

LUNCH AND FLOWERS

Interview by Jo Soto

I met **Betty Sue Flowers** for lunch at the UT Faculty Center. I found Betty Sue to be friendly and concerned that I get what information I needed to write my article, and easy to talk to. In fact, too easy!

It was a hard task deciding what part of the interview to include for the newsletter. Betty Sue has edited three books, published numerous articles, served as a consultant to Shell International in London and is a poet and a professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin.

Betty Sue Flowers will speak at the SWUW Conference Saturday, January 28 around 9 am. The theme of the conference is "She Changes Everything She Touches." The members of the planning group, W.O.M.B. (Women Of Many Blessings) wanted to interweave the theme into each day of the conference. Each day will represent a change a woman goes through in her lifetime. Friday is the *Maiden*, Saturday is the *Mother*, and Sunday is the *Crone*.

When I told Betty Sue she would be taking on *Mother Day* she said, "Oh, Mother day! Well, I'm writing a book with a woman in New York called *Mother Market*, so that fits right in."

Jo: "She changes..." What does that bring to your mind?

BSF: Well, very literally, everything she touches – changes – everything she touches, so it can be either way, the daughter changes the mother, the mother changes the daughter, the world, everything. I would really probably talk about what changes and what touches

Jo: What is this book about that you're writing?

BSF: It's about the hidden economy of relationships.

Jo: Hmmm ... The secret agenda?

BSF: Well, I don't know if it's an agenda, it's a reality that we have not paid attention to, so when it's foregrounded, different things come up into view. In a way, what we're positing is that the hidden economics of a relationship need to be looked at – dealt with – and, oh, it's partly autobiographical, partly a love story, partly a journey of discovery story, partly about living in an economic myth, it's just a – a stream, an unusual book the two of us are writing together.

Jo: What did you think about when Pat Cuney first asked you to speak at the First Goddess Conference?

BSF: I thought there was something abroad in the land – that people didn't know what to call it, so they put the name 'Goddess' to it, sort of a catch-all phrase. But what that meant was, there was something about

women's power, women's spiritual path, and finding a source of power in the neglected feminine that was emerging in women's spiritual life, and so, when she approached me, I thought it was an interesting thing to do – I must say my department got *calls*: "Someone at the University of Texas is a *Goddess* worshiper?" That's not the case, it's not a matter of goddess *worship*, but I thought it was very interesting and I was amazed at how many people came. It was quite an event.

Jo: What is this Goddess? What do you think about this question coming out now?

BSF: You know, when you think of the feminist in a paradigm way, you don't think of the opposite of it as masculine – at least I don't. You think of something that's inclusive. So, 'goddess' is not just the female version of 'god.' It's a completely different concept. To me, it connotes the ground of life, life itself, the image that moves us and is life, creativity and joy, and love, and connectedness, and I don't see

continued on page three



Betty Sue Flowers will speak at the Southwest Unitarian Universalist Women's Conference SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 9 am.

HOW SOULS UNFOLD by bell hooks

We are cheated of the emotional integrity that sustains the production of meaningful art because we live in a society that wants to erase suffering. Our society makes pain an occasion for shame, not an occasion for transformation. Yet I believe it is only by embracing our suffering that we truly extend ourselves.

Here lies the challenge of issues like capital punishment and AIDS, which call us to confront death in a greater, more complex way. We are called upon as artists to engage the reality of death and dying in our artistic practices in ways that we were not formerly so intimately called to. The immediacy of death is transforming personal experience and will necessarily register itself in artistic practice.

This is connected to the relationship between poverty and artistic production. In our society's cultural representations, poverty is characterized as negative. Why do people assume that a young woman like my sister A., who is on welfare and does not have a job all the time, couldn't use that time to create? We tend to see the realm of creativity as a class-bound world where those who inhabit a certain class position (a position that frees them from experiences of suffering and pain) are better situated to be artists. This is ironic. We forget about the relationship of Van Gogh's poverty to his painting. We use language that delegitimizes suffering: "You don't have to be starving artists in the garret." While that statement is true, we would not want to disallow, forget, or disremember the relationship of those particular forms of suffering to the art that is produced.

....(It is) both our true spiritual quest and the archetypic quest – to embrace difference and sameness at the same time without feeling the need to negate one or the other....

