



# Tales from the White Dog Cafe

3420 Sansom St. Philadelphia

Winter/Spring 1999

## A More Perfect Union

It was still dark at 6:30am on December 17 when some 70 citizens gathered at the White Dog Cafe and boarded two buses for Washington, DC. Three days before, Jessie Jackson had called for a march on the Capitol to protest the House impeachment proceedings against President Clinton. "This is the leadership we've needed," I thought, "Let's go." Soon the White Dog office was abuzz as we chartered a bus and began phoning our customers. The first bus filled quickly. Our plans made the news and word spread across the city reaching a new constituency. The phones continued to ring and a second bus soon filled.

Late in the afternoon on the day before we were to leave, the President announced his decision to begin bombing Iraq the next morning. Should we call off the trip? As a person committed to peace through peaceful means, would it be wrong to show support for the President on this day? The phone began ringing again - this time with cancellations. I respected their decision. We called Chicago and found that Jesse's buses were on the road to Washington. He deserved our support. What was the real issue? This was not just about our President, it was about the Presidency. I decided that we must go, but even as I climbed on board the bus in the morning, I felt conflicted.

As the buses rolled south, we got to know who had come with us. Ranging in age from twenty-something to seventy-something, our group represented a cross section of neighborhoods from South Philly to North Philly to the Main Line. Some had come in groups and pairs, and many had come alone. Appointments had been cancelled, meetings moved, deals delayed, classes skipped, childcare rearranged. Several were veterans of past White Dog trips, but many had never been to a protest before, nor ever been to the Cafe. Several of our customers who couldn't go had sent money to cover the fare for those with limited income, of which there were many. Our neighbor down the street at the Irish tavern had contributed generously. Four of us from the White Dog were on board, two on each bus to help lead the way. Others who couldn't come had contributed cookies and hot spiced cider.

As we neared the Capitol we merged with many other buses and soon were among thousands on the Capitol steps holding signs and banners - my favorite was a giant picture of Kenneth Starr which said, "Big Brother is Watching You." The program began and we cheered on one inspiring speaker after another: the head of the Black Farmers Association, the president of United Mine Workers, activists from NOW, a youth leader of the Junior NAACP, a rabbi, ministers - black, white, Latino, Asian, women, gays, old, young, disabled, - it was indeed the Rainbow Coalition.

Out of the Capitol building from the front lines of the impeachment battle came John Conyers and Maxine Waters of the House Judiciary Committee, realizing defeat in their outnumbered partisan battle, but uplifted by our large turnout and the political future we represented. As I watched the diverse crowd, including large numbers of white union men, cheering on the black leadership and applauding the feminists, I realized something was changing. The real majority was emerging, the "wedge" strategy used to separate us failing. The strength of our newfound unity arched boldly toward a brilliant future, and in the distance shone not a pot of gold, but the glory of the America that could be, where people, not money make decisions in Washington. Even as I grieved for the people of Iraq on this day when bombs were falling, I knew that if ever there be the power to change our national priorities from building bombs to buying books, surely it was present here today, in this place, in this new majority - a rainbow of great beauty and hope.

It was dark again when the buses arrived home, but we were bright with the joy of camaraderie and eager for the next trip on a new day. We had gone in defense of our Constitution and returned home energized and empowered as "We the People."

*Judy Wicks*

Fifth Annual

## Freedom Seder

Tuesday, March 23, 6pm

with **Sonia Sanchez** and **Rabbi Brian Walt**

We will use the traditional songs and symbols of the Seder to explore the universal themes of freedom and renewal. During the evening we'll hear from those who work against oppression and discrimination in their own lives and in the larger community, including members of Kensington Welfare Rights Union and the Center for Lesbian & Gay Civil Rights. Poet **Sonia Sanchez** holds the Laura Carnell Chair in English and is Chairperson of the Women's Studies Program at Temple University. The author of 16 books, including most recently *Like the Singing Coming off the Drums*, she is a national and international lecturer on black culture and literature, women's liberation, and peace and racial justice. **Rabbi Walt** is founding rabbi of Mishkan Shalom, a progressive synagogue in Chestnut Hill dedicated to the integration of spiritual life and social activism and committed to pursuing economic justice in the Philadelphia region. \$30, includes 3-course dinner, tax and gratuity. Reservations 386-9224.

*Bring a friend from a different cultural background.*