

Fall 2007

Body Literacy

at Work



Joelle Robichaud



By Bree Horel

Bleedy, the Menstrual Puppet

in the Community



A Forthright Women's Magazine for Maids, Mothers and Crones

Femme Fertile



Harvest of HRHPs

Justisse Practitioners Grow in Service

by Geraldine Matus

As the sun disappears a little longer every day and the nights become cooler, I am reminded that it is harvest season. For me, harvest is a time of reflection and 'new scribblers' for renewed and new intentions. It is a time for gathering and sharing the fruits of our labours. A time for reflecting on the viability of seeds successfully cultivated and those that might need different conditions for the next planting.

This past year has provided a rich harvest for Justisse of dream-seeds brought to fruition, with even occasional wild flower surprises to grace the garden.

HRHP Training Program

Congratulations to our most recent Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner (HRHP) graduates Megan Lalonde and Dr. Andrea Beaubrun! Andrea and Megan now apply the specialized knowledge of the HRHP training to their health care practices, bringing a deeper understanding of how to achieve and maintain menstrual cycle health and all the advantages of fertility awareness and body literacy. Andrea continues with her naturopathic practice in Calgary while attending to her wee son Xavier, born in March. Megan works at Justisse Healthworks, taking on the overflow of clients and sharing her special gifts as herbalist, doula, women's studies' major and her invaluable experience with menstrual cycle charting and life. She is learning how to train HRHPs.

HRHP Trainee Amy Sedgwick, along with her sister Kimberly Sedgwick, opened a retail and service store on Toronto's

Danforth Avenue this summer, promoting women's sexual and reproductive health. It is aptly named *Red Tent Sisters*. (See article page 5.) We could use a few of these stores in every city. Maybe the Sedgwick sisters will one day sell franchises.

All the best to HRHP trainee Aja Tapia who moved from Santa Monica, California, to Seattle, Washington. Actually, Seattle is quite a hot house of alternative medicine practices. HRHP Trainee Leilani Wong moved from Olympia, Washington, to Portland, Oregon, to begin pre-med studies. We wish her all the best in that endeavour. Nearing the completion of her HRHP training, Leilani is bringing the practice to her community with good success.

Camille Freeman has finished her master's studies in human physiology in Washington, D.C., and will be returning to Maryland to resume her practice as a clinical herbalist with the added benefit of her HRHP training, which she is close to completing.

I am truly awed by the depth and breadth of the women who have entered the HRHP program. They are all terribly intelligent, deeply dedicated to women's wellness and multi-talented in ways that marvel the mind. I am tremendously privileged to work and grow with them.

SMCR Conference

The Society for Menstrual Cycle Research (SMCR) held its biannual conference, *Ovulation: The Bellwether of Women's Health*, in Vancouver this year. A group of us attended the conference to

conduct a symposium entitled *Menstrual Cycle Charting: A Path To Body Literacy*. We examined the concept of charting as a means for women to acquire body literacy as it relates to sexual and reproductive health from three perspectives:

1. *Basic Principles, Methodologies, and Scientific Underpinnings* of menstrual cycle charting that have demonstrated the validity of fertility awareness as a means to prevent and achieve pregnancy and interpret reproductive health.
2. *Functions and Applications* of menstrual cycle charting that have demonstrated how women, individually and, in collaboration with their care providers, can use charting as a tool to monitor and manage reproductive health.
3. *Women's Reflections on Learning Fertility Awareness: Barriers, Encouraging Factors, Effects and Motivations (2006)* reported the findings of HRHP trainee Rose Yewchuk's MA thesis.

Presenters of these perspectives included Laura Wershler BSc, Sexual Health Access Alberta, Calgary, Megan Lalonde, BA, HRHP, Justisse Healthworks for Women, Edmonton, Lisa Leger BA, HRHP, Justisse-Healthworks, Parksville, B.C., and me.

We were fortunate to have HRHP trainees Kashka Zerafa, from Ymir, B.C, and Amy Sedgwick from Toronto join us. We spent our evenings sharing our findings from the conference and learning new things about and from each other. So we had a bonus HRHP conference within a conference.

