

Taking Roots at WDP: Some Reflections

BEING AND BECOMING FEMINIST THE WDP WAY*

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There has always been that feeling of having arrived, and yet still going somewhere. Feminism has taught me to savor the moment, to be mindful as well as to be thankful, to treasure what and where I already am because of what and where I have been. Yet, it has also given me an inexhaustible set of knots to unravel and paths to travel, placing me in a permanent adventure spin and pushing me to move on and forward, many times with an ache in the heart. *Because nobody ever becomes a finished, compleat feminist.*

Feminism is a never-ending spiral of enduring and evolving, weaving and unraveling, struggling and struggling. Against old and negative forces in both structure and self. Yet, there is pleasure in the pain, finding in the searching and the losing and the longing.

But feminism, to borrow a kindred poet's words, is both individuation and connectedness. Yes, it is going deep into one's being, conversing with one's many selves, listening to voices from the past and the future. It is sifting the grain from the

chaff, planting the seed of wisdom on the ground of experience and coaxing it to grow and flower. It is discovering one's uniqueness as both burden to lighten and gift to share. But it is also like the rays of the morning sun, touching others gently and energizing them for both the everyday life and the serious mission of change.



It is like little girls and boys holding hands, so that they may cross the street more safely and reach the other side of their dreams. It is listening not only with our ears; it is wiping off tears and fears. It is looking at the flag and knowing what a nation has to fight for. It is linking arms and hearts for bread and roses, bigas at sampagita. It is healing to be whole, with and for others in our only home called Earth. It is seeing the beauty and meaning of all this, much of which I learned with and through the WDP.

More than a hundred moons ago, I came to teach and instead I was taught. I came to reap what others, sisters and foremothers, sowed before me. And I resolved, I would return the favor a hundred-fold. *I was rewarded by myriad awakenings in the collective enterprise called classroom learning.* I found many selves between the lines of feminist texts. I discovered the gems beneath the grime of fieldwork, sometimes flashing from the smiles wrinkling the weathered faces of women survivors in factories and fields, legal bureaus and crisis centers.

And I knew that the WDP should survive and prevail for their sake and mine. Yours, too.

And so I carried on with my multiple burdens and pleasures, keeping a husband almost miraculously, raising three children with almost benign neglect, studying for a third degree, knitting the brow and tending the fire with grassroots

women, and listening as best I could to students eager to grow before my eyes.

Like a good feminist, I did my share of housekeeping – three and a half years of administering, a job I did not relish but had to do as sacred duty to the present and the future. *The WDP, like a vine, crept upward and outward, embracing without strangling the majors, now more than 50, touching others beyond Diliman, sending the message through distance education to Manila, Baguio, and Davao, influencing both civil society and the state, sowing human seeds in Japan, Nepal, Switzerland, Vietnam, and Fiji.*



The Women & Development Program Faculty

In the WDP, the humdrum was invested with meaning and excitement: revising the curriculum to make it more worldly, recruiting faculty with cutting edge, searching for scholarships for those in search, groping our way to systematic but still unmistakably feminist fieldwork, painstaking research graduating into books and journals, fora turning out as new explorations and reunions with old friends, module development punctuated with debates on sex and gender, venturing into the uncharted seas of feminist theorizing, imagining beyond today through a collective dream masquerading as a strategic plan. We laughed a lot and cried a little all the way to the Chancellor's door, hoping for a budget worthy of GAD and the Goddess but expecting the worst in the austere world of the globalized.

Now, more than a hundred students later, I sit in my room, looking at the leaves rustling outside my window, more than satisfied with my labors yet, knowing there are hundreds more who need to know how to be and become. And I wish I had a hundred more years to spare with and for the WDP.

