

NEWS & NOTES

Summer 2003

Mission statement of Charis Circle: The Charis Circle, a non-profit organization, exists to foster feminist community and to create social change. Charis Circle offers educational and cultural events and programs to the Atlanta community that empower women, men and children to honor themselves and work for justice in the world. We want to create a feminist world where racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and all other oppressions do not exist.

When I Was a Woman Child: Monologues in Celebration of Girlhood by Fiona Lewis

Sunday, June 22nd, 2003 was an amazing day. On that day we saw the hidden talents and stories of many women in our community come to full flower on the stage of the First Existentialist Congregation in the first public reading presented by Charis Circle's Women Writers Group. The women—Penny White, April VanMansfeld, Marguerite Ann VanMansfeld, Terri Lamme, Tricia Anders, Cherie Evans Lyon, Chantal Gadd, Malika, Collette Elbert, Frances Vernell, and Kathy Liddle, gave heart-breaking, inspiring, and even funny peeks at childhood experiences that many of us could never imagine. Did you ever wonder what it was like growing up Catholic and curious? Or to live among the sights, smells and stories of a beauty salon? Ever wonder how it might have been to experience girlhood in another country? These and so many others stories were opened up like precious gifts to the audience that evening. Brenda Porter, a local actress and friend of Charis, emceed this one of a kind fundraiser for Charis Circle. She graciously entertained the crowd, holding it spellbound while wearing a Mickey Mouse hat that was a link to her own woman-childhood. As with everything Ms. Porter undertakes, she did such an amazing job that we could only hope to have her back at the end of the year for the second installment of *When I was a Woman Child*.

During the intermission, the Gaia Collective Drumming Circle, led by the musical duo Fairewing, held the crowd captive with African and Middle Eastern drumming. Before and after my dance performance with the drummers, I sat in the audience, awed by the raw honesty and catharsis inducing monologues



that took place on the stage. In those two hours, I discovered things about these women, women I talk with almost everyday, that one could never guess were behind the smiling eyes or the freely given hugs. It made me want to share a part of my

own story, a part of myself, with the Charis community. And on December 14th, when the second part of *When I was a Woman Child* is scheduled to be performed, I just might share that story. Thanks to First E for their gracious co-sponsoring of this event and to the women of Open Mic for all their support!

The pictures in this article were taken at an abbreviated performance of the production at Woodruff Park on July 7th as part of the Summer Series presented by the Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs.

Dining for Charis Circle

by Debra Snell

Charis Circle is excited to announce a new fundraiser, "Dining for Charis Circle," September 15, at the Pleasant Peasant (on the corner of Peachtree and Linden). Maureen Kalmanson, an owner of the Peasant restaurants and longtime supporter of Charis Circle, is planning a 4-course menu for Charis Circle diners. The Pleasant Peasant is a longstanding Atlanta restaurant with a reputation for fabulous food in a warm and inviting atmosphere.

The restaurant is open 5:30–10:00 p.m. and Charis Circle diners can dine at anytime. Reservations are recommended, especially for larger parties—let's fill the restaurant! Tickets are \$50 each and include a glass of wine. (Tip is additional.) The menu will include vegetarian choices. Charis Circle will receive half of the proceeds.

Please mark your calendars for September 15 and bring your friends and family for "Dining for Charis Circle." Tickets are available at Charis Books, from a Charis Circle board member or staff person, or call 404-524-0304.



Safety and Inclusiveness

by Jane Branscomb, Executive Director

What makes an environment a safe space? What makes it an open space? Is it possible to have both at once? This is a persistent conundrum for Charis Circle. Not only are the answers subjective and widely variable, but at times they present paradoxes.

For example, can we actively dismantle the binary gender paradigm without obscuring the existing prejudices and power differentials that are based on it? Or conversely, can we challenge sex- and gender-based prejudices and power differentials without reinforcing the binary gender paradigm?

Some of our programs we judge as calling for a restricted audience in order to establish safe space for those who, as women in this society, experience silencing backed by various forms of violence. So we designate these occasional or ongoing programs as "women only, please." We want to welcome affirmatively those who reject classification as women, as well as women who previously were assigned a male classification, and so we added "trans inclusive" to this note.

