

Liane's Last Class

As women doctoral students at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, in the summer of 1995, we finalized plans for an independent summer study course, "Research and Teaching/Learning from Feminist Perspectives," with the awareness that our faculty sponsor, Liane Davis, was very ill with cancer. She had been resolutely participating in a rigorous chemotherapy program, constructing her own holistic treatment regimen, and, as the seminar began in June, was attending class in good spirits despite the chemomonitor strapped to her abdomen like a backwards fanny pack, numbers flashing as a beacon of hope.

The class discussion remained powerful and focused, despite the sometimes ominous awareness that this might be the last course that Liane would ever teach. It was easy to decide whether illness would be a lead topic of conversation, because Liane, in her directed way, insisted that it would not be. Even when we

discussed Mary Bricker-Jenkins'¹ poignant and forceful article about her own bout with breast cancer and the medical community's misguided efforts to understand this experience in the context of women's lives, Liane was silent about her own frequent contacts with a number of medical personnel and her feelings about her failing body. However, in the true feminist tradition of transforming silence² into language and action, Liane was *not* silent. She shared and gave to the class at least as much as she asked us to share and to give to one another. She remained committed to the feminist principle of listening to women's stories in their own words and honoring the narratives of marginalized/oppressed women while understanding and confronting the sexism of previous research efforts in social work—a situation we were all grappling with as women doctoral students in a program in the throes of a struggle to enhance or resist a

more heuristic model of teaching research.

Liane's love of teaching/encouraging women to grow was a great gift, a talent we hope to carry on with clients, students, and each other in her honor, as she honored us, following her example of passionate commitment to ideas, to people, and to confronting oppression in the world. We accept and extend her invitation to institutionalize the feminist perspective in social work research and teaching as a core set of principles of thought and action. We will miss her strength and generosity and the sound of her voice in the halls and on the written page.

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¹Mary Bricker-Jenkins, "Feminist Practice and Breast Cancer: The Patriarchy Has Claimed My Right Breast...." *Social Work*, 19, 17-24.

²See Audre Lorde's "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 1984, Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY; Also Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, 1980, Spinsters Ink, San Francisco.