



I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

By Latona Gamble

Latona Gamble, a 2014 NOSW graduate, recently shared her story, amidst tears and standing ovations, with two organizations that support the New Opportunity School for Women: 100 Women, a group of women philanthropists, and the Fayette Women Lawyers' Association. Latona, nicknamed "Byrd," now lives in Richmond, Ky., and, like Maya Angelou, knows "why the caged bird sings." Here, in Latona's words, is her story, a story that reflects the journey of so many NOSW graduates:

For many years, I lived imprisoned to dysfunction and chaos inflicted by those around me who were supposed to love me. My cell cold and dark, each bar representing something different. Abuse, mental illness, addiction, death... I lived in that toxic cell all of my life.

By 2013, I finally decided *enough*, and I started planning my escape. In winter 2014, I became a proud graduate of the New Opportunity School. I came home equipped with an arsenal of tools to break my cell door down, walk out with my head

held high, and become the phoenix you see here before you today.

The path to my freedom was not easy. Becoming "the end" of a generational curse was met with



Latona Gamble, first from right in the front row, is surrounded by some of the women who heard her story at a 100 Women gathering in Lexington.

much aggression and combat. I was alienated by all family, and my brother committed suicide a month after I graduated the New Opportunity

School. It was like a mass shooting had occurred. I watched everyone I loved die. I thought all that NOSW taught me was lost. I could not have been more wrong.

Without NOSW, I would not have survived. My sisters at NOSW replaced the family that I lost. They reminded me of my strength, my value—and that the tools were still there to use when I was *ready*.

It took me two years, but I finally got custody of my brother's daughter and relocated from Hazard to Richmond. I cut all ties with my toxic family. I got a divorce from my abusive husband and focused on my health. I lost over 100 pounds. I can now set an example of *empowerment* for my children. I can raise them peacefully in an environment where they are safe.

I could not have done this without the teachings, love and support that was given to me by the New Opportunity School for Women. It is because of them, that *I know better*, that *my children know better*, and that *the generations that come after me will know better*. 

Family Voices

NOSW IMPACTS WOMEN—AND THEIR FAMILIES!

By Jennifer Walden

It's not just the women whose lives change by participating in an NOSW program. The spouses and the families back home who support these women in their desire for change are also impacted. Our staff recently spoke with family members of several NOSW

graduates about these impacts. We were blown away by their responses! We will be highlighting their overwhelmingly positive feedback in this and coming issues.

Tom Gentry, when asked to comment

on how the winter 2016 NOSW session impacted his wife, Tami, responded quickly: "I don't know what happened to her in those three weeks, but I can tell you it lit a fire in her and she hasn't slowed down since.

See NOSW Impacts Women on page 2.

NOSW NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is published three times a year: Winter/Spring, Summer and Fall.

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CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 22–March 7, 2020

Residential Session
(Berea, KY)

APRIL 20–22

Community-Based Session
(Berea, KY)

JUNE 22–24

Community-Based Session
(TBD)

From the Executive Director PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Witnessing women start to uncover the many reasons to be grateful for who they are—that's one of the favorite parts of my job! "Practicing gratitude" is a powerful concept for me. At NOSW it can begin with having someone whisper your positive attributes in your ear. It can develop into giving voice to one of your own gifts and letting gratitude for this gift propel you forward.

NOSW has so much to be grateful for this past year. You will find a long list of thank yous (back cover) to those who made the November Festival of Trees a success. But I want to take a moment to recognize others whose generous gifts of time and treasure have touched so many lives:

- **Vogue Hair Salon** in Richmond. Not only did their staff volunteer their time to give our ladies haircuts during our November session, but they did it with a smile.
- **Nora Swanson** for presenting each of the women in our November session with a piece of her handcrafted jewelry.
- **Our meal sponsors** during our residential and community-based sessions.
- **Judy Halstead**, who facilitated the lovely totes filled with all kinds of goodies donated by the **General Federation of Women's Clubs** (GFWC) and **Dorothy Wager's Sisters of Spirit**.

- **Altrusa**, an international organization dedicated to service, which provides pizza and creative activities including jewelry-making for participants in many of our programs.
- **100 Women, Network NOW**, and the **Fayette County Bar Association Women Lawyers** who support our work through ongoing financial contributions.
- **Our grantors:** Berea College Appalachian Fund, Toyota, the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, Cralle Foundation, Baumker Foundation, Thompson Charitable Foundation, the Raymond Foundation, the Whitaker Family Foundation and the Oak Hill Fund for their generous grants to support our programs.
- **All our donors**—individuals, civic organizations and businesses who make our work possible.
- **Ronnie Slone**, our Berea College intern for the past 2 ½ years, and community volunteer **Kathy Barr**, who, with dedication and commitment, provided administration support to NOSW.