Collaborations

Justisse continues to introduce Grant MacEwan College Holistic Health Practitioner students to the use of menstrual cycle charting and fertility awareness as health care tools. Rumour has it that these presentations are popular.

Collaborations with Sexual Health Access Alberta (SHAA, formerly Planned Parenthood Alberta) and Planned Parenthood Edmonton (PPE) continue to bring more options for reproductive health care to women in the province. Justisse has conducted several workshops for SHAA and PPE volunteers and staff to demonstrate the viability of menstrual cycle charting as an option for birth control and to convey the importance of women acquiring *body literacy* in order to make fully informed sexual and reproductive health choices. SHAA continues as a strong advocate of body literacy and the use of fertility awareness as a viable birth control option. SHAA and Justisse pooled resources to facilitate the HRHP training of SHAA staff member Lana Leitch.

Wanda the Wandering Uterus

Lisa Leger had the imagination of a cartoon character, *Wanda the Wandering Uterus* whose adventures debut in this issue (see page 5). This has inspired Megan Lalonde and me to bring out the uterus costumes from the July/06 *Wandering Menstrual Show* to develop a stage script of Wanda and G-Spot; the wandering uteri who sashay across the stage with many a bloody tale to tell of the state of reproductive health. Stay tuned for pathos and comedy.

Fertility Awareness Charting Circle

The dedicated women of the not-for-profit Fertility Awareness Charting Circle (FACC) began work with Justisse this year, training as Body Literacy Advocates to deepen their knowledge of fertility awareness to better serve the women who come to their circles. Learn about them and the dates of their public sessions at www.fertilityawarenesschartingcircle.org.

The best of our harvest is the trust and stories of the women who come to Justisse for our services. They are our best teachers; they keep us humble and newly challenged. They make our work rewarding.

Geraldine Matus is Director of Justisse Healthworks for Women. Through her practice, she offers counseling therapy and holistic reproductive health care as well as training for Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioners.

Femme Fertile Fall 2007

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Please Keep in Touch

We welcome your questions, comments, story ideas and expressions of joy, pique or outrage.

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Scarlet Summer

It's Time for Menstrual Expression

by Laura Wershler (left) and Lana Leitch



How about some menstrual expression for a change? Recent approvals of Seasonale (Canada) and Lybrel (U.S.), drugs that, respectively, limit or completely eliminate menstruation, have prompted a flurry of media attention to menstrual suppression. So the women of Sexual Health Access Alberta (SHAA) decided to fight back for menstrual “rights” with Scarlet Summer: “An evening for women of all ages to explore our complex connections to the menstrual cycle”.

This past August, over 30 women brought friends, family and the warmth of summer to the Scarlet Summer workshop at the Calgary office of SHAA.

SHAA Executive Director Laura Wershler notes that the goal of the evening was “to give women a place to think, learn, discuss and laugh about the menstrual cycle, pay it a little attention in an age where there is so much encouragement to just make it go away”.

As guests arrived they were “pinned” with the name of a Famous Scarlet and had to guess who she was by asking others questions. A Scarlet was identified as a woman who – like the literary heroine Scarlet O’Hara – speaks her mind, commits to her beliefs, is self-sufficient and decides, for better or for worse, her own destiny. Scarlets included civil-rights activist Rosa Parks, artist and pop-icon Yoko Ono and singer/poet Patti Smith.

The game set the tone for an evening of discovery, cultural-critique and inspiration, conceived to create a comfortable space for

women to learn more about menstrual cycle function and challenge the ‘taboo’ status that too often shrouds the topic.

Guests viewed Giovanna Chesler’s documentary *Period: The End of Menstruation?* – a film that investigates the complexities of menstrual suppression and attention through the deeply affecting commentaries of



Left to right: Marilane Koutis, Maryam Pobee, Erin McKay, Joelle Robichaud.

women, health care providers and others. Attendees discussed such questions as: *Do we girls and women have enough knowledge to make truly informed decisions about health issues related to our menstrual cycles and birth control? What role does money and or/politics play in the way our culture regards or treats menstruation? Who profits? Who benefits? Who pays?*

Overwhelmingly, it was agreed that: No, even decades into the women’s movement, we still do not have easy access to the information we need to understand our menstrual cycles or fully inform our sexual and reproductive health decisions.