The magic of our moment and the potential power of our moment lie in expanding our capacity, as spiritual and artistic beings, to hold differences and contradictions. When we understand that we are never static souls, but always in the process of unfolding, our capacity to live passionately intensifies. Our creativity is also then not static but always shifting and reinventing itself.

If, as a culture, we embrace this way of thinking more fully and deeply, these insights will illuminate our struggles for justice and our visions for love and peace.

from **The Other Side** magazine

Southwest Unitarian Universalist Women
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Dues \$5.00/year

Date Paid _____

Name _____

Address _____

Name of Women's Group

Name of Church or Fellowship

Please Read

If you belong to a Women's Group in a UU church or Fellowship, your SWUJW dues may be paid as a group, should your group agree.

Designate a contact person above and enclose a list of members' names, addresses, and phone numbers – and a check or money order for dues of \$5/yr times the number of names.

Individuals become members by filling in this form and mailing it with their dues.

Check should be written to **SWUJW**

mailed to: Gail Huggett, Treasurer

12314 South 14th Street, Jenks, OK 74037

*Dues include your subscription to **SWWIRL**

SWWIRL (South West Women in Religion Letter) Volume 8, Issue 4, Winter, 1994

Editorial Board: Mavis Belisle, Sharon

Lazar, Karen McGinnis, Cyndy Walton: "We extend our sincere appreciation and thanks to our contributors. We welcome all contributions."

submission address: Carol Farris,

SWWIRL Editor, Clarendon, TX

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Interview with Betty Sue Flowers, continued from page one...

it as an above or opposite to god in the masculine sense, and yet it doesn't have centuries of theology onto it, so it's a variable for some people to do with it what they will, which seems fine with me. I'm not so much of a theologian – I'm much more an experientialist when it comes to religion or spirituality. It's experience that counts. So, I guess I'm an experientialist.

Jo: What do you think you've changed, that you've touched?

BSF: Well, I don't know about what I've changed ... I do know what I'm interested in is studying change, and probably what I would talk about there [at the conference] would have to do with how the stories we tell about who we are change things, and I'll use some of my experience at Shell International writing global scenarios about the future.

Jo: What do you mean when you say the stories we tell about ourselves change things?

BSF: Well, if you tell a story of your life as a victim, what's possible in this moment is less than if you're telling the story of your life as a hero, using the same events, because the present is created in part from the future you're projecting and not just from the past; so the story you tell about who you are and who you are becoming will affect what you even notice right now in the present.

Jo: So our perception as well as those around us are affected by the story we tell?

BSF: Yes. And one of the things about the goddess or about this kind of work is that we're in the process of changing the story of how you relate to the universe – and that makes other things possible that go with it. It makes some things drop away, and other things emerge into consciousness.

Jo: Well, that's certainly true with taking away the goddess. The stories started to change ...

BSF: That's right.

Jo: – written as well as spoken, to where she almost disappears.

BSF: Well, if she got subsumed into Mary, *Jo: She got subsumed into Mary, and in some places wasn't. Who was it, Buddha? who came out of his mother's side? She certainly became lesser.*

BSF: Yes, so the story it culminates in

makes a difference too. In the Christian culture, the so-called 'fact' that Eve ate the apple first created a tremendous backlash against women.

Jo: I think she should have taken a bigger bite, personally.

BSF: (laughter) Yes. Right. So, that's one thing I've been studying – the way stories change; if you change your story, how the world changes around you, how what you see changes, how what's possible changes. I've been working with corporations, and stories of what they're telling about the future, and seeing what differences that makes – I've been working with General Motors, and with Shell International. So, that's one thing about changing.

Jo: Well, it's certainly something I've thought about ... a thing that's been hard to explain to my daughter: She has a great deal of difficulty understanding why women are shamed or banished for being lifegivers or for having those things which are produced by us like having blood once a month, nursing...

BSF: Can't tell you how many airport bathrooms I've nursed in Why do you think most people will be coming to this conference? What will they be looking for?

Jo: I suspect different things, a lot of things, actually – I think they'll want to share in a community that has some of their same goals.

This interview is just a sample of what will be presented at the conference. I hope you will join us, as we change everything we touch!

