

Our (Rowdy) Lady of the Labyrinth

By Judith Sornberger

Apricot azaleas, lilac Jacob's ladder, orchid foxglove, lemon iris, cobalt blue lobelia—I had to come outside, amid the colors and bright scents of my garden, to write about my friend Sandra Linck.

A few weeks earlier I had stayed with Sandra over the weekend as she recuperated from complications following brain surgery. Her legs were too rubbery to carry her to the bathroom by themselves, and she slept most of the time. But when awake, she was plotting where to sow the seeds she had just received in the mail from Wildseed Farm in Texas: red corn poppies, dame's rocket, yarrow, cosmos, blanket flower. I brought the box of seed packets to her bed so she could dream over them in her waking moments.

The summer before she had retired from her post as Associate Provost at Mansfield University where I had met her when I interviewed for a teaching job ten years earlier. Right off I had liked her smile—a grin, really—conspiratorial, savvy, mischievous. It had been late March, and a steel gray sky had spit mean little pellets of snow at my face as I crossed the campus for my meeting with her. Seated beside the gray-pin-striped Provost, she had worn a lavender silk suit (a hue of what I would come to learn was her signature purple) and amethyst earrings—visible evidence of spring's arrival, despite the dearth of daffodils and tulips.

It was her laugh that assured me that we would become friends. How can a laugh be both warm and wicked at one time? She had laughed such a laugh that day—a laugh that both welcomed and winked. If hired, I would be expected to start a Women's Studies program, a rather daunting task, I surmised, for an untenured assistant professor in this rural and isolated campus. But her laugh told me that I would have at least one ally, not to mention a sister of the spirit.

Shortly after I was hired, I went to Sandra for advice on some points of order as I began to meet with my committee to create a proposal for the new program. That day she gave me the best professional advice I think a woman has ever offered another woman working within a traditionally male field. The best approach—the one that had always worked for her—had been to just go ahead and do whatever you wanted to do. "Don't ask permission," she said. "Just go on and do it, and later if somebody gets in a huff you can say (and here her eyebrows lifted innocently), 'Oh well, I didn't know.'" Then she gave me her cat-that-swallowed-the-canary grin.

Although she made many kinds of contributions to the university, her strongest suit was as a community builder. She got people from various corners of the campus together to discuss things, BIG things—not the petty stuff we quarreled over in committee meetings. She looked out for people and protected the underdogs. She spoke out and she listened. Outside of work, she devised opportunities

for women faculty and staff to come together and laugh. She hosted brunches and dinners in her cozy farm kitchen where we huddled near the woodstove, surrounded by her dark rose-colored cupboards and the soft light of scented votives in the windows. She started a book group where scientists, librarians and psychologists talked about everything—sometimes even the book at hand. Sandra liked to associate with the people on campus that she called “the rowdies.” She and I didn’t always agree on who the rowdies were; nevertheless, I was delighted to be included in her rowdy band of women.

All this was going on while she battled cancer. It first showed up as colon cancer four years after I came to Mansfield, and it later appeared in her liver, lung, and, most recently, her brain. Always she took the most aggressive approach. Always. Surgery, chemo, radiation—over and over in a cycle nearly as predictable as the seasons that she celebrated with such flair—with parties and food, whimsical decorations and dashing clothing.

Despite the fact that her energy was depleted by these treatments and her blood sugar levels as a diabetic were as erratic as a small university’s budget, she kept working for another seven years. But not only that. She kept learning, starting and finishing new projects, becoming new things.

A gifted writer, she took enough courses from me and my colleague Bruce Barton to attach a minor in Creative Writing to her Ph.D. She studied to become an Episcopal deacon (a term, which, she let her friends know, meant “angel”), and her ordination made me rethink my alienation from the church. After all, if a rowdy woman like Sandra could be admitted to the inner sanctum, maybe there was a place for me along the margins.

After one of her surgeries, she made several painfully beautiful stained glass pieces in response to her experience with cancer. She wrote a poem to accompany each one and allowed them to be hung in the Women’s Studies Program’s women’s art show.