After the film discussion, SHAA Program Assistant Lana Leitch invited guests to dig into

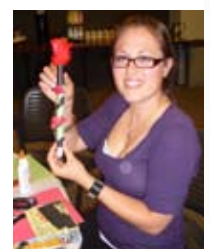
the baskets on each table containing yarn, fabric, magazines, construction paper, paints and other materials. She encouraged everyone to express freely, through arts and crafts, their stories, thoughts and feelings about menstruation.

As hands got busy, requests like “Can you pass the glue stick?” punctuated ongoing conversations about menstruation. Participants shaped materials into evocative works of art which included collages, mixed-media paintings and 3-D constructions. Each piece depicted images or symbols that had personal significance for the crafter. The confidence and passion of each woman and girl who presented her unique, creative piece was evident.

Twenty-eight-year-old adolescent counsellor Nikki Dueck and 14 year-old student Hilliary Burt stood together to explain their art – the female symbol, ringed with red feathers and painted with positive and negative words describing the experience of menstruation in their lives. With obvious emotion, Hilliary explained how she came to feel that it is great to be a girl.

Participants expressed their appreciation of the event. See page 8 for news on *Scarlet Fall*. Contact info@sexualhealthaccess.org. www.periodthemovie.com.

Laura Wershler is the Executive Director and Lana Leitch is the Program Assistant at Sexual Health Access Alberta.



Charlotte Howe, SHAA Summer Student



Kimberley (left) and Amy Sedgwick. Their Toronto store was named after Anita Diamant's novel *The Red Tent*, which describes how women of biblical times gathered in a tent to celebrate and tend to menstruation, child birth and other aspects of womanhood.

By Amy Sedgwick

This past summer marked our opening of a women's reproductive and sexual health store — *Red Tent Sisters* — in Toronto. The store grew out of my desire to bring forth the "blood mysteries" that I was becoming intimately familiar with through my studies with Geraldine Matus, Director of Justisse Healthworks for Women in Ed-

monton. It grew out of my sister Kimberley's desire to run a store in our home town similar to Venus Envy - a feminist book/adult toy store in Halifax and Ottawa.

It seemed fitting that the time from conception to birth of our business was nine months. The store truly feels like a being of its own, with its DNA born from our talents and histories. *Red Tent Sisters* brings together a retail