Many blessings, *Jo Soto*

Register Early!

9th Annual SWUW Conference, "She Changes Everything She Touches"

January 27-29, Austin, Texas

For additional information, please call
Linda Webster **512/458-1852**

"Let us hope the 21st century seeks universality at the smallest scale, that it recognizes that the fullness of existence is contained in the tiniest of spaces."

-Leopold Kohr, in conversation with Marilyn Berlin Snell



Being a Midwife

Lao Tzu

The wise leader does not intervene unnecessarily. The leader's presence is felt, but often the group runs itself.

Lesser leaders do a lot, say a lot, have followers, and form cults. Even worse ones use fear to energize the group and force to overcome resistance.

Only the most dreadful leaders have bad reputations. Remember that you are facilitating another person's process. It is not your process. Do not intrude. Do not control. Do not force your own needs and insights into the foreground.

If you do not trust a person's process, that person will not trust you. Imagine that you are a midwife; you are assisting at someone else's birth. Do good without show or fuss. Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the mother is helped, yet still free and in charge.

When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say: "We did it ourselves!"

The Tao of Leadership: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching
Adapted for a New Age

"Both tears and sweat are salty, but they render a different result. Tears will get you sympathy, sweat will get you change." —*Jesse Jackson*

Looking for a good book?

You might ask for a catalog from **Medea Books**, a woman-owned home business which offers titles in midwifery; women and children's health, including self-exam and traditions of healing; aging issues and menopause; simple living and alternative lifestyles; women travlin', self defense, contemporary feminism ... and green menstrual products, menarche kits, a device to pee standing up (should that be your preference) and organic underwear. Aim of the company owned by two sisters is to

"...empower women through self-education. We encourage you to get to know your body and to do self breast and cervical exams. We prefer prevention and self health care using natural remedies to a trip to the doctor. We also feel that women are often misunderstood and mistreated by the medical mainstream, and that it's only through knowledge that we can find new ways to better health." Address: 849 Almar Ave., Suite C-285, Santa Cruz, CA 95060 408/425-0913

MORE MADONNA, LESS JESUS

slogan suggested on a button available from "Book Woman" book store on 6th Street in Austin, TX

RESOURCES

The Older Women's League, 666 Eleventh St. NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20001-4512
Established in 1980, OWL has been fighting entrenched biases against midlife and older women in employment patterns, retirement programs, health care and planning.

OWL finds Social Security today to be "a system that discriminates almost across the board against women—be they single, married, divorced. ...it's structure to reward long-term, consecutive employment and just wasn't designed to accommodate what is fairly typical for women today, the roles of caregiving and working.

"A recent study estimates the value of women's unpaid caregiving work at a staggering \$515 billion annually—more than twice that of men. But Social Security actually penalizes this unpaid work!" by inserting a zero into her work record for each year she's out of the paid workforce to care for parents or children.

"Social Security makes a mockery of women's paid work as well. Because if a woman earns less than her husband, she will receive exactly the same benefit as if she had never worked outside the home. ...all the years she pays into the system make no difference at all in her retirement!"

"...since most women never even gain access to a pension program, 70% of women living alone have only Social Security benefits as their primary income.

OWL has 20,000 "creative, caring, committed women" as members. You may join too. Publishes a bi-monthly bulletin, *The OWL Observer*.

The Giraffe Project, 45 West 45th Street, Suite 402, New York, NY 10036 – encourages us to stick our necks out. This fits with organizing "Rise Up" training and also broader social action work. Here is an abbreviated version of their advice, titled "Seven Steps For Sticking Your Neck Out":

1. *Choose* Out of all the issues that concern you, choose one.
 2. *Envision* Get a clear picture of exactly how things will look when you achieve your goal. See yourself as a caring person, a person who takes responsibility for putting that caring to work. Hold tight to your vision and gradually pull the current reality toward it.
 3. *Study* Don't waste your energy re-inventing the wheel. Learn what other people have already created in your chosen issue area and build on it.
 4. *Assess* Identify your good points to help actualize your dream. Let your weak points show you new avenues for improvement.
 5. *Communicate* Inspire others through communicating your vision. Be willing to accept converts. As you communicate your vision, you will get feedback. No matter how wonderful your vision, you will hear about things you need to adjust – and you must listen, or you will sail off the edge of the world by yourself.
 6. *Work* It is a real temptation to intellectualize instead of applying elbow grease. You are responsible – you have to keep working toward your vision. There is no such thing as a risk-free life. Commit to risk to achieve the vision you have created.
 7. *Celebrate* Enjoy; take time to notice what worked. Let your accomplishments help you build your vision. This is essential to reach your goal.
- Write them for more ideas on "giraffeness."

