



# The Women's Word

Volume 2, Issue 3

...for women's voices to be heard

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Happy  
Holidays!



## It's the End of the Semester...

**By Ajita Rajan & Marjan Maghbouleh**  
**Editors of *The Women's Word***

As the semester winds down, everyone at the Women's Center looks back at the last few months with nothing but smiles.

In Fall 2005 the Women's Center sponsored speakers such as **Judy Norsigian**, co-author of the revolutionary *Our Bodies Our Selves*; modern American poet **Adrienne Rich**; and **Mike Domitrz**, the funny man who encouraged students to ask, "Can I Kiss You?"

Watch out for major student-organized programs next semester, such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Healthy Body Image Week, and of course, *The Vagina Monologues*.

Unfortunately, **Ajita** will be leaving us next semester. We appreciate all of her hard work with *The Women's Word*, and wish her the best of luck.

We hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday season. See you in the new year!

## From the Director's Desk

The Women's Center joined the staff of the Rainbow Room (Lehigh's new LGBTQ space!), student groups and other University offices in sponsoring a **Stop the Hate candlelight vigil** on November 15 (see story on p. 2). Hundreds of people came. About 30 students, faculty and staff members joined us immediately afterward in the Women's Center to discuss what we can all do to make Lehigh a more diverse and inclusive place to live, study and work.

Last week, the Center's **Women of Color Alliance** hosted a **Strategy Session for an Inclusive Community** that brought together representatives of the Black Student Union, Spectrum, Gryphons, Leadership Lehigh, Kappa Alpha Psi, Progressive Student Alliance, Asian Cultural Society, Panhellenic Council, NSBE, and SHPE, with several faculty and staff members who are working on diversity initiatives (Kashi Johnson, Jennifer Swann, Seth Moglen, Jeff Fleischer and myself). WoCA members **Nayla Raad** and **Sarah Jefferson** did a fantastic job of organizing and facilitating this meeting. We left feeling energized and ready to work together in new and creative ways. This group, and anyone else who wants to join us, will meet again **Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup> at 8:30pm in the Women's Center** to plan a series of events and initiatives focused on diversity next semester. **Con't on p. 3**



### Women's Center Staff & Volunteers at Winter Party

**Back row, l-r:** Farhana Kassamali, Renee Simons, Chelsea Erdmanis, Anne Rapson, Sarah Jefferson, Marjan Maghbouleh, Jessica Wren, Hailey Witt, KHandler

**Front row, l-r:** Betsy Berretta, Marisa Enrico, Nayla Raad, Megan Connelly, Charlie Jensen, Rachel Sansanelli

## Meet the Staff

**Kristin Handler**, Director

**Heather Weaver**, Administrative Coordinator

**Steve McAllister**, Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator

**Ajita Rajan**, Graduate Assistant, Co-editor of *Women's Word*, *Origyns*, Cultural Programming/Women of Color Alliance (WOCA)

**Marisa Enrico '07**—Body Empowerment Alliance (BEA) Co-Coordinator, REAL Women Project Co-Coordinator, Break the Silence