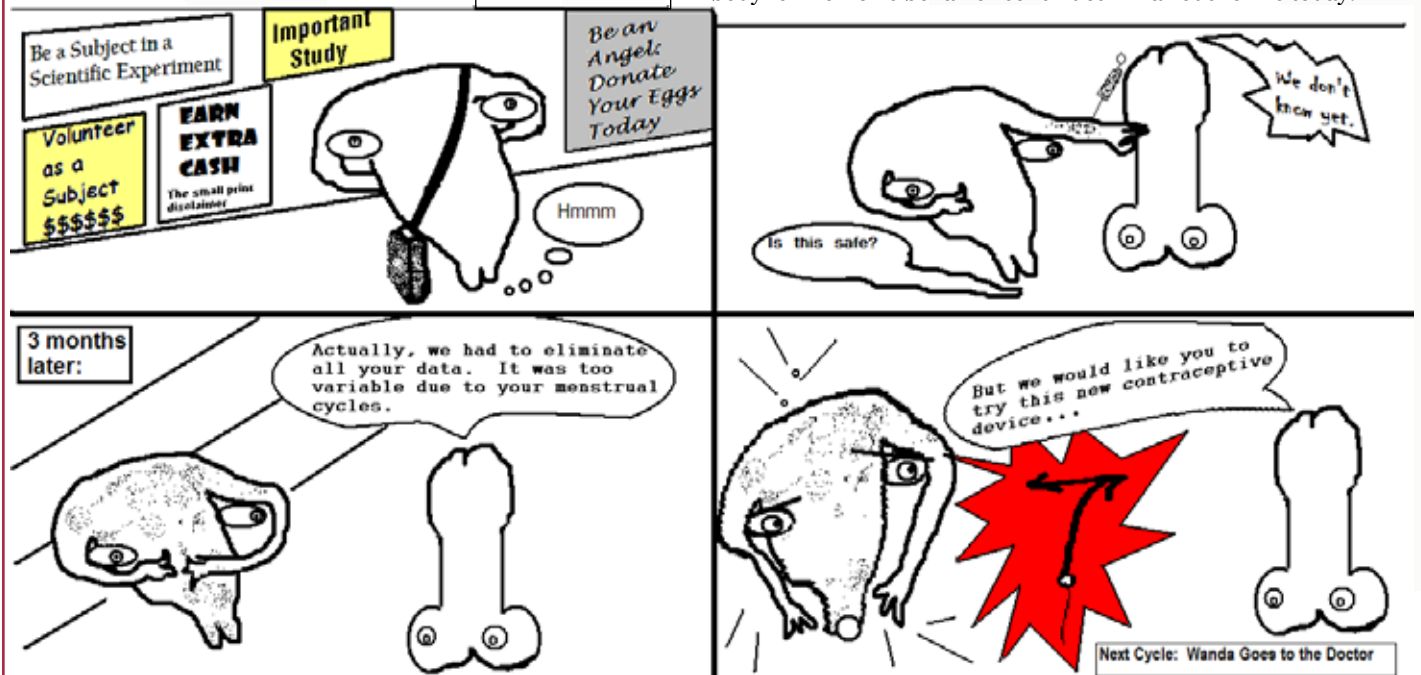
section (my sister's domain) that sells reproductive and sexual health products, including alternative menstrual products, adult toys, books, goddess worry stones, birthing tubs and menstrual charting supplies. The service section (my domain) offers workshops and classes related to fertility, sexuality, contraception, pregnancy, child-rearing and menopause. In addition to teaching the Justisse method of fertility awareness, we host ceremonies for miscarriage, abortion and first moon as well as workshops on masturbation, parenting and natural approaches to menopause. We offer knitting 'stitch 'n bitch' sessions on a variety of topics, such as menstruation, to encourage informal dialogue between women. We also host a free book club and feminist cinema circle to engage the community in issues of women's health.

I always struggled with trying to choose my calling. But, my calling has unquestionably chosen me. I couldn't be more honoured.

The Hysterical Adventures of Wanda the Wandering Uterus

This Cycle: Wanda Goes to University

By Lisa Leger



The idea for Wanda came from a group of Justisse teachers at the 2007 *Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference*, laughing about the ancient Greek theories of female hysteria being caused by the uterus wandering throughout the body and wreaking havoc. The unfunny part of the story is that blaming the female body for women's behavior continues in various forms today.

Nature vs. New Reproductive Technology

International Delegates Confront the Issues

By Lisa Leger



Patient advocates, policy makers, scholars and researchers from around the world attended the conference, *New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies (NRGT) Nobody's Child Everybody's Children*, this past May at the Nanaimo, B.C., campus of Malaspina University/College.

I was invited to critique assisted reproductive technologies from a clinical perspective and use examples of menstrual cycle charts to illustrate the usefulness of fertility awareness. Conspicuously missing were those who wield the technologies in question; no infertility doctors or pharmaceutical reps came although nurses and counsellors from fertility clinics did attend.

Discussions centered on how NRGTs should be regulated; people from New Zealand, Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States shared what was allowed or forbidden in their countries. The consensus was that it is wrong for ovum or sperm to be sold and for women to be exploited in surrogate arrangements that offer money for reproductive services.

The practice of donor anonymity was challenged by Eric Blyth from the Department of Applied Childhood Studies in the UK. Blyth argued that familial and genetic information about both biological parents is important to one's health. He illuminated the psycho-social factors that provide meaning to a child's life (what value am I when my "dad" got paid to ejaculate into a jar?) and the importance of familial ties to forming a child's identity (why am I musical and fond of beets?). University of Alberta ethicist Laura Shanner analyzed the secrecy of the anonymous donor arrange-

ment and pointed out that "donor children" are denied choice when they are kept from vitally important knowledge about themselves.