But have we now thwarted this latter group's due acceptance as women by implying that they weren't already included under the term? Have we masked the existence of a gender continuum among biological males, whether they retain or reject classification as men? Have we colluded in disempowering women by presuming that they can't take care of themselves in the presence of men? After discussion and research, we revised our wording again.

Variations of these questions apply to other broad distinctions—race, sexuality, body ability, class. None of these turn out to be as binary or clear-cut as our culture treats them; we all have fluid locations on the continua of race, class, ability, sexuality and other dimensions. But all of these carry very real oppression experiences and histories, embedded in social

norms and institutions, which are in part perpetuated by our treating them as binary or clear-cut.

In each case those of us who live generally on the dominant side of the equation lack, to varying degrees, consciousness and understanding of how we contribute to the problem; and we can improve these by getting to know people across the spectrum, hearing their voices, engaging in dialog, undoing our assumptions, attitudes and beliefs. Those living on the subordinate side need, to varying degrees, spaces in which to safely lower our guard and redefine our identity in a positive light on the way to healing and wholeness.

Charis Circle will continue searching for the best ways to assist personal growth, foster community, and promote social change. We'll keep questioning our language, and our meaning, to be sure we're as inclusive and welcoming as possible and not operating out of the paradigms we're trying to shift. We appreciate your being with us, with honesty and openness, in this messy but uplifting process.

As always, I welcome your thoughts. E-mail me at jane@chariscircle.org.

Charis Books and Charis Circle Participate in the Atlanta Literary Festival

by Linda Bryant

The Atlanta Literary Festival was created last year and is slated to be an annual event each September to encourage everyone to rediscover the love of reading, meet authors, and support literacy programs throughout the state of Georgia.

The Festival itself is a non-profit organization and intends to funnel all profits to local literacy organizations. You can check it out and get more details at www.atlantaliteraryfestival.com.

We are very excited that our guest for the September 25th Night of 100 Authors, when authors will be reading throughout the city, will be Pearl Cleage! Pearl's new novel will be out then so watch for ***Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do*** and plan to join us for a fabulous night with Pearl – if you've never heard her read, you are in for a treat. Thank you, Pearl, for your faithful support!

Charis Circle will join the bookstore on September 27 and 28 for another aspect of the Festival: *Pages at Phipps*. We will have a booth at Phipps Plaza where we can spread the word about Circle programs and we will also have many author signings. Joining us to sign their books will be Valerie Boyd, (***Wrapped in Rainbows***), Virginia Spencer Carr (***The Lonely Hunter***), Shonia Brown, (***A Deeper Love***), Sara Martin (***More Than Petticoats***), Monique Douglass (***From Ghetto to Glory***) and Aviva Jill Romm (***The Natural Pregnancy Book***).



Pearl Cleage
© Albert Trotman/AllfordTrotman.com

Charis on Parade

As part of our efforts to be visible in the community, Charis Circle has been in two parades this year, Inman Park Festival and PRIDE. We hope to participate in the Little Five Points Halloween Parade on October 25th as well.

COME JOIN US!



SisterGirls

by Rhiannon O'Connor,
SisterGirls Intern



Hello from SisterGirls! We have had a very exciting spring and are thrilled that SisterGirls is active again after a winter break. Our first three sessions were focused on the topics of community, body image and feminism. Our mentors have had an incredible time working with the SisterGirls – we only hope that the girls have learned as much from us as we have from them! Activities have included a "Community Tree," a "Beautiful Women Show," and the creation of a 'zine about what feminism means to each of us. We also made a huge banner, "SisterGirls Have Pride!" that we carried in the Pride Parade in June; We attended an Atlanta Beat game in July. Many, many thanks to the Atlanta Beat for donating tickets!

The next two sessions will take place on July 26 and August 16 from 1 to 5pm. All girls ages 9 to 14 are welcome; contact Charis Circle for more information or to sign up. We just need your name, phone number and age and we'll give you directions to the meeting. I look forward to some new faces joining our vibrant group!

Program Highlight: Intimate Partner Violence

by Barbara Gibson

Nearly 30 women and men gathered last month to discuss intimate partner violence in the lesbian and gay community. The discussion, planned as a part of Pride month, was facilitated by Ulester Douglas of Men Stopping Violence and Barbara Gibson of the Women's Resource Center. Participants included survivors, service providers and others who understand that, whether fists or harsh words fly in our homes or in the homes of our neighbors, violence affects us all.