**Chelsea Erdmanis '06**—BEA Co-Coordinator

**Sarah Jefferson '06**—*Women's Word*, Cultural Programming/Women of Color Alliance (WOCA)

**Farhana Kassamali '06**—BEA member, Cultural Programming/WOCA

**Marjan Maghbouleh '08**—Co-Editor of *Women's Word*, Co-Coordinator of Gender & Violence Group

**Alex Milspaw '07**(Studying Abroad) - REAL Women Project Co-Coordinator, Break the Silence

**Nayla Raad '07**—Cultural Programming/WOCA, Producer of *V-Day/Vagina Monologues 2006*, Break the Silence

**Annie Rapson '06**—Publicity Coordinator, Co-Coordinator of Gender & Violence Group

**Rachel Sansanelli '07**—BEA member

**Renee Simons '06**—Graphic Designer, *Origyns*

**Sarah Smith '04**—Editor emerita, *Origyns*

**Hailey Witt '07**—REAL Women Project Co-Coordinator, BEA member, Educational Displays

**Jessica Wren '08**—BEA member/web designer, *Origyns*, *Women's Word*



## Stories from Lebanon

**Nayla Raad** shares her experiences growing up in **Lebanon**

As I write about my experiences in Lebanon, I write from the point of view of a Lebanese-American. My mother was the daughter of an ambassador and spent the majority of her life living in Liberia, Italy and France. My father was the son of a very powerful man in a mountain village, Beit Mery, and spent most of his life there until the civil war in the 1980s when he moved to the United States.

Lebanon is distinct from the rest of the Middle East. We are the only Middle Eastern country without a desert. We have a reputation as the "Paris" of the Middle East, we are viewed as the most liberal Middle-Eastern country, and hence, Lebanon is quite the vacation spot for Middle Easterners. We also have the highest percentage of Christians in the Middle East: 40 percent.

I was raised in California until age seven, and then moved back and forth between Lebanon and the United States until I was 14. I wouldn't change the course of my life, looking back on it now. But, the joke in Lebanon is that if you can survive living there, you can survive almost anything. I have trouble articulating what it was like living it Lebanon, and it would require more space to describe it justly but I will do my best through a few memories.

Sitting around the dining room with all my family around me. Lebanese

are very community-oriented. Especially because I grew up in a little village, everyone knew everyone and their life stories. Lebanon is also a very small country (about two-thirds the size of Connecticut) so no matter where you go, you can figure out how you're related to anyone you meet. For all holidays and nearly every Sunday, my family and I would go to one of our grandparent's house for lunch. There would be more food than one could realistically eat. My paternal grandmother's way of showing her love was to cook for us. My father **continued on page 3...**



## Candlelight Vigil to Stop Hate

**By Heather Sterner, Women's Center Administrative Coordinator**

The lights are dim and faces are silhouetted by hundreds of candles. People from all walks of life rise together, one chorus singing and proclaiming that "We Shall Overcome." Some people are crying, some are praying, others are smiling. An energy rises in the room unlike any felt in a very long time. Tired bodies are renewed with strength to go out and make a difference.

This was the overwhelming culmination of the Stop the Hate Vigil held on Tuesday, November 15<sup>th</sup> in Packer Memorial Church. Hundreds of people turned out for the event. Students, faculty, staff, and community members packed the chapel to hear speakers talk about a variety of issues, from the recent bias incidents on campus to the lack of diversity among the student body. Each speaker made clear that change must happen and it will only happen if each and every person goes out and starts the process.

Michelle Samuels, Associate Dean of Students, summed up the program with a passionate plea. She spoke about how a choir of people does not just sing when they're together, but that they keep singing when they're apart. This analogy became real as people left the chapel buzzing about the event and talking about how to make changes, some even still singing "We Shall Overcome." The vigil was not an end to weeks of outrage and inquiry over several bias incidents; it was the beginning of a movement to make real and lasting change on the campus.



**The Women's Center wins International Week Office-Decorating Contest!!**

Not shown: a beautiful rug, colorful scarves and the great food Nayla made.

L-R: Annie Rapson, Nayla Raad, Marjan Maghbouleh, Jessica Wren, Ajita Rajan

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## From the Director's Desk, cont'd from p. 1

At the end of each semester, we celebrate our successes, but sadly, we also have to say some goodbyes:

**Ajita Rajan** has been the Center's Graduate Assistant for the last year and a half. She is finishing her graduate degree in chemical engineering, and will be leaving us at the end of this semester. She has done so much for the Center, including establishing *The Women's Word*, organizing the Graduate Women's Luncheons, advising the Women of Color Alliance, and more.

**Sarah Smith** is finishing her MA in Political Science and is looking for work in the non-profit world. **Farhana Kassamali** is graduating

a semester early. She will be traveling in the spring and working at Price Waterhouse Cooper in Manhattan in the fall.

