

We Can't Die Without Letting Them Know We Were There:
Oral Histories of Konnarock Training School
Alumnae and Faculty

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education
in
Curriculum and Instruction

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April 17, 2003
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Feminist theology, feminist research, education, oral history

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(ABSTRACT)

From 1924-1959, the United Lutheran Church of America operated a girls' boarding school in Southwest Virginia. When Konnarock Training School opened, there were few educational opportunities in the isolated mountains, especially for girls. Students from five states came to Konnarock, with some receiving eleven years of education there. Konnarock Training School recruited faculty from throughout the United States and at least one teacher from Europe. These individuals lived in the Virginia mountains, taught academic classes, and engaged in extensive community outreach. A unique level of cooperation existed among church, public schools systems, and government agencies during the school's existence.

The mission of Konnarock Training School was to help women reach their potential and to become leaders in their families, their church, and their communities. Students were taught, by example and by word, that they had a place in the church, that women did not have to accept prevailing social and economic circumstances, and that they could make decisions about their own lives. The day-to-day examples given to the students became a scaffold for social change; KTS encouraged the women to become authors of their own lives.

This research is essentially a case study using a feminist oral history methodology. A total of twenty-three interviews with eight women alumnae and faculty of KTS provides the basis for the study. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method. In addition, extensive archival material provided data for analysis.

The central argument presented is that KTS was a community embodying both Christian and feminist ideals, one that looked toward the vision of a just, equitable world but that persisted in the real and imperfect world. Overlapping themes leading to a view of the school as an example of feminist theology in practice are Family and Friends, Community, Identity, A Tradition of Leadership, and An Eschatological Focus. The role that memory plays in the telling of one's oral history is also considered.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Geneva Blevins Shepherd,
who gave me roots and wings,

and

To my daughters, Joy and Courtney;
may they always find soil in which to flourish.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“No [wo]man is an island, entire in itself.”

I did not reach this point alone. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us and of those who help us along the way. *Thank you* does not begin to express the gratitude I feel toward all the people who have given so much to me.

First of all, I thank the one who gave me birth. Mommy, you made me believe I could do anything, taught me about God, taught me to love learning and language, introduced me to KTS, and have made me the person I am today. I hope you, most of all, are proud of the story that I have written. You, and all the other wonderful women whose stories are here, who have shared your words, your time, and your trust with me, are very important to me. Each of you welcomed me into your home as a friend and an honored guest. Dora, Virginia, Geneva, Rose, Emily, Peggie, LaVerne, and Betty, I am deeply grateful to you.

Throughout my years of study at VA Tech, the members of my committee have been wonderfully supportive of all my efforts. Pat Kelly, you helped me to see myself as a writer, you gave me so much good advice, and you did not retire before I finished. Thank you. Carol Bailey, you have made me feel good about myself so many times. Your kind words are most appreciated, as is your willingness to read my very rough draft of this document. Tony Oliveira and David Hicks, I thank you, too, for your belief in me and for the time you have given to serve on my committee. How can I possibly put into words my gratitude to you, Melanie? As my mentor and my friend, you have read more of my work, answered more emails, and given far more than anyone should be expected to. From the moment I began to consider this work, you encouraged me and gave me confidence that I could do it. I know God was guiding me when I met you. Melanie Uttech, you are truly a special person and a wonderful teacher. Thank you.

I also need to express my appreciation to all my dear friends at Chilhowie High School. You have covered classes for me, have read my papers (the sign of true friends!), and most of all have given me encouragement every step of the way. Thank you all for believing in me. I am also grateful to Marie Claire Bullins and her students, Katie Estep and Angel Surber, for their help with the cover design.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge my husband. Thank you, Bob, for doing much more than your share around the house, for not complaining *too* much, and for always seeing that the car would get me where ever and back again.

I have been truly blessed by each of you.

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