She traveled to India during this time to be honored as “educator of the year” by an agency there. And she traveled “home” to Missouri several times a year to visit her parents and her grown children nearby. She built raised flowerbeds so that her mother could still engage in gardening—her favorite activity—from her wheelchair. And last year she officiated at her daughter’s wedding in Lawrence, Kansas.

I loved to watch her before a congregation, her sermons part poetry, part down-to-earth midwestern farm girl wisdom, and part the sultry humor of a Mae West. And I loved to receive Communion from her hand, for she offered the wafer and the wine with all the womanly warmth with which she set out a buffet and welcomed her friends to the table.

Last Spring she had emailed her friends with her intention to retire. If she had one summer left, she had written, she wanted to spend it in her garden. And she didn’t mean setting out a few annuals and doing a little weeding, either! She hatched a plan to turn her property into a place where her friends and others could seek retreat in the natural world. Along with her friend and hired helpmate Heather,

she created seven meditation sites with benches and views; a firepit with a hand built stone wall setting it off; a rock beach around her pond; and—the crowning glory—a labyrinth. Being the pragmatic Swede that she was, she didn't fret over it a lot. She just chose a field where wildflowers came up among the grasses, consulted a few diagrams, and she and Heather took off with the lawnmower.

I was one of eight women invited to launch the labyrinth one golden evening last summer. As we walked the curving path, we took turns pulling a wagon holding the large, stone Celtic cross Sandra had ordered for its center. Reaching the center, we set it into place, said our prayers, and wound back out through the concentric circles. I noticed a horse from the neighbor's field above us watching. She might well have been wondering what those crazy ladies were up to, but I think that she was our "watcher." The first time I walked a labyrinth I had been told that one person, the watcher, stands outside and prays for those walking within it. The chestnut horse stood, faithfully and still, as we circled the center and as the sun reached the horizon, glowing like the eye of God before it disappeared.

During my stay at Sandra's, nearly a year after that night, she called me into her bedroom where she had devised a plan for her wild seeds. She asked if I would sow a mixture of the yellow yarrow and red corn poppies in the labyrinth. "Go out there and be Mother Nature," she grinned. She had lost her wavy blonde hair in the last round of radiation, but she had held onto that grin for dear life. "I want it to be fabulous," she said. *Fabulous*, I thought grimly, surveying the weather. It wasn't that pleasant a prospect. For May, it was downright cold and the sky wore its darkest scowl. But I went out there and sowed, and knowing that that would never be enough, I twirled and danced and waved my arms in hopeful arcs as rain ran down my face and drenched my feet.

Although, for a brief time, Sandra was my student, I was her student in a truer and deeper sense of the word ever since our first meeting. So many of us have been her protégées, her apprentices. So many of us are trying to learn from remembering her how to become "fabulous."

Let's Honor Sandra Linck

By Lynn Pifer

Mansfield University held a dedication ceremony for its childcare center on October 11, 2001. Appropriately, the center has been named for Sandra Linck, the former associate provost who had advocated for a childcare center ever since she first came to campus with her two kids to begin her career at Mansfield as a home economics professor. No one has done more to promote a childcare center here than Sandra, and no one deserves the honor more.

Like a lot of people, I wasn't prepared to lose Sandra this June. It is comforting to me that the childcare center will honor her memory. Steve Bronn, V.P. for Finance, welcomed the audience and introduced the speakers. Connie Beckman, of the M.U. Women's Commission, Denny Murray, faculty member, President Halstead, and Sandra's daughter, Sara Taliaferro, all spoke at the ceremony. Connie noted that Sandra always fought for what was right. She didn't relax when the building was being

finished; she looked for improvements. "It needs a tree." She said, "The children will need some shade to play in." It would be easy to forget about the center once it's up and running, but Sandra kept thinking about the children's interests.

We got to see the children when they came out and performed a song for the audience. I'm quite familiar with the song since my daughter, who attends the center's preschool class, has been practicing the song, complete with gestures, at the dinner table for several nights:

I'm a little scarecrow, stuffed with hay.

Here I stand in the field all day.

When I see a crow I like to shout,

"Hey! You Crows! You better get out!"

It fits the "I'm a Little Teapot" tune, and the children enjoy shouting the last line enthusiastically.

