

Commentary on 1+10=50,000

By Ruthann L. Rountree

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DREAM DEFERRED

Reading the article about Amy Biehl led me to reflect on a recent experience I had in Kentucky. My plans were to take a side trip into Appalachia, to talk with people and view rural poverty first hand. The trip was canceled following a 30 minute drive into the country, just outside of Louisville. While enjoying the beautiful lush green trees, shrubbery, and rolling hills, I became aware of a tiny alarm. It grew louder with each bend I rounded in the road. The trees lining the two lane road began to meet and grow together; they seemed an omen of impending danger. Finding a way to turn around, I did so pressing the pedal to the floor.

As an African American woman, raised in a western state, I did not grow up with alarms in my head. Over the years I have learned that some environs are off limits, even in America. On various occasions I have accidentally gone into the wrong area. Fortunately local residents advised me to leave for my own good. Heeding these warnings allowed me to escape physical harm. Paying attention to the alarm has guided me through unfamiliar communities and around potentially volatile situations.

PATH OF THE VISIONARY

Amy Biehl's life cannot be judged solely on her age — longevity does not guarantee that a person will make a contribution to society. I would suggest that one's life can best be evaluated by the quality of one's character. The fruits of Amy's labor reveal that she probably achieved an advanced level of socio-emotional and spiritual maturity. Individuals at this level work towards self-actualization and seek to function as world citizens. They develop a special lens that allows them to recognize the borderless nature of evil: racism, sexism, poverty, and violence. Ultimately, if Amy Biehl had lived, we do not know what her contributions to the world might have been.

Entire nations were transformed by visionaries. Unfortunately the legacy left by many of these visionaries is martyrdom. Medgar Evers (1963, civil rights advocate), Jonathan Daniels, 26 year old seminary student (1965, civil rights advocate), Steven Biko (1977, South African Black Consciousness Movement leader) and Ruth First (1982, South African A.N.C. organizer) and others too numerous to name were killed. They were ordinary people who were martyred because of their extraordinary vision.

Systems of oppression specialize in creating and per-

petuating rigid boundaries based upon class, race and gender roles. They maintain control through subsystems that are ruthless, self-destructive and hostile to outside influence. Individuals and families living in these systems exist at the margins of society. Oppressive systems cannot tolerate the message of a visionary: peace, social justice and the oneness of humanity. Visionaries may fail to perceive or adhere to the realities of these closed systems while attempting to bring about social change. The consequences for ignoring these system boundaries can be fatal.

"Without a vision the people perish" (Pro 29:18). A modern translation of this proverb might read: Without revelation, the people cast off all restraint. When all restraint is cast off the weapons of the colonizer become the tactics of the colonized. Slogans like "one settler, one bullet" are reminiscent of the slogan that rang in the streets of Los Angeles just a few years ago, "no justice no peace." These slogans challenge the social order and call for social action.

"As an organizer I start from where the world is,

As it is, not as I would like it to be." S. Alinski

Starting from where the world is implies that the organizer must be aware of the sociohistorical dynamics and strengths of individuals and organizations in that community. These forces shape the space into that the organizer enters. The women's movement in today's South Africa must be woven into the fabric that already exists. Leaders such as Lillian Ngoyi and Helen

Joseph, and groups such as The Black Sash (1955) the National Federation of Women, the Women's league of ANC and Federation of South Africa represent the residual resources and strengths of older visionaries available to the organizer of women's concerns in South Africa. The new visionaries must be linked to the work of the past

and current grassroots movements.

Social work, at one time, was a profession that attracted and birthed visionaries. The challenge is how to incorporate the visionary into community practice and develop community interventions that identify the survival strategies and residual resources of the community. □



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