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UAH Women's Studies, Spring 2008

University of Alabama in Huntsville

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UAH Women's Studies

Volume 18, Number 2

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Spring, 2008

Four Spirits World Premiere at UAH

UAH Theatre will present the theatrical adaptation of Dr. Sena Jeter Naslund's novel *Four Spirits* for its world premiere as a fully staged play next month. The five performances will be **February 7-10** in the Chan

Auditorium of the Business Administration Building (formerly called the Administrative Science Building).

Naslund will be UAH's Eminent Scholar in Humanities during the spring semester, teaching fiction writing. She collaborated with Montevallo professor Dr. Elaine Hughes in the theatrical adaptation of the novel, and both will be consulting with director Shannon Graham on the production.

The play deals with the Ku Klux Klan's bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963. The founding African-American church in Birmingham was a central meeting point for civil rights activists, and its bombing injured more than 20 people and killed four young girls attending Sunday School—the "four spirits" that inspired Naslund's novel. The play shows how the horror of the church bombing influenced people to try to make a positive contribution toward racial equality in Alabama and the nation. It depicts the lives of a group of educators and students in a GED preparation program at Miles College in Birmingham and three white civil rights workers who volunteer to work with them.

"For me," Naslund said, "one of the most interesting features of transforming the novel into a play was that in the play we especially focus not on Stella Silver (who represented me in the novel) but on Cat Cartwright, a young white woman activist in a wheelchair, and on Christine



Four Spirits cast members rehearse a scene.

Powers, a single mother and Miles College student. The play is about building friendships and crossing artificial barriers as well as about overcoming injustice."

Naslund says she had promised herself while in college at Birmingham Southern that she would write about the civil rights era in Birmingham. "The play tries to show we all have our prejudices and limitations," she says, "but we must work together to try to overcome them. The play is about coming together, whether we're black or white, whatever our religious or personal orientation. We need to have goals that address both our personal ambitions and our hopes for a better world."

Director Shannon Graham was drawn to the play because "it centers on women's experiences of the time and shows how both black and white women were affected by race and gender issues." The main characters come together as teachers because of the church bombing. "In the end," Graham said, "they share the belief that only education of heart and mind can bring integration to fruition."

The production is co-sponsored by the UAH Humanities Center, Women's Studies Program, and the English Department, with underwriting from the Huntsville Literary Association. Tickets are available at UAH (Morton Hall 222 and University Center) and Stearns Coffee, 2113 Whitesburg Dr S (near the intersection of Whitesburg Dr and Longwood Dr). Tickets are \$10 general and \$5 students (with ID). Reserved seating is available for groups of 10 or more. To order tickets or request information about group rates, phone (256) 824-6210. See also theatre.uah.edu.

Canadian Senator to Speak at UAH and in Community



The Women's Studies Student Organization, POWER, will host a "meet and greet" with Canadian Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette

Monday, February 4,

9 a.m. in Morton Hall room 343.

Hervieux-Payette has had continuing influence on women's and social issues within her community and beyond. For information on this free public event, email ragans@uah.edu.

Hervieux-Payette will also speak at a luncheon sponsored by The Women's Economic Development Council (WEDC) **Monday, February 4, at noon** at the Von Braun Center North Hall, Salon 3.

A moderated follow-up session will take place at 1:15 p.m. The ticket price is \$25 for regular attendees and \$20 for students. Tables (8 seats) may be purchased for \$200. The reservation deadline is January 30. Payment by check can be sent to WEDC, P.O. Box 18144, Huntsville, AL 35804 or online payment can be made at www.wedc-online.com. Student scholarships for the luncheon are available. Contact ragans@uah.edu.

Makeba to Perform at UAH



The Office of Multicultural Affairs will present a one-woman theatrical performance entitled "*I'm Not Getting On Until Jim Crow Gets Off*," featuring Awele Makeba, in celebration of Black History Month

February 12. The performance begins at **11 a.m.** in Frank Franz Hall.

This event is free and open to the public and is co-sponsored by the UAH Honors Program, Humanities Center, Office of Student Affairs, and Women's Studies Program. For information, contact the Office of Multicultural Affairs at 824-6822.

Holly Near, Arts and Activism Celebration a Success!

