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Sister, Friend, Warrior: Honoring Audre Lorde

by Angela Bowen

*"Change is the immediate responsibility of each of us, wherever and however we are standing, in whatever arena we choose." **

I first met Audre Lorde, Black lesbian feminist poet mother warrior, at a poetry reading at a women's restaurant in Bridgeport, Ct. During intermission she walked over to my table, handed me a business card and said, "If you ever need to call me, I'm right at the other end of the phone." I was flabbergasted at such an invitation from *Audre Lorde* (I still thought of her in italics then) to a stranger, but I learned since that she'd done it many times; and I wondered how many late night calls of desperate loneliness she had received as a result of her generous spirit.

That night another Black woman whom I didn't know was sitting at my table; it turned out that we were in similar circumstances: still married, but wanting out; newly settling into our lesbian feminist identities; deciding whether we had the right to upset the carefully constructed (or carelessly backed into) heterosexual traps of respectability we had built around ourselves. Perhaps we shared similar looks of desperation. Whatever the reason, sister Audre, knowing that talking at just the right moment with one who understands can help a sister take the next step to freedom, made herself available. Being shy about intruding on her personal life, I never called her during that period, but kept the card for years; just having it made me feel stronger. Knowing that she was out there and accessible if I *absolutely* needed her made it easier for me to break out and make for the light.

This incident, one of a dozen I could tell, embodies the spirit of Audre Lorde: spontaneous support on an individual basis as well as to groups the world over: Indigenous women in many countries, including South Africa and Australia;

Afro-Caribbean and Afro-German women; and white women everywhere who were willing to look within and struggle against their racism. Her work was global AND individual.

A cancer warrior for 14 years, she tied women's health directly to the poisoning of the earth. Poet Laureate of NY State, 1991-1993, 17 books of poetry and prose; awesome teacher; loving companion to Gloria Joseph; dedicated mother (with co-mother Frances Clayton) to Beth and Jonathan; warrior for Black Liberation, Women's Liberation, and Gay Liberation - where she was as much a s/hero to Black gay men as to Black lesbians. Black gay poet Essex Hemphill wrote for her memorial:

"You said, 'I love you,' you said, 'Man,' you said, 'Brother.' You welcomed your brothers to come into the circle you were creating. You never barred us from

participating in envisioning a new world. You only asked that we be brave, we be strong, we be committed to working for a joint liberation from the oppressed, a joint liberation for us all."***

May we all, like sister Audre, remain committed to sowing individual acts of generosity that make our collective journey along the road to freedom an easier one. For, as she said, "It is crucial for each of us to know we are not alone."****

Oh Audre, "You gave us words to bridge our differences and point us to collective power instead of a singular, selfish glory."**



Photo: Leigh H. Mosley

*"You gave us words to bridge our differences and point us to collective power instead of a singular selfish glory" ***

*Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," *Sister Outsider*

**Essex Hemphill, *Lorde Memorial Program* addendum, Jan. 18, 1993

***Jennifer Abod, "Honoring Audre Lorde: *The Making of a Global Conference*," a video-in-progress