Transformation

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INSIDE

As a VISTA worker in the fall of 1980, I traveled around the state of Arkansas asking women what the main issues were that they were facing and what they needed to face them. The issues, they said, were violence, racism, and poverty, and what they needed was an organization to help bring them together to confront these oppressions. The articles that follow, written by women who have had deep staff and board relationships with the Women's Project, are testimonies to the pervasiveness of those issues and to the passion and hope each woman brought to working for justice in her community. Each writer was asked to address four questions:

What inspired you to work for social justice? How has your involvement in the social justice movement changed since you first were inspired to get involved? Considering all you have done and your own experiences, what is your vision for social justice? What keeps you doing this work?

The stories that follow speak to the profound commitment of the women who were drawn to the Women's Project as a place to live their commitment to social change. These statements are a fulfillment of the dream formed in the fall of 1980: that an organization could be created that would draw women together to build a world of equality and justice for everyone.

SUZANNE PHARR

Where We Are Going, Where We Have Been

Suzanne Pharr

When I was a child, I was rebellious, disliked authority and, like most children, had a heightened sense of fairness and unfairness. On top of that, my gender behavior more resembled that of a boy than a girl. These traits caused me considerable conflict with my large family and church. I saw that females did not have the privileges of males, black people were treated as less than white people, and, particularly within the church, what people professed to believe (and imposed on everyone else) did not match their actions.

Given my rebellious nature, I might have become destructive toward society. However, by the late 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement gained strength, I discovered the idealism of the Romantic poets and Henry David Thoreau, and I was drawn toward a path of social change. The 1960s found me without true direction as I tried to sort out my sexual orientation, my concern about the Civil Rights movement, and my vehement opposition to the Vietnam War. It was only when I returned from a short expatriate period in New Zealand in 1969 and discovered a full-blown anti-war movement and a fledgling women's movement that I made a 100% commitment to social change.

When I first got involved in social change, I was lucky enough to be part

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Where We Are Going, Where We Have Been

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of creating new ideas, new systems, new analyses. Because there were so many of us focusing in the same direction, there was a tremendous sense of energy and support. All of the movements of that time—Civil Rights, women's, gay and lesbian, anti-war—were charged with idealism and sexual energy. Very few of us were paid organizers; we simply organized. We were young, we had passion and ideas, and we made things happen. Back then, we expected young people to be leaders, to recreate the world. However, many of us who were involved back then are now currently in paid positions in social change organizations, and young people have few places to enter where they can be treated as equals and leaders. As the 61 year-old director of Highlander, a 68 year-old social change organization, I'm wondering if too many directors of organizations have gray hair. I'm wondering if we should be using the full force of our power and privilege to work with young people, to place all that we do on the progressive left up for examination and radical change. A big piece of that change might be moving ourselves out of leadership positions, in order to ensure that we are not gatekeepers.

My vision for social change has remained pretty much the same from the first: that we must demand and maintain equality and justice for everyone, no matter who they are. Every person has equal worth and must be given opportunity and treated with dignity. I believe that all oppressions are interconnected and their elimination will happen when those who are targeted by oppression also connect to confront power and make change occur. Capitalism remains an obstacle that brings our efforts up short again and again. In the next decade, we will have increased opportunities to mobilize great numbers of people to demand economic justice and to choose survival and well being instead of destroying the planet in the name of greed.

What keeps me doing this work is the rightness of it. The deepest sense of spirituality I have is tapped when I stand shoulder to shoulder with people who are united in their passion for freedom and justice. When I see people of color and women in occupations and social settings that were closed to them 50 years ago, when I see queer folks out and vocal, when I see the U.S. population reluctant to lose even one person in a military battle, I know that although the world continues to be an imperfect place, we have changed it. Social change work has given me my most profound friendships, my deepest beliefs, and my greatest sense of accomplishment. One could ask for little more in a lifetime search for purpose and meaning. ■

Remembering Why

Janet Perkins

During my college career in the early 70's, I registered for Western Civilization four or five times. Each time I would end up dropping the course a month or so into the class. Years later, I realized that one of my problems with this course was that I rarely saw **me**—as an African-American or as a woman—on any of the pages. When African-Americans or women did appear in these books, the conversation was very short, and most times we were defined by our weaknesses, never by our strengths. Certainly few words were printed about our contributions to the world.