We want to thank all of you in the community who helped make the Holly Near visit so successful. Holly's visit was part of a two-day celebration of music, art, and activism, and, by all accounts, it was an inspiring and exciting week for Women's Studies.

A special thanks goes out to Black Slip Wines, Inc., and Wildflour Bistro for helping host a fun and elegant event to assist us in funding Holly's visit. The UAH Art Club arranged a fantastic art auction with some magnificent pieces, and POWER (the Women's Studies Student Organization) hosted an arts festival that highlighted some of the creative talent in the area, such as the Posey Peep Show.

The Huntsville Feminist Chorus provided a lovely musical introduction to Holly, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Huntsville, the UAH Humanities Center, and Departments of Sociology and English provided support. But most importantly, the members of the UAH community and the wider North Alabama community attended in large numbers and worked hard to make these events happen. What a great week. Thanks for all the support!



(Top) Holly Near made an eloquent impromptu speech at the art fundraiser for community support of artists of all sorts. Thanks, Holly!

(Bottom) Women's Studies faculty, staff, and students smile with Holly after her talk with song. Pictured left to right: Erin Reid, Staff Assistant; Rose Norman, Events Coordinator; Heather Harwell, POWER Vice President; Holly Near; Sarah Ragan, POWER President; and Nancy Finley, Director.

Harris Paper Contest to Award Academic and Creative Writing

The Women's Studies Program will sponsor the eighth annual Kathryn L. Harris Women's Studies Paper Competition, which awards prizes for essays written for a graduate or undergraduate course at UAH that deal substantially with women or women's issues. The competition awards in two categories—academic and creative. Each category will offer a first prize of \$100 and a second prize of \$50. The winners will be honored at Liberal Arts Honors Day, April 8. For more information, contact Dr. Molly Johnson at (256) 824-2566 or Dr. Angela Balla at (256) 824-2378 or visit www.uah.edu/womensstudies/essay_college.htm

UAH Alumna Publishes Second-Wave Feminism Book

From Nancy Finley's first "feminar" in spring 1992 at UAH, Stephanie Gilmore was inspired to pursue a career as a feminist academic. She completed her coursework at the Center for Research on Women and earned an MA in history at the University of Memphis in 1997 and a Ph.D. in comparative women's history at The Ohio State University in 2005.

She has published numerous articles and book chapters on feminist activism and women's sexuality in post-World War II America. Her article on Memphis NOW, "The Dynamics of Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971-1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide" (*NWSA Journal*, spring 2003), was awarded the SAWH A. Elizabeth Taylor Prize for the best article on Southern women's history in 2004. Her first book, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism*, will be published this spring from the University of Illinois Press. Congratulations to Stephanie on this important book!

She currently holds a joint appointment in history and American studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where she is developing new courses on sexual labors in the United States, black women's social movement activisms, and the 1970s.

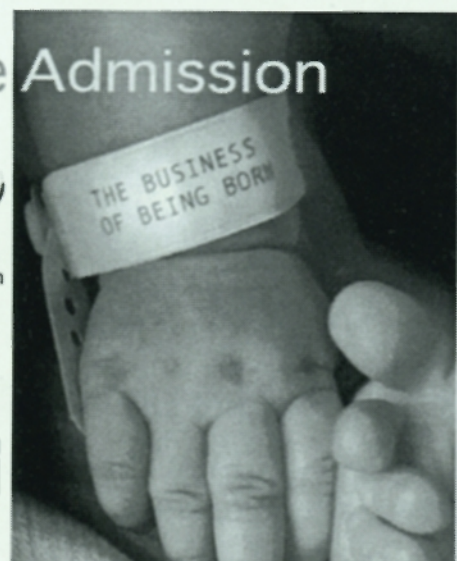
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Major Novelist Sena Jeter Naslund to Teach at UAH Spring Semester

Dr. Sena Jeter Naslund will be UAH's Eminent Scholar in the Humanities during the spring semester, when she will teach fiction writing and give a variety of talks, plus a fiction writing workshop. Naslund first gained national prominence in 1999 with her bestselling novel, *Ahab's Wife*, which was a Book of the Month Club main selection and named by *Time Magazine* as one of the top five novels of the year. Her most recent book, *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette* (2006), also made *The New York Times* Extended Bestseller List. *Four Spirits*, her novel about civil rights era Birmingham, has been dramatized and will receive its world premiere as a fully staged play at UAH February 7-10.