Keynote speaker Maureen McTeer, who served on the federally appointed Royal Commission on NRTs, made it clear that technology is racing ahead of society's attempts to regulate it. She shared delegates' frustration that the commission's report was published years later than expected and that Canadian regulations are just now being implemented.

The federal government sent representatives from the fledgling Assisted Human Reproduction Canada, the agency that will enforce these long awaited regulations. Spokesperson Eleanor Wilson admitted that the agency faces challenges enforcing the regulations and also acknowledged gaps regarding newer practices such as medical tourism.

My favourite presenter was Keynote Louise Vandelac, PhD, from the Department of Sociology, L'Université de Québec à Montréal. Vandelac also served on the Royal Commission and had suggested, in the early 90s, that Justisse teachers should be invited to present to the commission. Her talk was entitled *Reproductive and Genetic Engineering: An Ecological and Anthropological Breach*. Finally, someone was speaking about causes and prevention of infertility! Vandelac raised environmental issues such as the impact of Persistent Organic Pollutants on reproduction. She pointed to social trends (such as women delaying their child-bearing into their 30s) that can increase the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ART). She discussed the detrimental effects

of hormonal contraceptives on reproductive health and summed up with: "Maybe we are a species which is endangered." Vandelac talked about "medicalization"; the notion that science can solve every problem. She noted that ART does not cure the fertility problem but merely bypasses it; she proposed that this approach actually takes attention and resources away from avenues of prevention, diagnosis and cure. This is exactly the problem that fertility awareness educators have been pointing to all along; the safe, simple and useful act of charting is overshadowed by heroic, high-tech interventions.

I hope that Vandelac's words had a grounding effect on delegates. She reminded us that we are talking about the reproduction of human animals living in community upon the earth. Personally, I find that the academic study of complicated human experiences can get in the way of generating concrete solutions. I left the conference reflecting that "actions speak louder than words". My commitment to teaching fertility awareness and reproductive health was renewed.

Lisa Leger, B.A. is an Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner on Vancouver Island. She teaches the Justisse Method of fertility awareness in a pharmacy where she works as the Natural Health Consultant.

Conference Web Site: www.mala.ca/nrgt; Centre for Genetics and Society: www.geneticsandsociety.org; The Center for Bioethics and Culture Network: www.cbc-network.org; Infertility Awareness Association of Canada: www.iaac.ca; Infertility Network www.infertilitynetwork.org.

In the Company of Wise Women

Conference Confirms Course for HRHP

By Kashka Zerafa

The Society for Menstrual Cycle Research (SMCR) Conference, held this past June at the University of British Columbia, was an exciting event for me. It was my first conference and also my first opportunity to meet other Justisse practitioners and students. Although I found it overwhelming at times, I was able to keep up thanks to the inclusiveness of the Justisse women. At least one of us attended each session and, after every day, we gathered for a debriefing of the events. By watching the sharp and articulate women of Justisse in action, I saw how important it is to ask the right questions and to be a critical thinker with regards to scientific research. I often learned more from the questions and contributions to the discussion than I did from the research presented.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that the majority of projects presented utilized menstrual (and more rarely ovulatory) reproductive symptomatic charting methods to collect data. I was touched to witness the educated women

in the field of reproductive health and science as well as the general public eagerly taking any chance given to share personal experiences of their reproductive beings. I think it is probably rare to find an academic conference that acknowledges and incorporates the human behind the brain in such an intimate way.