I finally made it through Western Civilization, because I found some balance: courses in Black History and in Women's Literature were offered that same semester. This combination of courses helped the Western Civilization experience take on new meaning. The Black History course built on and expanded what I had learned during years of being in all black schools throughout my formative education years. No longer was I marginalized or rendered non-existent throughout the entire course. Studying Black History was enriching, and, thanks to an excellent professor, we were encouraged to analyze and question what was being presented to us.

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The Women's Literature class was also exciting because this was a space where we studied writings of women and discussed the experiences of women in the world. What was missing were the writings and experiences of women of color. Although this course was quite one-sided, it still provided an opportunity for women to be brought into focus as we examined history.

As I moved from school to various employment situations, I always questioned what I saw, felt and heard, but I didn't have a place to go to examine these experiences or know how to challenge them in a way that would make a difference. Sure, many times I spoke with supervisors and personnel departments about what I thought were company practices that were unfair to women and African-Americans only to be politely told, "the wheels of progress turn slowly."

When I was in school trying to make it through Western Civilization or in my early working career, I might not have been able to articulate clearly what the injustices were, but on a very fundamental level I knew that people should not be mistreated regardless of who they were.

My most memorable working experience will always be the Women's Project. When I walked into the Women's Project each day, I didn't have to deny my race, gender, religious beliefs or any aspect of who I was in order to fit into the culture of this organization. What was required of me was to be committed to going beyond my own feelings of frustration and anger caused by my experiences of being black and a female. I was challenged to stretch and broaden my definition of injustice to include how people experience life who are disabled, Jewish, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and elderly.

As many of you know, I am no longer on the staff of the Women's Project. However, I continue to be involved in striving to make this a better world through my work as program director at the Southern Partners Fund, a new public foundation which has been created and is governed by grassroots community leaders throughout the South. The Southern Partners Fund, like the Women's Project, values the richness and power which exist in communities. We know those communities can more than survive if people are willing to challenge injustices and if resources are available to support their efforts for social change.

My personal experiences with injustice and witnessing how it hurts, degrades and marginalizes others always troubled me. Far too many people lack hope and have succumbed to drugs, alcohol and illegal activities. It hurts so much to witness people destroying themselves and others. These were the things that motivated me to work for social justice.

Several events captured my attention this summer. I was flipping channels trying to find something I wanted to watch on television when I turned to a channel where women were hollering and crying. One scene showed a woman's top being forcibly ripped from her body. Another shot showed a woman being surrounded by men as they taunted her and touched her body. My first impression was that I had come upon a movie that reminded me so much of the book, *Lord of the Flies*. To my dismay, I realized that what I was watching was the news, and the horrible scenes I had just witnessed had actually happened to women in New York's Central Park during a Puerto Rican celebration.

During the Southern Baptist Convention the decision was made that women were restricted from being pastors. They explained that women's participation is welcomed in many areas of the Baptist church, but a congregation's leader should not be a woman.

In a rural community in Utah, a young African-American male was brutally murdered because he was gay. In Mississippi, an African-American male teenager was found hanging from a tree. Immediately, news reports claimed the Mississippi teenager's death was a suicide. Later, news reports suggested further investigations would be conducted because new information suggested that the young man might have been lynched because of his friendship with two White females.

What is my vision for social justice? Very simply put, I don't want another person, especially another woman humiliated, raped, killed or to experience any kind of abuse. I want a woman's talents, skills and abilities to be the determining factor as to whether she qualifies for a certain job

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Remembering Why

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or position. I don't want another lesbian or gay man persecuted, beaten and murdered just because of their sexual identity. I want the freedom to choose my friends and love interest based on trust and common interest, not on race.