Although I knew what the sign would say before Pres. Halstead and Sara Taliaferro removed the Mansfield flag, it was still moving to read the words, "Sandra B. Linck Childcare Center." There's also a portrait of Sandra that hangs in the lobby, noting that she was an "educator and innovator, leader and rebel, professor and poet."

After the ceremony we moved into the center to enjoy punch and cookies with the children and admire their art and school work on the walls. The Sandra B. Linck Childcare Center is full now. They've got so many kids that they've partitioned the preschool side into two areas: one for 2 and 3 year olds and one for 4 and 5 year olds. I remember hearing about a rebellion among the 4 year olds when the dress up clothes ended up on the other side of the partition. They've solved the problem with a box of silly dress up hats on the older kids' side.

There are other problems to solve, however. We still need to address cost of the center for student parents. Many student parents are working, attending school, and still having trouble making the weekly tuition rates. Scott's Day Care charges reasonable rates that are competitive for this area, but that's little consolation for parents who can't afford any kind of professional day care.

One of Sandra's visions was that the center would be for student parents first, and that the university should help subsidize the tuition for children of M.U. students. There are, however, several factors that complicate this vision. In the first place, Scott's Day Care is a private company, and cannot charge different rates for different customers. Also, since Scott's is an auxiliary service to students, the University cannot provide subsidies out of its budget.

We need to look to more creative solutions. M.U. students, for instance, could vote to impose an activity fee upon themselves to support day care subsidies. This would work the same way current

student activity fees support MAC concerts or the Fitness Center and would be the fastest and most effective way to generate funds. Previous attempts to pass such an initiative through SGA have failed, however.

Another possibility is applying for federal grants. A small university committee has explored an application to the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant program, offered through the U.S. Department of Education. The next competition for this program will be spring 2002 or 2003; its continuance is based on federal budget priorities. The grant allows funding for subsidizing the costs of the childcare services for low-income students, educational programs involving parents, faculty, staff, program, and curriculum development, supplies and equipment, renovations and repairs. Under this program, the center would need to seek accreditation within three years. There are other grants offered through the PA Department of Public Welfare and other state agencies. Any of these applications would require the Center owners and campus representatives to commit to a multi-year plan of improvements and programming for the Center. Lower-income students may individually qualify for state aid through a public assistance agency; Scott's provides this information to students who think they may qualify.

A third possibility is to provide day care scholarships to student parents. This fall the Mansfield Foundation provided seven \$500 childcare assistance scholarships. The upcoming capital campaign will generate funds for more M.U. scholarships, and I hope that day care assistance scholarships will be part of the campaign.

As I began writing this article, I became frustrated that I've heard nothing about a day care fund available to support student parents with financial need. Years ago, when we didn't know if we'd ever build a center, I followed Sandra Linck's advice and personal example, and donated part of my MEDAL fund donations to "Other" and wrote "Day Care Center" in the blank. It seemed to me that we should have a designated fund for day care scholarships, and such a fund should be named for Sandra Linck. "Why don't you check with Leslie Folmer," my husband said, "there's probably a memorial fund being set up now." He was right. Sandra's family has already requested it. **Anyone interested in contributing to the Sandra B. Linck Childcare Assistance Fund should contact Leslie D. Folmer, V. P. for Development & Executive Director of the MU Foundation, 524 North Hall, Mansfield University.**

A name on a sign and a portrait in the lobby are nice, but it's time to make sure that Sandra's vision becomes a reality.

To Palpate or Not to Palpate, That is the Question

By Denise Seigart

A recent research study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal argues that teaching women to do self-breast exams causes more harm than good. The Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care reviewed 34 years of published studies and concluded that breast self-examination "had no benefit and good evidence of harm" (Baxter, 2001, 164, p. 1837). The US task force for Preventive

Services arrived at a similar conclusion in 1987 and 1996 (Nekhlyudov & Fletcher, 2001). Now, this presents very confusing information to women. Do we palpate or not, and what is the harm if we do?

Before I argue my position on this question, let us review what we know about breast cancer and breast self-examination (hereafter referred to as BSE).

