

Our Day of Hope: A Summit for WNC Women in Asheville

August 5 & 6, 2016, held at the Reuter Center

Sarah Larson and Sally Gooze were always running into each other at venues they both attended and after a month, they realized that a friendship was being born due to their mutual interests. After many years their instincts were right and they have become fast friends.

During the period of sharing their life stories they were amazed at how many of their life paths created an even greater commonality. Both had taught in global schools: Sally in Okinawa, Sarah in Shanghai and Ghana. They both have been fascinated by art: Sally in visual arts and Sarah with the written word, as well as verbal storytelling. Sarah writes using visual art as a prompt and inspiration. Sally likes to create artistic calligraphy.

Both women have shared their life challenges and found enrichment in their life tapestries from both sorrow and joy. By sharing their stories, they drew closer. It was a comfort knowing they were not alone in overcoming some difficult struggles and sharing these travails brought them closer to each other.

They participated in the Reuter Center (now known as OLLI) Leadership Asheville Seniors 23, founded the storytelling festival known as Stories on Asheville's Front Porch now in its seventh year, and managed to discover other friends to make a circle of intentional friendships. These friendships all share a dedication to the ideas of inclusion, multi-cultural diversity, and varied religious practices, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. They see faith as a lifetime journey of searching, never settling into strict dogma or believing that mortals can attain all the answers in a lifetime.

Their latest and greatest new endeavor is to be facilitators of a grassroots generated event to honor the role of women as healers and peacekeepers: Our Day of Hope: A Summit for WNC Women will be held August 5 & 6, 2016 at the Reuter Center, on the campus of UNC-Asheville.

Sally: "I've been a volunteer at the Botanical Gardens, Manna Food Bank and along with Judy Levitt on the Social Justice Committee at Beth Israel Synagogue, initiating Interfaith Programs. All my community service interest and volunteer life has (sic) prepared me for leadership with Our Day of Hope. Our shared vision has given us structure for our (sic) day. Like Sarah, I've always believed it is important to accept people by honoring and respecting their beliefs."

Sarah: "I've always questioned where that ethic came from it is so deep in me. As a teenager, I was on a committee with the World Council of Churches, as well as, an officer with my own denomination on the county and state level and a delegate to national conventions where I met with Hungarian teens, who were active in the Revolution and where I led worship services for thousands of international delegates. I remember our youth advisor explaining that our friends might have beliefs that limited their activities, like not attending dances or not going to the movies on Sunday. It is just as right for them as it is for you to believe otherwise, until you have been inspired to different convictions. That was a powerful lesson for me."

Sarah and Sally both experienced conflicts during college and their careers about finding time for volunteer service. Sarah says, "It was always a strong part of me, sometimes to the detriment of my studies. I had to keep convincing myself that my main job was to study and prepare for the future." Sarah worked with students housed in mental institutions and did service projects around the college, served on the Student Board of Affairs and Student Government. Sally worked with the Upward Bound Program for Algonquin Indians and was a counselor in her dorm. Prior to college Sarah led young girls in the production of quilts to send to Appalachia in flooded areas. Later she designed a summer program to work with the children of migrant workers in Northern Indiana.

Looking back, both women can see the threads of their lives preparing them for this moment. They have felt and appreciated the support of Rabbi Goldstein of Beth Israel and Rev. Patrick Johnson of First Presbyterian Church, who also live this ethic of inclusion as faith leaders of their respective congregations." It is important to us that we join with women of many faiths and diverse ethnicities," said Sally. "All voices are necessary to the conversation on August 5 & 6. Come without walls, labels or stereotypes. Come share your hope with us," added Sarah.

The Summit will offer creative workshops on August 5, also at Reuters. The mask making workshop with storytelling will begin at 9:00 and last until 11:00. From 1:00-3:00 participants who register will be creating a secret futures box. Both will be led by artist Suzanne Benton.

The Doors open on August 6 at 9 AM to facilitate beginning at 10 AM. There will be music led by Womansong and laughter yoga led by LaBet Pritchard while settling in for the morning. Terry Bellamy will give the Welcome followed by the keynote presenter, Suzanne Benton a United Nations honoree, who will be presenting via performance art. Suzanne has studied the theatre of the mask throughout the world, through a Methodist Church grant. She will be telling women's stories through masks she has create. These stories will be the basis for small group discussions following her performance.

On August 6 participants will create a Wall of Hope designed by Sally.

"We hope that women from every walk of life, every faith practice, and race will come to the conversation. We will come as we are, without labels and stereotypes just with out hopes to begin the conversation of how we can live believing that love is stronger than hate, hope is stronger than fear," said Sarah. "This is women's work and knowing other women share my intent I can do better at living it. I hope so."

For registration forms, visit your local Buncombe County Library, YWCA of Asheville or the Unitarian Universalist Church of Asheville on the corner of Charlotte Street and Edwin Place.

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