Whether or not we are able to eradicate all the oppression that exists is not the issue. We must continue to try because our activism does make a difference. We must continue to make connections with each other and be committed to stand together in opposition to injustice. We must examine our own work to make certain that we are not guilty of being as racist, homophobic, sexist, or anti-Semitic as those we see as the major opponents of justice. How do we, those of us who say we are on the side of justice, handle power? Do we know how to share resources, skills, opportunities and information to ensure that we are being inclusive and are developing the leadership skills of others involved in the work?

All of us who have made a choice to work for social justice have different reasons and motivations for getting involved. What we have in common is that we have a desire to live in a better world where people lead whole, healthy and decent lives. I want a world where respect, love and integrity rule, rather than hate. I learned a long time ago, whatever you want in life, you must be willing to diligently work for it. ■

Our Mission...

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Rich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, women with disabilities, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working in coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.

Transformation is published four times every year.

In each issue, members receive analysis of contemporary issues, information about Women's Project upcoming events and activities, book reviews, and more. If you are not a Women's Project member and would like to continue receiving the journal, please fill out the membership form on page 6.

Full Circle

Amy Edgington

Without a doubt my longing for social justice was inspired by the civil rights movement as I grew up in Little Rock. I was awed by the courage of Daisy Bates and the nine school children, just four or five years older than I was, who faced the mobs at Central High School in 1957. Another role model was my Sunday school teacher, Adolphine Terry, a white woman of the "plantation class," who fought for desegregation. She never failed to use Bible stories to illustrate the need for social justice, which she pursued on many fronts all her long life.

My mother was a role model too. She was a "special education" teacher, with students from 6 to 18, who had all types of disabilities. She recognized the fact that children were often dumped in her classroom, simply because they were "difficult," "disfigured", or very poor, and she did whatever it took to get them back into the mainstream. She worked hard to prepare her students, whatever their disabilities, for employment and independence, at a time when this was a novel idea.

In high school and college, I became involved with the Quakers in civil rights work and the anti-war movement at the beginnings of the Vietnam war. However, my attempts to deal with racism and violence as purely moral issues left me feeling inadequate and deeply ashamed of my identity as a Southern white. A year after college, I moved to Europe, because it was as far away as I could get.

I studied at the University in Marburg, Germany, where my favorite professor was Wolfgang Abendroth, one of the leading communist thinkers in Western Europe. I was as much influenced by his aura of personal courage (he was a concentration camp survivor), as I was by his brilliant analyses of history and current events. Like most Americans, I had never learned much about history and less about economics, and my grasp of issues such as class and race had been greatly hampered by these deficits in my education. The prime example of my ignorance, was the fact that I moved to Germany, of all places, to flee racism.

Most of my education, however, took place outside the classroom. As I traveled, worked and lived in Europe and North Africa for the next four years, I saw examples of racism, classism and imperialism, in places far removed from Arkansas. I began to understand my home far better than I had been able to up close. Seeing different ways societies could work and different ways individuals could view the world, also gave me a sense of the possibilities for change.

Back in Fayetteville, Arkansas in 1973, I was hit with the revolution in feminist consciousness which had begun to take place in the U.S. I finally came to terms with my identity as a woman and a lesbian. This happened with the force of religious conversion, and for a while, separatism provided a place where I felt free for the first time from fear and shame, a place where I developed valuable leadership skills, and a place where I learned to listen to and respect other women.

I became increasingly uncomfortable in the separatist enclave in Northwest Arkansas and later in Northern California, however. Although women of color were pushing for a meaningful share of the agenda in the feminist movement, white women, even with the best intentions, seemed unable to maintain a focus on

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Full Circle
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racism as a feminist issue. We tended to treat racism and classism as matters of personal behavior, divorced from the enormous social, political and economic forces at work.

In California, I belonged to a wonderful support group for lesbians with disabilities. Here I claimed without shame the epithet "hunchback," hurled at me since childhood, and I felt whole for the first time in my life. Yet in that group I also learned the limits of identity politics. How long we had been disabled, whether we expected to get better or worse, when and how well we could "pass," and the quality of care we could buy determined how each of us experienced living with a disability. We had to talk about issues like money, access and power in order to understand each other.