(Photo by John Nations)

Naslund grew up in Birmingham and is now Writer in Residence and Professor of English at the University of Louisville. She has also been the Program Director for the MFA in Writing, Spalding University, in Louisville since 2000. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa Writers Workshop and has won numerous prizes for her fiction.

Naslund's first public event at UAH was Tuesday, January 15, when she spoke on "Doing Factual Research to Write Fiction" for the UAH Honors Forum. Naslund's last three novels draw significantly on historical research. *Abundance* is told in the voice of Marie Antoinette, from her arrival in France at age 14 to her death at the guillotine. The novel presents a richly detailed and sympathetic portrayal of France's much-maligned queen. *Four Spirits* takes place in Birmingham during 1963-1964 and concerns events leading up to the September 15 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four young girls, the "four spirits" of the title. The novel explores the intersecting lives of black educators at Miles College, the students in a GED program there, and a small group of white civil rights workers. *Ahab's Wife* imagines nineteenth century American life from the point of view of a woman portrayed as the wife of Melville's whale-seeking sea captain in *Moby Dick*. In all of these novels, Naslund demonstrates a remarkable capacity to get inside the minds of people of another era, and to take you with her.

Naslund's second public lecture at UAH will be **Friday, January 25, 7:30 p.m.** on "The Origins of My Novels: *Ahab's Wife*, *Four Spirits*, *Abundance: A Novel of Marie Antoinette*." This free event will be at Chan Auditorium in the Business Administration Building (formerly called the Administrative Science Building). Chan Auditorium will also be the venue for Naslund's theatrical adaptation of *Four Spirits* (with Elaine Hughes), which opens **Thursday, February 7, 7:30 p.m.** for five performances.

Naslund's fiction writing workshop will be **Saturday, March 29, 1-3 p.m.**, and will be open to the public. Seating is limited and attendance requires advance reservations to brasherc@uah.edu or 824-6321. For more information about events scheduled during Naslund's stay, contact the UAH English Department, 824-6320, or visit www.uah.edu/english/naslund_schedule.php. For more about the production of *Four Spirits*, see theatre.uah.edu or call 824-6871.

International Women's Day Celebration to Feature Feminist Chorus and Other Local Performers

Celebrate International Women's Day **Saturday, March 8, 7:30 p.m.** with an evening of song, dance, puppetry, and more, at Roberts Recital Hall. Performers will include the Huntsville Feminist Chorus and other local artists who have been invited to perform works



Huntsville-based puppeteer Anna Sue Courtney will perform and is producing the event on UAH's campus.

about, by, or inspired by women who have inspired them.

The Huntsville Feminist Chorus is well known locally for singing "songs that empower women," songs in many languages and honoring many cultures. In a single performance they have been known to sing "Ave Maria" in Latin, followed by "Ancient Mother," intertwined with a goddess chant naming 30 goddesses from almost that many cultures. This a capella chorus, now in its 15th season, often features drumming and puppetry, and will be a featured part of the evening's events.

International Women's Day originated in 1908, when women marched for pay equity and voting rights in New York City. The day was established in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1910, at the first international women's conference, and over a million women and men attended European rallies on March 19, 1911. A few weeks later, a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City cost the lives of over 140 women, mostly Italian and Jewish immigrants, who had been routinely locked into their workplace and so were unable to escape the fire. Reactions to this event gave impetus to the worldwide movement for women's working rights. Since the 1970s, March 8 has been set aside as International Women's Day, to celebrate women's social, economic, and political contributions.

Puppeteer Anna Sue Courtney will perform and is producing the UAH Women's Studies celebration of International Women's Day. She will be seeking performers of any gender who work in music, dance, drama, or other performing arts and who have performance pieces that honor or were inspired by women. Artists interested in performing may contact Anna Sue at 256-479-7863. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support this free event, please contact Cybilla Hawk at 256-509-2900 (cybilla@hiwaay.net).

Women's Studies will post additional information as the show develops, www.uah.edu/womensstudies/events.html.