Working Women Count! survey by the Women's Bureau, U.S. Dept of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave NW, Washington, DC 20210

Questionnaires and interviews during a compact four-month period of 1994 asked women to evaluate their work lives. Cites that 99% of women in America will work for pay sometime during their lives. You may receive a free full report by writing the DC address. Find out what over a quarter of a million women said.

PEACE ON EARTH, a report on PPCAB Pantex tour by Mavis Belisle

Mavis Belisle is director of The Peace Farm, an organization created to monitor Pantex, the industrial complex where U.S. nuclear warheads were assembled. Located on land above the Ogalala aquifer, water supply to eight states, since "the end of the cold war" Pantex has dis-assembled weapons but now stores their lethal components at the site. The Peace Farm is located across the highway from Pantex's back gate. This is an account of Mavis's last site inspection of the Pantex facility:

The tour began pretty much as usual, with a gathering for orientation and briefings. There were about forty of us, including many ex-officio state and federal regulators and some of the Pantex employees who would be involved in a media tour the next day, accompanying us in a sort of dry run before their main event.

Because the plant has been in "maintenance" mode for several weeks, with no dismantling activities going on, and because areas of the plant not usually open to visitors had been "sanitized" for the media day, we would walk through the assembly cells and bays rather than drive by areas and have them pointed out from the bus as on earlier tours.

After welcomes to the plant and security briefings, we were given an overview of the environmental restoration/waste management program, and shown a dismantlement video. And then, with elaborate security precautions, the tour began.

Clacking along in plastic toe protectors and safety glasses, we started in Bldg 12-104A, Bay 19 (Linear Accelerator), for a description of the weapons verification/integrity testing, in which weapons are "x-rayed" before disassembly to ensure that all internal parts are in order, looking as they are expected to look inside as well as outside.

The next stop was Bay 18 (Vacuum Chamber) in the same building, where we were shown how the nuclear explosive parts are checked to make sure there are no leaks before forwarding on for deployment, how pit storage and shipping containers are checked, and how new storage containers for plutonium pits will work.

We went next to the assembly/disassembly areas. Because the cells and bays are limited in the number of people allowed, the group was divided. Half of us started in a cell, the other half in a bay, then we switched places.

My group went first into a bay where

weapons are separated into their various components, and then to a cell where the "physics package" itself is taken apart.

After a break for lunch, we viewed the "stage Right" video and boarded the bus again for Zone 4, the pit storage area. We were shown the security precautions involved in opening an igloo to add, remove, or verify pits; and then the model igloo that has been set up for training for "Stage Right." Workers there demonstrated how the inventory process will take place when the system is implemented.

The final stop was the transportation area, where we were told about courier training, and looked at trucks and escort vehicles. The train, no longer in use, was also pointed out.

I had seen the pit storage area and stage right demonstration on previous tours, and had been as close to trucks and escorts off-site. The assembly/ disassembly area was the "new" part for me, and it affected me profoundly. Throughout the area were models of weapons (or sanitized samples?): B61, B57, B83, B28. Some were active in the stockpile and some retired. They were discussed – their various configurations and yields – as dispassionately as the weight of the doors to the bays or the thickness of the gravel above us. There were photos of the weapons with parachutes opening as they were dropped from airplanes. My mind drifted, trying to remember the number of people one would expect to be killed by a one kiloton air blast as opposed to a surface explosion by the same weapon.

Many walls throughout the area also included posters with names of weapons that might be handled there: Minuteman..., Cruise..., Peace Keeper.... I remembered the struggles to stop deployment of each of these systems, and what role each played in military strategies. In the almost three hours inside the area where all the nuclear

continued on page seven...