When I returned to Arkansas, I was trapped in an abusive relationship with a "feminist" lesbian. By the time I freed myself, I felt real despair about a movement that denied what I had experienced in the name of "solidarity."

I also began to understand that this was what women of color had always felt about the feminist movement.

When I moved to Little Rock late in 1986, to take care of my mother, I found it depressing and ironic that I was back in exactly the place I had always wanted to leave. Little Rock still simmered with racial tension; whites still ruled through economic privilege. Yet the violent system of legal apartheid was gone, and that made a palpable difference. I sat in a concert hall and heard Bernice Reagon call Little Rock "hallowed ground." I heard Maya Angelou remind us that we have all been "paid for." I began to be very glad to be back in Little Rock, to have the chance to pay back a fraction of what I owe to those who came before me.

At this juncture in my life I discovered the Women's Project. Kerry Lobel's work around lesbian battering rekindled my hope that here was a place where I could belong without being silenced. As the Women's Project took shape around Kerry, Suzanne Pharr, Janet Perkins, Kelly Mitchell-Clark and others, I saw the start of a true coalition to fight racism, sexism and homophobia. With the leadership of the organization in the hands of those who know both racism and sexism on their own bodies, the Women's Project has retained a clear focus on its multi-issue agenda.

As a Women's Project volunteer and board member, I have learned many new lessons, which are the same lessons my life has brought me over and over: that privilege creates discrimination and inequality, that history and economics shape our daily lives, that all people have dignity and value, that love is the root of justice, that our souls are homesick for true democracy.

I believe that social justice work requires the willingness to learn and teach the same lessons again and again, as we journey with others along a spiral path towards liberation. We all resist change. To see a single person unfold and blossom, to see a community strive for greater fairness and understanding towards one another, is to witness a miracle. I keep working for social justice because I have witnessed miracles, and I could not bear to miss the chance to see the next miracle happen. ■

Mending a Broken Promise

Felicia Davidson

Starting from an early age I asked a lot of questions without getting answers. I remember the injustice when I was a young girl working in the cotton fields. We were in the hot sun chopping the white man's cotton and his kids were playing in the pool. I remember asking my mother "Why can't I go play in the water?" She smiled and said, "One day you can." I didn't know the words "social injustice," but I knew that it was not right for us to be chopping cotton in the hot sun when they didn't have to.

Even in school whites and blacks were treated differently. In the eighth grade, the science teacher caught two boys cheating on a test. He balled the black boy's paper up and put it in the trash can, but he moved the white boy to the front of the class to finish his test. Here I go again asking questions: "Why did you take his paper and not the other boy's?" The teacher told me to be quiet or he would put my test in the trash too. Yes, my paper ended up in the trash as well. Again I didn't understand. I told my mother about what happened at school. She said, "You, need to learn to mind your own business." I went through life always in other people's business, because I would question things that I felt were not right.

The real test came in 1991, when my sister was incarcerated for killing her abuser. She went to the police for help and got an order of protection. Nothing she tried helped, not even going to the battered women's shelter. Her abuser followed her there from work one night, and she was put out. Going through the trial process was devastating. She was treated worse than an animal. All the system saw was a poor black woman who had killed her husband. It didn't matter that she had never been in trouble before. We are talking about a loving, caring mother of three that went to work everyday, not someone with a long history of criminal activities. My brother-in-law was the one with the criminal history but none of this was presented at the trial. The lawyer didn't use any of the evidence, like the picture with her eyes black and swollen or hospital bills for stitches from when he busted her head with a 40 ounce beer bottle. Not one of the police records was presented from the many trips they made to their house. On the night the killing happened, the police had been there and arrested him for third degree battery, but less than three hours later he was out of jail and fighting again. Can someone please show me the justice in this situation?

