwide to attend our meetings. For more information, please contact Hollie Mann at mannhs@vcu.edu.

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