I enjoyed getting to know others in my field as well as confirming my experiences of the Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner program with other students. The last night I slept in the Justisse dorm where I awoke from a powerful dream. I had been treading water, circling the parameter of a dark basement with exposed plumbing on the ceiling and only a few barred widows. I was in this jail with lots of other women going around and around in silence. I tried to escape a few times but was always caught and put back. Then, I climbed out the window and up the building to roof-hop. I stepped on a rusty triangular piece of metal which cut a vaginal shaped wound in the center of my left foot. It was so



Left to Right: Kashka Zerafa, Amy Sedgwick, Megan Lalonde, Geraldine Matus, Laura Wershler, Lisa Leger.

painful, I couldn't continue. On the ground level of a store front, I was ushered inside by the Justisse women. They placed me on a massage table where they nurtured me and tended to my wound. A soothing sensation spread through my whole body so that it was no longer in pain. Thoughts of fleeing evaporated as I was enveloped by the activity of the women — A dream confirmation that I am where I need to be, on my path to being of service to women. I am blessed to be a growing member of a powerful network of gutsy, intelligent and compassionate women. I have experienced the truth of the Justisse motto: "Around every wise woman are many other wise women!"

Kashka Zerafa is a Menstrual and Women's Health Activist, Massage Practitioner and HRHP student.

Don't It Always Seem to Go...

Executive Director of Sexual Health Access Alberta Laura Wershler sees a metaphor specific to women in Joni Mitchell's famous song *Big Yellow Taxi*. Here are the lyrics along with some of Ms. Wershler's thoughts in parenthesis:

They paved paradise (the female body eco-system) *and put up a parking lot* (a wide open, barren, infertile space)

With a pink hotel, a boutique (the mindless pink princess philosophy – Paris Hilton hangs out there) *And a swinging hot spot* (a euphemism for the sexual freedom promised by menstrual suppression drugs; too bad they cause irregular bleeding and diminish a woman's sexual interest, intensity and sensitivity) *Don't it always seem to go?* *That you don't know what you've got* *Til it's gone* –

They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.

Ms. Wershler is sending out Joni Mitchell postcards with the song's lyrics inviting us to stand up for our health as women: "Will hormonal contraceptive drugs become the standard-of-care 'treatment' for being female? Menstruation is not a disease! Please use your voice to speak (out) about this important issue."

*Justisse Healthworks
for Women Special Events*

Justisse Lecture Series

Healthworks Building
10303 - 65 Avenue, Edmonton
Hosted by Megan Lalonde, Clinical Herbalist, Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner and Birth Doula.

Wednesdays at 6:30 pm:

Oct 10 Cramps and PMS

Nov 14 Perimenopause and Menopause

Dec 12 Pre-Conception Nutrition

Jan 9 Menstrual Arts and Crafts

**Feb 13 Breast Health and
Thermography Explained**

**Mar 12 Healthy Practices for Healthy
Cycles**

**Women's Health & Menstrual
Cycle Charting Circle**

**Tuesdays at 7 pm: Sept 18, Oct 16
and Nov 20.**

Hosted by Organic Roots
8225 - 112 Street, Edmonton.

Woman of all ages and stages are welcome. In a supportive environment, women will learn to observe, chart and interpret their signs of fertility and infertility to avoid or achieve pregnancy and monitor and support their overall health.

**Film Screening & Book Launch
Thursday, November 15**

Metro Cinema
7 Sir Winston Churchill Square

Period: The End of Menstruation?

—A Documentary by Giovanna Chesler

Coming Off the Pill

—A Book by Megan Lalonde
and Geraldine Matus

Fundraiser for Fertility Awareness
Charting Circle.

Our Beauty Our Blood

**February 8 - 10, 2008 (Fri 5:30 pm
to Sunday 1 pm)**

An experiential "Red Tent" retreat for maids, mothers and crones. Discover the deeper meaningfulness of women's beauty and blood mysteries.

Star of the North Retreat Centre

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Facilitator Geraldine Matus,
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**Around Every Wise Woman
are Many Other
Wise Women**

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- **Sexual and reproductive wellness education and counseling**
- **Perimenopause and menopause consultation and care**
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Canada**

Scarlet Fall:

It's Time for Menstrual Expression

Saturday, November 17, 10 am to 2 pm

Special Preview of *Our Beauty Our Blood*,
Red Ribbon Arts, *Recovering the Blood Mysteries*.

Hosted by Justisse Healthworks for Women
in collaboration with Sexual Health Access Alberta
Healthworks Building
10303 - 65 Avenue, Edmonton

**To register or for more information on these
events, contact Justisse Healthworks for
Women at 420-0877 or www.justisse.ca.**