I knew that injustice had stuck its ugly head up again, but this time I vowed to fight. I had two strikes against me: poor and black. It seemed everywhere I turned we were running into brick walls. I thank God for the strong family ties my mother instilled in us at a young age. We never had much, but we could always depend on each other. This tragedy brought our family closer together. We pooled our money and hired her a lawyer because we had noticed from the start the public defender was not interested in whether she would be free or go to prison. The lawyer we hired was just as bad. He never had time to sit down and talk to us about the case. We set up appointments and he didn't keep them. He lied and kept telling us that she was not going to do any time, until they shipped her to Tucker Women's Unit. I recall the trial like it was yesterday. The lawyer didn't object to anything. When it was his time to ask questions he never had any. Sitting in that court I vowed that I would not sit back and let another person be hoodwinked like that again. I left that courtroom full of hatred and bitterness for all white people; I felt like a victim of a broken promise.

I was introduced to the Women's Project in 1992 through the non-traditional job program where they prepared us to work on jobs normally held by men. A part of their mission statement moved my spirit. "We are concerned in particular about issues of importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, women with disabilities, lesbians and women in prison, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives." I felt that I had found some people to help me in all areas of my life. I was a single parent of two and I was raising the three children of my sister while she was in prison.

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Beginning the Journey

Judy Matsuoka

I grew up during the 1950s and 60s—turbulent times full of hope for social change. Although this was the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the beginnings of the Women's Movement and the anti-war movement, it was blindness that gave me a vision for social justice. When I was growing up in Chicago, there was a blind man who begged in all kinds of weather on a nearby street corner, and a blind woman who ran her own snack shop in the building where my father worked. Being seven and less than tactful, I asked the woman if she knew the man (don't all blind people know each other?) and why he chose to beg. From her, I learned about the lack of job opportunities for people who were blind, the discrimination faced by those who sought work outside of the few select vocations for blind persons, and the difficulty for those who were also people of color, who had less education or additional disabilities. She also spoke of the man as a fighter, as someone who chose to make it on his own terms rather than bow to a system that said that blind men who were also black could not work in offices, could not run businesses, but should be hidden away to work in sheltered workshops for little pay.

The idea of resistance to oppression was a new one, and I began to listen to family stories with a new awareness. I learned that my grandfather, Nobuo Matsuoka, wanted to be a lawyer but was unable to practice given the classist constraints of late 19th century Japan. He fled to the United States, only to encounter racism. Prevented by U.S. law from becoming a naturalized citizen, voting, serving on juries, or owning land, he used his legal training to help other Japanese immigrants fight the system. I learned that my grandmother, Chiyo Sakamoto Hirata, had resisted the traditional Japanese arranged marriage and had instead married a man she picked, attended college and worked. I learned that even through the experiences of being interned in concentration camps in Arkansas during World War II, my family resisted through humor, hope and community.

At the age of 10, I was spat upon by a man and called a "Jap." At the age of 10, a former classmate was raped. By this time, we lived in Skokie, Illinois, home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors in the US. My friends' parents were survivors of Nazi concentration camps and work camps. From them, I learned that the long road to the death camps began with gradual elimination of civil rights, growing social intolerance, job discrimination, restrictions on housing and travel, and increasingly random harassment and violence. By comparing our personal and family experiences, I understood that none of us can be safe unless all of us resist oppression and work for a true democracy, which would respect and uphold our freedoms and rights and treat every individual with justice and fairness regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age or gender.

I also understood that the awful past was still the present for many in this country. The Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. On the news, I saw scenes of marchers, demonstrators, and others who braved police clubs and police dogs, fire hoses and fire bombs, and the fury of mobs in order to make social justice the social norm.

In high school, I decided that I wanted to work with people who were blind to help remove the barriers that severely restricted their life choices. After college I taught children with visual disabilities, and later I worked with adults who were newly blinded. I found that blindness was only the icing on the cake of racism, sexism, ableism and economic injustice. Mr. T. was 63 and had never gone to school because he had begun working in the coal mines at the age of 7 to help his family. He had to learn to read before he could learn Braille. Ms. J. was a woman whose husband did not want her to learn to use a white cane, so that she would not be able to go outside of the house without him. M.M. was a young Palestinian man who could not get a job because of anti-Arab sentiment and because people were afraid he would not be able to find his way to the bathroom or cafeteria. Ms. G. was passed over for promotion time and again because her company would not put the necessary manuals into Braille. And R. could not get an apartment because she was transgendered. It was clear that teaching people the tools of blindness would not change their social reality, unless it was coupled with changing society by eradicating racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism and other oppressions.