Breast cancer is one of the leading killers of women. Lung cancer is the leading killer due to women smoking, but breast cancer is more common. Approximately 1 in every 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. The rate of occurrence increased by an average of 1 percent a year from 1940-1982, yet no one knows for sure what causes it or why it seems to be increasing. North American women seem to be at greater risk than women in less developed countries. According to the American Cancer Society approximately 183,000 US women were diagnosed with breast cancer in the year 2000. Approximately one third of women who get breast cancer eventually die from it, or about 40,000 each year. An estimated 1.5 million women or more will be diagnosed with breast cancer in the next ten years.

Now, do we know what causes breast cancer? No, not really. We know about some factors that seem to correlate with breast cancer. These include diet, genetic history, environment, age at menarche, hormone exposures, alcohol consumption, smoking, etc. We also know that if we detect the cancer earlier, women seem to have a better prognosis, thus the historical emphasis on BSE. Keep in mind, however, that BSE is an early detection method, not a prevention method for breast cancer. We also know that most women do not do BSE, either because they fear what they might find, they don't know how, or they forget. According to Dr. Christiane Northrup:

I always ask women if they perform monthly breast exams. Few women do-even nurses and those who should know better. Why do so few women examine their breasts regularly? Some women feel that their breasts are lumpy and scary and are designed for someone else's pleasure or judgement anyway...No matter how much intellectual information a woman has, however, doing a self-exam in a clinical and systematic way may bring up all her fears about her breasts. Why search meticulously each month for something that you don't want to find, in an organ whose texture you don't understand?...A good time to change how you think about and do your breast exams is right after you've had a normal exam with your health care practitioner and you know everything is currently normal.(Northrup, C. 1998, pg. 332)

Another well known physician in the field of breast cancer treatment is Dr. Susan Love. The following is a transcript of an interview with Dr. Love.

Susan Love: I am actually not a big fan of breast self-exam because it has never been shown to make a difference in the death rate of breast cancer. The problem is by the time you can feel a lump it has been there 8 to 10 years, so whether you find it this month, or next month, is not the critical factor. What is important however, is that you get acquainted with your breasts so that you know what's normal for you and can sometimes even prevent surgery by being able to point out to the doctor that a particular lump has been there a long time.

Again, there has been a lot of emphasis on breast self-exam and I think it is wishful thinking on our part. We wish that it worked and that makes us after a while start believing that it does.

Moderator: Dr. Love, the campaign this month certainly emphasizes breast exams. Are you saying women don't have to do this??

Susan Love: Again, I think we sometimes focus on breast self exam because it is easy. But my fear is that it diverts us from finding something that really works and in addition tends to scare women to death. They start to look at the breast as if it is the enemy - and their job is to find the hidden land mine that is going to do them in. I'm not sure that the amount of guilt is worth it. When I say this, women sometimes get mad at me, but what we need is something that works better. I have been trying to work on this because I don't think it's right to complain about the limits of our current techniques and not try to find something better.

http://www.canoe.ca/Health0010/10_chat.html

The position of the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health care is that when women do BSE it does not lead to increased detection of breast cancer but often does lead to anxiety, increased physician visits, and increased breast biopsies for benign tumors (Baxter, 2001). The negative psychological impacts and breast biopsies coupled with the cost of teaching BSE are said to be significant enough harm to warrant rescinding the recommendation that all women be taught to do BSE. Baxter states; "Teaching and reinforcing BSE are costly activities and potentially divert resources from other preventive strategies." (2001, p. 1842). I believe this is a questionable assumption of harm.

If women do not mind the negative psychological impacts or breast biopsies, then the only real "harm" is the increased use of health care services. Given that breast cancer is the leading killer of women, I don't think our anxiety about it is going to go away if we stop doing BSE. I am also not convinced that we should stop teaching women how to do BSE. We know that "Many breast tumors are found by women themselves, even in highly screened populations." (Baxter, 2001, p. 1838). Perhaps what we need to do is change the way we teach women to do BSE. As noted by both authors Northrup and Love, women should be taught to be comfortable with their bodies, to know their bodies, so that changes can more easily be detected. I also question the emphasis of research on breast self-exam. Many studies have been done to assess the effectiveness of BSE, yet few research dollars are directed at finding environmental causes for breast cancer. Why are researchers studying whether BSE reduces the mortality from breast cancer, instead of what causes breast cancer? If there is a waste of resources occurring, this is one! I think all research focusing on breast cancer should be focused on two things, more effective treatments and discovering the cause.