With a grateful heart!



Robbie Pentecost

NOSW IMPACTS WOMEN—AND THEIR FAMILIES!

Continued from page 1.

And the last three years," Tom went on to add, "have been the best three years of our lives."

Prior to Tami attending NOSW, Tom was concerned for Tami's health and mental well-being. Drug addiction had her spiraling out of control. He was concerned about her being away from him for the program.

But after Tami returned home, Tom came to realize how beneficial the program was in helping Tami

discover her own strengths instead of depending on him. A beaming Tom now boasts about Tami's transformation since overcoming her personal demons and reclaiming her courage.

"Four years ago, I thought she would be dead in a matter of weeks," he says. "Everything she has now she's worked for herself and she deserves it. I can tell you that program is the best thing that ever happened to her. She's



Tami and Tom Gentry at NOSW community-based session in Winchester, Ky, which Tami organized.

got her own car that she bought and paid for; she's got money in the bank."

Today, as Tom's enthusiasm gives witness, Tami is a changed person. And so is Tom!



A SISTERHOOD FOR LIFE

By Jennifer Walden

Navigating life's inevitable transitions can be tough, as many of our graduates can attest.

Having a support system in place can provide the buoyancy one needs to stay afloat through the change process. This is especially important for someone who's setting out to change old habits or chart a new course in life—like the women who attend NOSW programs!

Fortunately for our session participants, they come to rely upon each other for support as they expand beyond their comfort zones, develop new skills, and face uncertainty about themselves. The natural ebb and flow of confidence in one's abilities is buoyed by a sounding board of encouragement and comfort from NOSW "sisters" during session. Which means



The most recent "support group" of NOSW women formed at the November 2019 session share a meal together at the Snug Hollow Bed and Breakfast outside of Berea.

graduates leave their NOSW program with lasting bonds and a sisterhood to last a lifetime.

Social media has provided new ways to keep that sisterhood alive. For example, the November 2019 class, which calls itself The Butterfly Tribe

Sisters, has created a private Facebook page where they can stay updated on each other's lives and cheer one another on from across the miles.

And another private Facebook page already exists for all NOSW graduates.

A LOT OF THANK YOUS FOR FESTIVAL OF TREES

Continued from page 4.



One of 15 Christmas trees, each uniquely decorated, sold to the highest bidder at the November 2019 Festival of Trees.

Silver—Churchill's

Jingle Bell—Dr. and Mrs. Lyle Roelofs, Union Church, People's Bank

Mistletoe—Central Bank, Cumberland Valley Bank

Thanks to special contributors:

Bill Lake, Santa's helper

Eddie Kennedy, our auctioneer

Joy Keplar and Larkyn Rogers, our face painters

Tree decorators Judy Fritz, Kala Cain, LaRee Jacobs, Anna Lake, Nora Swanson, Kathy Barr, Father John Rausch, Susan Jordison, Mary Lewis, Jennifer Walden and Fran Lemaster

The Berea College Tennis Team, who served as volunteers

The Berea College Choir, who sang at the event

Thank you to our vendors:

Brandi's Bistro
Melinda Carter
Easy As Pie, You Just Buy

Gypsy Glass

Gypsy Pots

Juice Plus

Anna Lake

Lucky Clover Farms

Merry-Go-Round Farms

Redeemed Clothing

Nora Swanson Arts and Kinetic

Soul Food

Billy Powell

Stella-Kate Simple Sweet Clothing

Mary Ann West

Wild Wood Designs



We work to improve the financial, educational and personal circumstances of low-income women in the Appalachian region.

FESTIVAL OF TREES A SUCCESS

Long List of Thank Yous!

By Robbie Pentecost

All the beautifully decorated Christmas trees (all 15 of them) were sold, a bounty of vendors displayed their wares for Christmas gift-buying, and several hundred attendees were exposed to the mission of the New Opportunity School for Women at the third annual Festival of Trees Nov.1-3 at Churchill's.

It was a success!

Thank you to author Adriana Trigiani for being the highlight of our Friday night opening event.

Thank you to our sponsors:

Presenting—Whitaker Family Foundation and CHI St. Joseph Health



Adriana Trigiani speaks to attendees at the Friday-night premier of the Third Annual Festival of Trees. She emphasized her passion to explore real-life women characters in her novels. A few of the 15 decorated trees can be seen in the background.

See A Lot of Thank Yous on page 3.