To learn more about International Women's Day and this year's events worldwide, see www.internationalwomensday.com.

Sponsored by English, Women's Studies and the UAH Humanities Center
UAH Theatre presents the world premiere production of

Four Spirits

A PLAY BASED ON THE NOVEL BY SENA JETER NASLUND



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DIRECTED BY

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Women's Studies Faculty Member Publishes Fascinating Book on Sexual Identity

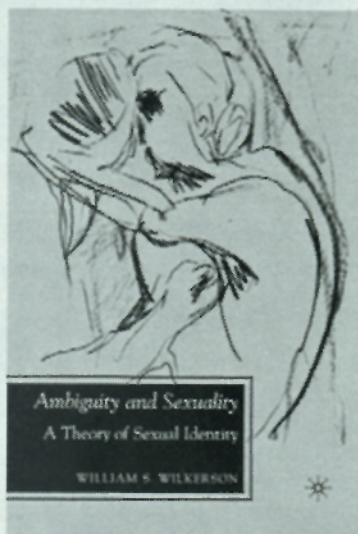
Ambiguity and Sexuality: A Theory of Sexual Identity

Dr. William Wilkerson, Associate Professor in the UAH Philosophy Department, has been a popular instructor in the Women's Studies Program for years. Wilkerson recently published a new book on sexual identity entitled *Ambiguity and Sexuality: A Theory of Sexual Identity*.

He summarizes the book noting that, "Sexual identity—whether somebody is homo-, hetero- or bisexual—has always been something of a mystery. What does it mean to be gay? Straight? Bisexual? Many think that biological factors, like genetics, determine our sexuality. A smaller number have argued that we have a hand in making our sexuality through the choices that we make. Making things more complicated, many academics who study sexual identity claim that it is only a 'social construction'—a recent invention of our culture to which people adapt their lives.

"After many years of study and living out of the closet, I have attempted to unify these different ideas about sexual identity, and argue that choice, biology, and cultural influences all fuse together in a person's sexuality. People make choices based upon feelings that they interpret through the sexual roles that culture offers them. Sexual identities are a continual project that each individual participates in making."

Congratulations to Dr. Wilkerson on his new book!



Cover art work by K. Jill Johnson, Assistant Professor of Art, who is also an active faculty member involved in Women's Studies.

POWER Works on Campus and in Community for Social Change

The Women's Studies Student Organization, POWER (People Organized for Women's Equality and Rights), had an exhilarating fall with their involvement in Habitat for Humanity work, their Arts and Music Festival, as well as their participation in Women's Studies events such as Woody Blue and Holly Near.

POWER is anticipating an exciting spring with many events including hosting a "Meet and Greet" with Canadian Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, support for *Four Spirits*, Rape Aggression Defense training provided by the Huntsville Police Department, and additional work with Habitat for Humanity as well as other local organizations.

POWER promotes awareness of oppression through student activities and community service, integrates the contributions of all members, and is open to all UAH students. The officers include President Sarah Ragan, Vice President Heather Harwell, Treasurer Rebecca Purcell, and Secretary Tiffany Schlosser, with faculty sponsor Dr. Angela Balla. For information, email ragans@uah.edu.



(Left) Jacob McCaleb and Heather Harwell volunteer to paint the interior of a house with Habitat for Humanity.



(Top-Right) Sarah Ragan and Heather Harwell host a POWER table for incoming students. (Bottom-Right) Pictured left to right: Heather Harwell, Sarah Ragan, Amanda Bisset, and Becky Purcell demonstrate for "love" at an anti-Klan rally.



The Women's Studies Program publishes an online newsletter that is distributed monthly (sometimes weekly).

If you would like to subscribe to the online Women's Studies newsletter, go to www.uah.edu/womensstudies and click on "Subscribe to Online Newsletter."

Women's Studies Program

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Dr. Rose Norman, Events Coordinator,
Online Newsletter Editor
Erin Reid, Newsletter Editor

Become a Friend of Women's Studies!

Friends of Women's Studies (FWS) is an organization of people who support the UAH Women's Studies Program.

The goals of FWS include

- supporting community involvement in Women's Studies events
- sponsoring cultural activities and events that honor and empower women
- supporting women scholars, artists, and performers
- fostering discussion of issues affecting women's lives

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