Since the only harm noted by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Care and US Prevention Services Task Force and the Canadian Task force is an increased use of health care services and some anxiety in women and since 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, I think we should have some anxiety about this disease. Remember that a large number of cancers are detected by women themselves. Since teaching women to do some form of BSE is empowering, and since we have made little progress in determining the cause of breast cancer in women, I'll take the anxiety and occasional biopsy over "Don't worry honey, we'll take care of it". In addition to teaching BSE, I think we should

teach women more about what is being done (e.g., treatment for breast cancer has changed little in the past 30 years). Much research focuses on treatment or early recognition of the disease, not discovering the cause and working to prevent the disease entirely. Some authors believe this is because focusing on the cause would focus on the environmental conditions here in the U.S. that may lead to an increased risk (see Rachel's friends web site). "Of 722 NIH grants for breast cancer research in 1996-1997, only 33 (5%) involved a possible environmental connection." (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1998, pg. 139). Shall we palpate? Absolutely.

References and other resources:

Baxter, N. (2001). Preventive Health Care, 2001 update: Should women be routinely taught breast self-examination to screen for breast cancer? *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 164 (13) 1837-1846.

Nekhlyudov, L. and Fletcher, S. (2001). Is it time to stop teaching breast self-examination? *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 164 (13), 1851-1852.

Northrup, C. 1998, *Women's bodies, women's wisdom*. Bantam books: New York.

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1998)

Transcript of Interview with Dr. Susan Love http://www.canoe.ca/Health0010/10_chat.html

Cornell resource on environmental causes of breast cancer
<http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/bcerf/>

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/oc/factsheets/breast.htm>

Rachel's friends
<http://www.rachelsfriends.org/index.html>

Silent Spring Institute
<http://www.silentspring.org/index.html>

My Experience in Attending the Women's Leadership Institute:

July 29th to August 3rd, 2001

By Kimberly Heffner, Dec. '01

The theme of this year's institute was "Taking Charge, Making Change," which had particular relevance to my own emerging vision of what it meant to be a woman. Each leadership participant had received two books to read prior to attending the Institute and one of those books, *Gender on Campus*,

really caught my eye. It was an introduction to feminist views that did not bog a person down with terminology, but explained things in a simple manner. I had a lot of questions after reading this book which we discussed at the Institute.

Though women make up about 55% of the population, white males occupy most positions of power and authority. That is, 95% of senior managers, 90% of newspaper editors, 80% of the Forbes list of richest Americans, and 80% of congressional legislators (Shaw, 2001). After gaining more information about women's issues I was left to question where I fit into all of this. Was I a woman who would be content with the way things were after my eyes were opened to the lack of equality between the sexes or would I set out to create change in my own life and those around me. The choice was mine then, as it is today.

I would encourage each and every woman to attend an event such as this. It was a learning experience in many ways. I am a twenty-five year old single mother and though I questioned whether or not I would fit in or enjoy my stay I am glad that I went. Thirty-eight students in total attended, coming from twelve of the fourteen Pennsylvania State System colleges. If nothing else it provided an opportunity to network with the other students, but it was much more than that. Each us came to the Institute knowing very little about each other and quickly became a cohesive group. I still have contact with them today. This is what I would describe as a bonding/learning/leadership experience. It was not a male bashing or gripe session, but an opportunity for participants to break down the walls that separate us and just be who we are and learn and grow together.

Note from the editor: For her campus project as a follow-up to the Women's Leadership Institute, Kim organized Mansfield's first-ever Women's Day Fair, "for women and the men who love them," November 13, in the Alumni Hall Student Center. Over 30 organizations and agencies will be in attendance, and there will be panel discussions, workshops, free classes, and many other events. For a complete schedule go to <http://mansfield.edu/womens-studies>

Celebrations

At the November 2001 Pennsylvania Music Teachers Association convention, **Nancy Boston** ended her term as PMTA president. This began six years ago, when she became Convention Coordinator for two years, followed by two years as President Elect, and two years as President.

