

**Liz Fisher's statement in
TELLING OUR STORIES: CELEBRATING OURSELVES
History of the Women and Religion Task Force, PCD-UUA 1977-1998**

In 1982, over 15 Years ago, I signed the membership book at the Unitarian Universalist Church of San Francisco. The personal power women in our denomination were willing to claim was one of the prime attractions Unitarian Universalism presented to me and my husband Bob, also a committed feminist.

The Women and Religion Task Force (*W&RTF*) of the PCD soon became my most important community outside the local church (*Bob's also, behind the scenes*). Discovering the W&RTF literally changed my life. Here I found a group with spunk, determination, vision, organizing skills, and just plain appreciation for great fun! I started going to annual retreats and soon became involved in the monthly meetings. There, in 1983, I met Shirley Ranck, author of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*, the first curriculum developed, with denominational support, that dealt with feminist theology (*exploration of the female divine*). When I met Shirley her curriculum was still being reviewed by the UUA and it wasn't clear how long it would be before final publication. (*We all know by now how that goes!*)

So, in the Spring of 1984, I brought Shirley to the San Francisco church to present *Cakes* in its pre-published form. An added bonus for me was giving Shirley rides to and from the class, a time when I was able to gain firsthand. through our conversations, an intimate perspective on the UU women's movement. That really hooked me!

Soon I faced the fact that pleasure also demands responsibility so, in the mid 1980's, for over 3-1/2 years, I took on the role of co-convenor of the task force, conspiring sequentially with two wonderful co-leaders: Margaret Pearce and Betty Ortez. Many important events occurred then, which shaped my work on behalf of women and religion. Producing educational material on shared leadership, giving workshops on overcoming sexist language' coordinating district-wide meetings, and leading creative rituals were among them.

By this time, I. was intensely aware that women and religion was being woven ever more prominently into the fabric of my life's activities, though I don't think I then grasped the extent of its future presence. At that time, women and religion was nurturing the expansion of my own character and self-esteem. For my-service in the district, in 1988 I was honored with the *Favorite Feisty Feminist* award given by the W&RTF.

Also in 1988, my activism around these issues won me a place on a General Assembly panel, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF) addressing the question *Is Cakes Well-done or Half-baked?*, an unfortunate title that nonetheless led to a very lively discussion. Within that critique, there was one aspect of Cakes all acknowledged as a legitimate concern, namely, its lack of multicultural content. Shirley Ranck was the first to agree. Fortunately, most who made this criticism also recognized that an author can only do so much in one pioneering work. After the official presentation, women testified about the powerful role UU women's circles played in their lives, circles originally formed to study Cakes. By the time this panel was over, the impact feminist spirituality was having on women across the continent couldn't be denied, even by the critics of Cakes. That afternoon, I personally felt the intense quality and considerable influence, across our continent, of our revolutionary, religiously-based feminist movement.

Right after that panel, I suggested to UUWF leadership that instead of a continuing critique of *Cakes*, another curriculum should be produced, one that addressed the female divine within varied cultures. Several months later, the UUWF board and staff saw the wisdom of such a proposal and prepared the grant applications needed. I became the author and editor of this new curriculum, *Rise Up and Call Her Name: a Woman-honoring Journey into Global Earth-based Spiritualities* published by the UUWF in 1994, working for over five years with scores of people, hundreds of books, many images and songs, to make it happen. This process expanded my skills, knowledge and personal spiritual perspective. As always, for me, the germ of this endeavor can be traced back to the W&RTF, my home base.

The second important path I discovered through the W&RTF is the International Women's Movement, thanks to Lucile Longview, Rosemary Matson and Meg Bowman, three of the most staunch and continual influences in my W&R life. Lucile attended the first international women's meeting in Mexico City in 1975, the first of others in later years, and brought back a deep personal commitment to make a difference in our denomination and encourage others to do the same. She preached her international vision to me many times, motivating my own efforts. Over many years, Rosemary and Meg shared their vast knowledge, keeping us all posted on movements among women around the world. They provided constant streams of important information on such topics as female genital mutilation, education for girls, grassroots peace efforts, and human rights for women.

Because of my ongoing interest in what women were engaged in around the world, when Linda Mackay of the UU Service Committee invited me to design a workshop series of experiential exercises that would explore this international movement, I enthusiastically agreed. In September 1995, I also was able to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, bringing all I had learned from these women and others to an even more personal level. *Gender Justice: Human Rights are Women's Rights*, which I co-authored with Linda, was published in early 1997. Again, an activity stimulated by my experiences with the W&RTF.

So what's next? In my view, we are currently articulating a profound theology (*female honoring talk about the sacred*) that has just begun to exhibit its powerful imprint on real world social relations. To truly experience the positive impact of diversity, within a unity that works in concert with natural rhythms, requires us to alternate reflection and action. Valuing women and men equally, being nurtured by birds, plants, and animals, finding joy in coming together in a larger community — this is the stuff we are privileged to work with, both in our meditating and advocating.

What more interesting, timely, important and just plain feisty ways to spend our time, especially when this journey contains mutual aid from so many others, allowing each of us to discover and develop our personal passions. This is the

very best quality of our movement. To have such committed sisters and brothers *(often silently supportive)* in this venture -- and, so many of rare quality -- is the ultimate treasure I value from my women and religion community in our district and throughout our continental association.