For almost twenty years, as I continued to work in the field of blindness, I looked for a place where

all oppressions were connected and challenged. I truly believe this is the way we need to work, so that no one is left behind in our quest for social justice. I took courses in Women's Studies, participated in women's study circles, attended meetings and still found that my experiences as a woman of color were not reflected. I volunteered with AIDS groups in the early 80s and found a middle-class, white male focus. I taught at two universities and worked with different disability rights groups and found, with the exception of ADAPT, a lack of willingness to claim issues of racism and sexism as disability issues. I joined people of color groups and found sexism, homophobia and a discomfort with people with disabilities. It was not until I found the Women's Project that I found a place with people who have a clear vision of how all our struggles are connected, who were willing to be challenged to stretch beyond their own experiences and to work for a true democracy.

Almost forty years after getting my first lesson in social inequality, what keeps me going are others in the movement for social justice—the other voices in the crowd, the other bricks in the wall. It is a tremendous lift to open a letter from a woman who has moved away and to read of her work to get legal representation for poor people or to protect the environment. It is a rush to hear a young person say, "I went from doing nothing to being willing to do anything for social justice." It is powerful to connect with someone from a totally different background, who has a shared vision for a future of peace and justice. At times like these, I know we cannot fail. ■

Dee Dee's World

Dee Dee Green

Being an older sister to my brother afforded me the opportunity to fall victim to the double standard at an early age. As my brother got older, I noticed that he could participate in activities or attend events without adult supervision long before I was able to do so. When questioned about why this was "cool" for my brother at such a young age and not for me, my parents responded with that ever-so-infamous line, "He's a boy; it's different for boys."

I recognized similar disparities regarding race and economic standing all around me—at school, work, church and play. I recall an assembly being held at my high school to announce this wonderful opportunity for students to attend schools outside of the Pulaski County Special School District. These schools were implementing programs that standard public schools were not, such as advanced or alternative courses in the arts, language, science and mathematics. We received a wonderful appeal from the head principal about how advantageous this programming would be for students interested in leaving the district, especially those who were college-bound. There was one catch to all of this: only white students could take advantage of this opportunity. The Black students at the assembly were outraged. Boos and walkouts followed the announcement. I think that this is the point at which my consciousness was raised.

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Mending a Broken Promise

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I am grateful to God for putting sisters like Janet Perkins and Damita Marks in my life when times got tough for me and the children. They stood by me and gave me the love and support I needed to be the sister I am today.

The Women's Project found me a job. Unfortunately, it did not work out as I anticipated, but those ladies encouraged me to come and volunteer for the Women's Project during the time I was not working. I started working for the Women's Project on a part-time basis in 1993. This is when I learned that I had a voice, and what I had to say was important. I learned more about the political process from talking to my co-workers in the halls at work than from anywhere else. It was during this time that I began to value myself as being a real "sister," not just in words but by accepting the thick lips, the bow hips and the napped hair. I was not ashamed of being a black woman anymore.

I have been involved in prison work since 1995, educating about the cause and consequences of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, identifying alternatives to incarceration to prevent damage to families and to assist in changing polices that will benefit the victim. I have come full circle, back to the beginning. Now I am working to assist other women so that they do not have to experience what my sister experienced. That's why I keep doing what I do. I am keeping a vow to myself and in the process making the lives of others more bearable, if not better. ■

Dee Dee's World

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I was unfamiliar with phrases such as "social justice" until I entered college. Reading and enrolling in courses like Gender Studies and Applied Anthropology revealed to me that all of my questions about the lack of parity between sexes and races were neither isolated nor alien. For much of my young life society had dictated that "white is right." It also said to me that being a successful woman would mean fulfilling certain roles in order to gain acceptance from men and society-at-large. My college experience directed me to the realization that all of this was bullshit! I knew that the inequality I felt as a teen was not simply hormonal. My feelings were a reflection of the oppressions that have allowed our system to thrive for centuries.