PEACE ON EARTH, continued from page six:

weapons in the U.S. arsenal have been assembled, the word *kill* wasn't used once. There was no hint that in the war these weapons were built for, 150 million American lives were considered an acceptable price for "winning."

What came across was the pride of workers in their skill and the technical sophistication of their jobs, their consciousness of the minute details required to ensure their day-to-day safety, and their total detachment on some profound level from the meaning of their work. In each of the stops after the first, workers spoke of assembly in the present tense, though no new weapons have been assembled in several years. If anyone thought, "Thank God, we will never have to build weapons of mass destruction again" it was deeply hidden.

The night after the tour my dreams returned me to the assembly/disassembly areas, walking along and listening to the cool, reassuring voices of the guides, but the scene kept shifting back and forth to gas chambers in Germany with Nazi officers explaining the technical sophistication of the pipes and valves carrying poison gas, the efficiency with which they could move thousands through the system, and pointing with pride to spotless walls and floors.

Brian Swimme, who earned his Ph.D. in gravitational systems and teaches cosmology at a California college, describes what takes place

in standard scientific training as equivalent in many ways to a frontal lobotomy. "... by the time they are done training us as leaders for our major institutions, we have only a sliver of our original minds still operative. What sliver is left? ...It is the sliver chiseled to perfection for controlling, for distancing, for calculating, and for dominating. ...Trapped inside our mind splinter, **we are unable to see what is right there before us.** We see something, no doubt, but it's at best a gnarled illusion of the actual reality enveloping us."

On this Pantex tour, I saw more clearly than ever the effects of this mind split. Am I glad I went? Yes. Will I ever go again? No. Not until the day comes when we can all recognize the madness that overcame us in these decades, and we go together to dedicate those cells and bays as a memorial to all that has been lost and a commitment that it must never happen again.

In spite of all the treaty agreements and piles of dismantled weapons, I have been sharply reminded how long it may be until that day.

For further information about the work of The Peace Farm, you may contact Mavis Belisle at HCR2, Box 25, Panhandle, TX 79068. Contributions to peace work are always needed.

Twelve Things to Remember

The value of time
The success of perseverance
The pleasure of working
The dignity of simplicity
The worth of character
The power of kindness
The influence of example
The obligation of duty
The wisdom of economy
The value of patience
The improvement of talent
The joy of originating
by Marshall Field

Southwest Unitarian Universalist Women **Ninth Annual Conference:**

"The Changes Everything She Touches..."

January 27, 28, 29, 1995

Austin, Texas

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or Rosemary Maclsaacs 512/441-6800

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\$25 + 10%, deadline 12/15/94

COST \$80 prior to 12/14; \$100 after 12/14

Questions: Linda Webster, 512/458-1852

One Faith, Many "Feminisms"

from *The Faith of a Feminist* by Judith Meyer

"Contemporary feminism is a social, economic, political, and spiritual movement that profoundly influences Unitarian Universalism. The contributions of feminism have enabled UUism to take another step in its spiritual evolution.

The feminist critique of patriarchal religion, for example, has revealed the systematic oppression of women through the assertion of male religious authority. Feminism corrects our understanding of religion by exposing patriarchal patterns in the clergy, the gender image of God, the expression of worship, and the organization of the church – and by affirming the authority of women and women's experiences. Feminism also

celebrates women's deep insights into the nature of life itself.

Unitarian Universalism can embrace the feminist critique and commit itself to the feminist construction of faith.

Our appreciation of diversity and our belief in the dignity and worth of every human being have encouraged UUs to strive for religious expression that celebrates the experiences of women, and to hold inclusivity itself as an important religious value. Feminist UUs differ on such issues as the meaning of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the existence of God or Goddess, or even the value of Western religion itself. Feminism expresses itself within UUism across a broad spectrum of

belief. While individual attitudes toward religious tradition may vary among UU feminists, there is common ground; **religious faith is a dynamic process of relating to one another and to our ultimate concerns.**

For some UU feminists, UUism remains solidly identified with the Jewish and Christian heritage. The feminist critique of biblical scripture provides new interpretations that illuminate the experience of women, both in ancient and modern times. Others believe that biblical traditions are contaminated by the patriarchal biases of history, and they turn to images and rituals from other traditions to express their religious faith."

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