The informal dialogue, energized by passionate concern, touched on such topics as barriers to speaking out against violence in lesbian and gay relationships. These included homophobia, isolation, lack of community services, rigidly constructed gender roles and even our own fears around exposing "dirty laundry" in a sometimes hostile world.

Ending intimate partner violence is no small feat. We must continue to challenge ourselves and one another to reach for our vision of safe communities. We can do it. The work begins within.

To get or give help call Kim Frndak at the Women's Resource Center: 404/508-9717 x 101

High School Women Writers

by Elizabeth Anderson

On Saturday, June 7th the High School Women Writers group converged on Linda Bryant's house for an exciting mix of old and new Charis writers. Group alumnae Alexis Gumbs and Elizabeth Anderson returned to lead a workshop on harnessing creative energy. Because the group included young women ages 14-21 who embodied a diverse range of experiences and writing styles, we felt it was particularly important for each young woman to think about her own creative process and discover the various sources of her personal creative energy. Aside from a day full of writing we also enjoyed many games and exercises to help us visualize what we would want out of a community of writers.

After the workshop the writers headed over to Charis to share some of their writings with the larger Charis community. The event included young women who had never before read their work to an audience and others who had participated in poetry readings countless times. The range of voices and styles was most exciting as each young woman brought her own perspective and passion to the Charis audience.

As always we thank everyone who continues to encourage the powerful expression of these young women and we encourage all who are interested to join us at our next public reading. We look forward to continuing our work throughout the summer on our upcoming anthology and continue to welcome any interested young women entering grades 9-12

on Tuesday afternoons from 5 to 6:30 in the Charis Circle office.



Stories for free children

by Lisa Diane White

Charis Circle story time for children (especially those ages 3-7), is held the third Saturday of each month from 11:00-11:45 am. Stories for Free Children helps liberate children from negative stereotypes and biases about themselves or others. Some of the upcoming stories will include a Spanish/bi-lingual presentation and a sign-language story time where the children will be introduced to signing. We enjoy creating opportunities that celebrate children and their wonderful diversity. Fun giveaways are often included for your children's enjoyment. We are working hard to keep you updated about this monthly event and encourage you to sign up for email reminders. Just send your e-mail address to lisa@chariscircle.org and become part of the Stories for Free Children e-group. Hope to see you at the next story time!

Looking Forward

Charis Circle's 3rd Annual
CELEBRATION of WOMEN, MUSIC & ART

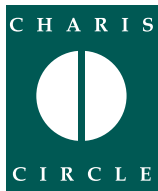
Sunday, November 9th, 5:30 to 9 pm
at the Academy of Medicine in Midtown

Honorary Co-Chairs
Mayor Shirley Franklin and Emily Saliers

A lively and elegant evening ~ fine food, beverages and company; fantastic music and silent auction ~ all for the amazing price of \$30 per ticket! **Pre-pay to reserve yours now.** Call, stop by, or mail your check with ticket request today.

- ▶ 3rd Thursday evening of each month at 7:30, our ongoing **Feminism 101** series
- ▶ Thursday, August 14, 7:30 – Gifted midwife and author Aviva Jill Romm discusses the new edition of her **Natural Pregnancy Book**
- ▶ Friday, August 29, 8 pm – A lively night as local authors read their work in celebration of Black LGBTQ Pride
- ▶ Friday, October 3, 7:30, First Existentialist Congregation – Co-sponsoring with our friends at First E, we are honored to present Maxine Hong Kingston, well-loved author of **Woman Warrior**, with her new book **The Fifth Book of Peace**, a beautiful weaving of memoir and fiction.
- ▶ Please pick up our monthly program fliers or check the calendar at www.chariscircle.org

Please clip and mail to the Charis Circle.



Yes, I want to support Charis Circle and guarantee the continuation of a unique and treasured resource. Here's my tax-deductible contribution to the Charis Circle.

- \$20
 \$50
 \$100
 \$250
 \$500
 Other \$ _____

Please make your check payable to Charis Circle,
1189 Euclid Avenue NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30307

- My check is enclosed
 Please charge my
 Visa MC Discover Amex

Name _____

Address _____

City, State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

Email _____

Thank You!

Signature

Card Number _____ Exp.Date _____

rec'd _____ ack _____