I went to the Women's Project one day after class in 1995 and met Lynn Frost. Lynn invited me to come by the office on Saturdays to volunteer. Volunteering was atop my list of priorities for personal and professional reasons. The experience was gratifying and educational. I was introduced to a different form of oppression: homophobia. I knew very little about homosexuality other than what was contained in the Scripture. Personally, I did not know whether same-sex relationships were right or wrong. I did know that we are all God's children and are created equal. I began realizing that this "social justice thing" is not only about being a woman of color, but it is all encompassing. It means that people are people and should be treated with respect. We have an inherent right to equality. As citizens of this country, we each deserve the same fundamental liberties and justice upon which this nation was founded. This line of thinking sparked a greater interest in how much our differences make us similar as human beings.

About a year after college, I was hired as a Women's Advocate with Advocates for Battered Women. This was the perfect opportunity to work on behalf of women whose voices are suppressed by violence. The organization is a source of intervention for victims as well as an outreach agency that works to prevent violence against families before it ever occurs. The preventative measures confused me at first, because I felt that we could not adequately serve the victim if we concerned ourselves too much with trying to prevent the victimization. I was asked to join the Board of the Women's Project in 1998. Here I achieved a better understanding of why social justice could not be achieved without social change. The prevention and intervention services of Advocates for Battered Women began making sense. The outreach that the staff of ABW performed was about educating and changing attitudes about violence against women. That was social change. What a novel concept!

In 1999, I joined the staff of the Women's Project. Since that time, I have learned a great deal about progressive thinking. Some people appear to be frightened by the term "progressive" for whatever reason. To progress simply means to move onward or forward. This notion appears too intimidating for some, but this movement won't dissolve as long as conservatism continues to oppress. I have enjoyed working for and learning from the Women's Project. I hesitate to call myself an Organizer because after 20 months on staff, I have yet to do enough of the grassroots work that results in effective organizing. I am not much of a leader; I am more of a follower. I don't mind that about myself because that is the source of my personal growth. However, I envision a future full of followers who are destined to become leaders within the social justice movement. At the same time I have to wonder what type of role people of color will play in the mass effort for social change. If you are talking about equality, the people for whom it should be achieved need to stand in the forefront. I don't see enough of that yet within the social justice movement.

For a good part of my life I have despised systems and attitudes of oppression. That is why I work for social justice. My contribution to social change is minimal, but my small efforts that will lead to bigger strides will ultimately result in true social change for future generations. Something must give because I am tired of raiding the men's restroom in nightclubs just to relieve my bladder. Have you ever noticed that there are several urinals in addition to the stalls in the men's restroom, while the women's restroom has lots of mirrors but only two stalls? Talk about injustice! ■

Living Change, Creating Change

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also has a comfortable chair, everyone is hungry for true justice and everyone gets equal portions of food to fill them up. The meals may be spiced very differently, but there's enough to go around. Each individual is welcomed and appreciated for their genuine differences, not judged by them. The dinner conversation is thoughtful, compassionate and punctuated by laughter about the ironic ways in which we can appear to be so different, but are often so alike. And everyone really **listens** to each other.

I keep doing social justice work, because I have always had a passion for understanding human relationships—how they're built, strengthened, grown, etc. And, at its core, organizing is about folks building relationships with other folks and counting on those relationships as the foundation for building change. I absolutely love it when people work together to create change.

I'm also addicted to expanding my mind. Experiences like that anti-racism workshop in 1990, are extremely important to my growth as an individual. I've had similar epiphanies over the years regarding gender identity and other issues that continue to expand my vision of what equality really means.

And lastly, I am a chronic optimist. I believe in the politics of hope and in the human capacity for change. I think the process of working together for social change is one of the most rewarding processes we can share as human beings. ■

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