

A Q & A with Sarah Bracey White and Laurel Holliday, editor of *Children of the Dream*

How did you hear about the anthology; what convinced you to submit your writing for it?

A writer-friend, Linda Simone, saw your notice on the Web and e-mailed me your address. She convinced me that *A Vermont Summer*, which she had heard me read at a local coffee-house, was perfect material for your described anthology.

How do you see yourself as a person and as a writer?

I am a survivor. If you don't kill me, I will be all right - no matter what happens. I am an optimistic, happy, self-confident person cursed with the desire to know why and how things happen. I am also an instinctive teacher. I feel that the events of my life matter and use writing to organize what has happened in my life and the lives of those around me, or project what would happen if . . . Writing makes sense of the ideas and emotions that collide inside me. It cleanses my soul like a brisk rainstorm does a smog-laden city, leaving me free to start over.

Who are the people and what are the things, values, ideas, beliefs, feelings, etc. that are important to you?

I was 44 years old before I repeated marriage vows, and my husband is very important to me. His loving, supportive presence adds a dimension to my life that I never knew I needed: a safe place to exercise and experience all of my feelings. I love other people's children. Because I have no children of my own and my parents and grandparents are long dead, I value the extended family my marriage has given me: a mother-in-law and three adult stepchildren who are an integral part of my life. My sisters and their children are important to me because they link me to my past and my parents. I cherish the memory of my deceased Aunt Susie (who cared for me from the time I was nine months old until I was five) and fortified me for life. She clothed me with the armor of self-confidence that protected me from southerners' Jim Crow attitudes of racial inferiority. I believe that life is a gift to be enjoyed, and I try to live each day fully; however, I also feel an obligation to contribute to the betterment of life for those people whose lives intersect with mine. Freedom is also very important to me. I must make my own choices; I'm also willing to pay the price of my choices. I believe that free-will governs our lives - our actions today set in motion the circumstances of our tomorrow. I am a very spiritual person, though not a regular churchgoer.

What were the most significant experiences you had in the arena of racial relations when you were growing up? (You may have addressed this in your story, but please summarize here)

I could not enter the local public library, learn to swim in the town's public pool, or be served in turn when I went to the local department store. By law, I had to drink from colored only water fountains, sit only in the balcony of the local movie theater, and purchase my train-ticket-out-of-town at a back window of the white ticket agent's office. The world of my youth was a place where no amount of education, civic/social consciousness, or good behavior earned respect - if you were colored. I had to escape that prison.

What are your thoughts about the future of racial relations in this country? (You may have addressed this in your story, but please summarize here.)

Children who have not been taught racial hatred are the only hope for the eradication of racial prejudice. They acknowledge differences and go on to ascertain common ground. Ignorance of those different from us is what breeds fear and apprehension. When we get to know others, we find that their cores are as good - and as bad - as our own.

What are your thoughts about affirmative action? (All kinds -- gender, race, disability, etc.)

I feel that the only way life's playing field can be made level is for people who have benefitted by generations of discrimination against another group must give some advantages back to that group. Affirmative action is a fair solution.

What are your thoughts about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream?

Dr. King's dream was a noble one which can serve all people. It is fair, achievable and morally correct.

What would you like to tell your readers about you and /or your story?

I never considered myself extraordinary or courageous. I simply considered myself fortunate to have escaped from a kind of Hell. I felt that the harsh lives of people I grew up with and knew, made my small pains inconsequential. However, I was determined to make my life worthwhile. I decided to not dwell on the past but reach out to the present and make my now a world of my own liking. After I left the south, I believed that all white people were the enemy. In middle age, an interracial affair made me look beneath the color of a man's skin into his heart. I then had to explore my own self-protective racism and consciously tear down the barriers that kept me from allowing myself to love without restraint. His skin color didn't match my own, but the emotions of his heart did. I married him and we live very happily.

How do you feel about being a part of the Children of the Dream anthology?

I truly consider myself the carrier of my parents' dreams: one dreamed of personal fulfillment and satisfaction, the other dreamed of service to mankind. I have always felt compelled to live-out, in my own way, those dreams. I long to have my stories, real and fiction, reach wide audiences. Selection for inclusion in this anthology means that I have made another step in the direction of my dreams. This gives me a sense of their appropriateness.