



# Tales from the White Dog Cafe

A Quarterly Newsletter 3420 Sansom St. Philadelphia Winter, 1998

## Trespass for Truth

On November 16th, I was arrested at Fort Benning, Georgia - my first act of civil disobedience. It was on that date, eight years ago, that six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter were assassinated in El Salvador by graduates of the U.S. Army's School of Americas (SOA). I went to Georgia as part of the White Dog Cafe delegation of staff and customers which joined 2000 other demonstrators from across the country. The vigil and protest were organized by Father Roy Bourgeois, founder of the SOA Watch, and called for the closing of the SOA which trains Latin American military personnel at Fort Benning. Over two thirds of the Salvadoran officers cited in a UN Truth Commission report on murder, rape, and torture during El Salvador's Civil War were trained at this school, including those charged with the murder of Archbishop Romero, the rape and murder of four U.S. church women and the massacre of over 900 villagers at El Mozote. During our sister restaurant travels to Central America, I had visited these sites and talked with survivors. I knew that the priests had been killed for speaking out on behalf of the poor. I knew that our tax dollars had financed the weapons and training of the assassins and massacre leaders. I knew that a root cause of violence in Central America traced back to our government's foreign policy designed to control the availability of cheap labor and natural resources for U.S. corporations. As a U.S. citizen, I was an accomplice; as a U.S. consumer, I was a beneficiary. This was my truth. When Father Roy led the march across the line onto the grounds of Fort Benning, I followed him.

As part of the vigil and silent funeral procession, I helped carry one of six coffins filled with petitions calling for the closing of the school. On the side of the coffin was written, "The truth can not be silenced." Filing behind Roy and the other coffin bearers, I stepped over the line onto government property and continued slowly along the winding road toward the school. Through blaring bullhorns, MPs had warned the demonstrators not to proceed, but when I looked over my shoulder, I saw hundreds of my fellow citizens walking behind us holding white crosses bearing the names of those killed by graduates of the SOA. As six hundred demonstrators marched into the brilliant late afternoon sun, the names of the dead were read over the loudspeaker and the crowd responded *Presente* after each name. At one point when my coffin was seized and those marching before me were arrested and detained by the Army, I suddenly found myself at the head of the procession. Joining hands with an elderly woman who had been a fellow pallbearer, we led the

march on toward the school. In those brief moments before my own arrest, I had never felt the sun so radiant nor seen woods as beautiful as the golden leaved oaks and green Georgia pines along the road. *Presente*. We were all present - the dead and the living. As we marched toward detention, I had never felt so free. In disobeying, I had never followed my country's ideals more truly. In being present, I had never stood more clearly for what I believe in, nor felt more profoundly the interconnectedness of our world.

This January marks the Cafe's 15th anniversary when we'll celebrate the community of all those who come here to eat, to dialogue, to work, and to bring us our food from the farms, and with all those we have met through our sister restaurant program around the world. The proceeds from our anniversary dinner will go to Amnesty International for their support of those imprisoned in Latin America for speaking the truth. Amnesty has called on our government to conduct a full inquiry into the U.S. Army manuals used to train soldiers in torture and human rights violations at SOA, to hold accountable the individuals responsible for creating and using them, and to assume moral responsibility for the human rights violations committed by those trained here. Our funds will also support U.S. prisoners of conscience sentenced to Federal prison for "criminal trespass" at Fort Benning, Georgia. As we celebrate the beginning of a new year, let us resolve to be present.

Judy Wicks



## 15th Anniversary Dinner & Storytelling

Tuesday,  
January 20,  
1998



5:30pm Cocktail Party at Judy's House and  
6:30 Dinner at the cafe

Benefiting Amnesty International and SOA Watch  
(see story above)

8pm Storytelling Bring your favorite White Dog tale  
of eating, dancing, meeting, conversing, connecting,  
learning, working, volunteering, traveling, sniffing or barking.

Cocktail Party \$20, Dinner \$30; Both \$45  
(tax & tip included) Reservations 386-9224