Stephanie Rose DeNicola, WS alum, currently lives in Culpeper, Virginia. In June 2001, she completed a year of service as an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow in Washington, DC. She worked on The President's Student Service Awards at Youth Service America, a small non-profit in the shadow of the Capitol building. In July 2001, Stephanie began her current job as coordinator of Fauquier County's Promise in Warrenton, VA. Fauquier County's Promise is a local initiative of America's Promise, the alliance for youth started by General Colin L. Powell. She coordinates county-wide resources for youth ages birth-19 years. On October 27, she coordinated Making a Difference in Fauquier Day, a day full of volunteer

projects with a celebratory rally. For the past 6 months, Stephanie has been training for 26.2 mile Arthritis Foundation Marathon on December 9 Honolulu, Hawaii. Anyone who wishes to contact Stephanie may do so at sdenicola@hotmail.com.

Andrea Harris, Languages and Literature, was selected to attend the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University this summer. This competitive program brings together scholars in the humanities and social sciences from around the world for intensive seminars and colloquia on current topics in the academy.

Elena Lukasz, History/Political Science, has announced her retirement in December 2001.

Priscilla Older, Library, has announced her retirement in May 2002.

Lynn Pifer & John Ulrich, Languages and Literature, announce the birth of their daughter, Adyn Sunn Pifer Ulrich. She was born on June 13, 2001 and has a very proud older sister, Samantha Sage Pifer Ulrich.

Judith Sornberger, Languages and Literature, has had a collection of poetry accepted for publication. It is a chapbook called *Bones of Light* and it will be published by the Parallel Press at the University of Wisconsin May 2003. In October, she gave an invited poetry reading at the Prairie Schooner 75th Anniversary Conference and Celebration in Lincoln, Nebraska. Three of her poems are in the current issue of *Prairie Schooner*. Also forthcoming are two chapters from her manuscript *The Accidental Pilgrim*--one in an anthology of essays on pilgrimage and one in *The Jabberwock Review*, and three poems in the anthology of women's poetry *Times of Sorrow/Times of Grace* to be published by Backwaters Press.

Sue Young, Communication, Theatre and Art, has been promoted to Associate Professor.

Sharing

One way of supporting women is to donate to organizations that help women and their families. Here are two of the editor's choices. Give generously to the organization of your choice.

Madre is an international women's human rights organization run by women. They work with women's community groups in several areas of the world. You can visit their website at www.madre.org for more information about their mission and programs. Currently they are providing relief for working men and women affected by the September 11 attacks and are working with Pakistani and Afghan women's organizations to provide relief in Afghanistan. Their latest mailing quotes from a letter from an Afghan community worker:

We have already started humanitarian work here, linking with the Afghan Women's Network and Afghan Women's Educational Centre here in Pakistan who have family and friends in Afghanistan and can ensure that

what we collect gets to people who need it. We have succeeded in sending through a truck to Afghanistan and will continue to do so as long as the roads are open.

Day before yesterday I got home to discover piles of things on our porch. I was touched by the contributions from school children of up to 5 Rupees (\$1 = 62 Rupees) and small packets of biscuits.

What we need especially is money for sleeping bags, quilts and tents.

On December 10 in New York Susan Sarandon, Danny Glover, Eve Ensler, Blanch Wiesen Cook, and others will give a dramatic reading, *Mother Courage: Imagining Peace*, to benefit Madre. For further details, visit www.madre.org.

Donations to Madre may be sent to Madre, 121 W 27 St Rm 301, New York, NY 10117-0305

Oxfam America www.oxfamamerica.org is the U.S. affiliate of the British relief agency Oxfam. Like Madre, they work with local organizations to help poor people. They are conducting relief efforts in Afghanistan and are one of the groups trucking in food. They write that

The vast majority of those at risk are women and children. They have the most fragile grip on survival. By November, extremely harsh winter conditions—up to 50 degrees below zero in mountain regions and snows closing mountain passes—will cut many off from future relief supplies.

Donations to Oxfam America may be sent to P. O. Box 9224, Boston, MA 02209-9224.