Thank you, Ajita, Sarah and Farhana, for everything you've done to build the Women's Center and make it flourish. We'll miss you!

We're also saying goodbye to **Marisa Enrico** and **Hailey Witt**, but only for a semester: they'll be studying in Italy and Sweden, respectively. *Bon Voyage!*

To all our fabulous volunteers and staff members: Thanks for a great semester and have a wonderful holiday break!

## Stories from Lebanon, cont'd from p. 2

explained that this was because she lived through the civil war when people were desperate for food and food was the greatest gift you could give someone.

Another memory brings feeling of regret. The night before a big exam, my home phone rings. I pick it up and realize that the person on the other end of the line is my friend from school who has confided in me that her father is "very strict." She is sobbing. I find out that her father has taken the book she needs to study. She is worried about the exam and scared of her father. I tell her I will take care of it. I tell her not to worry about the exam and to take care of herself. He walks in on her. She screams and hangs up. Fortunately, I am friends with the teacher and call her and tell her that Tamara is having family problems and cannot make the test. Tamara is excused from the exam. She doesn't show up to school the next day.

There are no formal numbers to call in a case like this. The best I could do was to notify my school officials about this instance. As far as I know, nothing was done. What frustrates me looking back on this now is that I didn't recognize this as abuse. I never saw the gravity of the situation because it is all so unspoken of in Lebanon. It is one of my biggest regrets that I didn't do more.

My culture also has things that happen on a fairly regular basis that cannot be portrayed through a memory. For example, there is a certain level of safety I feel when in Lebanon. Although there is a very weak police force, I know that all of my family and my friends are there for me should something happen. All of us watch out for each other and should something happen, all of my family and extended family, my friends and their extended family, and my whole village will be there to take care of me. There is so much friendliness. I can be walking down the street at any time of the day and someone will stop to offer me a ride. I have gotten invited over for a meal or for coffee at strangers' houses on numerous occasions. It is considered an insult to refuse the invitation.

Once again I am struggling to put my experiences into words. I now work at a domestic violence shelter and think of Tamara often. I am an Orientation Leader so that new students can feel welcome on Lehigh's campus. I am constantly cooking huge meals. On Tuesday nights, I smoke a water pipe with many of my friends and talk for hours. I am thankful for every second I spent in Lebanon, the good and the bad, because it helped shape me into the person I want to be today.

## Calling All Clubs!

**The Women's Center needs your help with upcoming campus-wide awareness events**

### SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

Through the month of April, the Women's Center's **Gender and Violence Group** will sponsor programs and activities to encourage Lehigh students to take a stand against sexual violence.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month, scheduled for April 3rd to 28th, is a month for organizations and colleges throughout the world to get together and take a stand against violence.

The main program, Take Back the Night, is a march from the top of the Hill down to the University Center. We march with pride and power, protesting violence against women.

We march with friends, chant empowering messages and carry posters declaring our strength.

After the march, there will be a gathering to discuss personal experiences and ideas for making this campus safer and more tolerant.

The Clothesline Project is a display of t-shirts with messages against sexual violence. Students can decorate shirts for the display, which will be in the upper UC.

Do you have any ideas? Would your club like to get involved with planning and fundraising for these programs? Let us know! **E-mail Annie Rapson (anr9) for more information**, or come to the Gender and Violence Group meetings, every Tuesday from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. in the Women's Center (upper UC, room C207).

### HEALTHY BODY IMAGE WEEK

Be comfortable in your genes! Help the **Body Empowerment Alliance** with Healthy Body Image Week, scheduled for March 13th to 20th.

Interested in helping to plan and sponsor an open-mic night at Jazzman's? Or in setting up a display in the upper UC that sends the message: "Be comfortable in your genes!" ?

There are many programs planned for Healthy Body Image week, so what are you waiting for? Get involved!

**If you or your club is interested in helping out, or if you have any suggestions for future programs, e-mail Chelsea Erdmanis (cke2).**