

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR FELICE YESKEL

This past May, the Working Class Studies Association posthumously honored our very own Felice Yeskel for a lifetime of investigating and agitating to understand and improve working class life in the United States.

Over 200 people gathered to honor Felice, including her partner Felicia Mednick.

Here is a touching excerpt from the speech Barbara Jenson wrote to honor her friend and late colleague:

In Working Class Studies, she was never without a crowd around her. Her big laughter and personal warmth drew others to her. An



outspoken lesbian feminist that founded and staffed the Stonewall Center at University of Massachusetts for 25 years, she pushed the boundaries of the working class studies constituency, welcoming queers, sissies, dykes and big women who are unashamed that their goddess bodies take up space in a man's world. But she alienated no one, everyone was welcome at Felice's table. She built community as easily as breathing, far more concerned with building a movement than in having an individual career. She demonstrated working class values of inclusion, solidarity, great personal warmth and "keeping it real" every day of her life.

Finally, she had a burning passion and an extraordinary ability to find and connect with working class people wherever she went, in Ivy League colleges, on the streets, in workshops and in working class studies. She changed lives. She labored hard to forge deep and permanent connections that touched and supported other working class crossovers. She made us cry and laugh and shout, Hell no! She helped bring us to the inclusive, amazing collection of working class scholars and activists we are today. Her heart was big enough for all of us, and we love her.

To read the full text of Barbara's tribute to Felice visit classism.org/felice-yeskel.

CLASS ACTION HELPS WOMEN DONORS BECOME BETTER ALLIES

By Denise Moorehead

Class Action's belief that people of all class backgrounds must be included in the struggle against classism was put into action during a recent collaboration between Class Action and the Women Donors Network (WDN), a national community of progressive women philanthropists.

According to Rebecca Flournoy, WDN's Senior Director of Programs, the organization has long supported its members' efforts to advance racial, class and gender justice through philanthropy. "It's been incorporated into different aspects of our work," she shared. "This is a process, not a one-time thing."

The organization first approached Class Action last year about helping its members strengthen their ability to be allies for race and class justice.

"Our members were requesting time to get together and talk about race, class and gender," explained Rebecca.

"As we were trying to figure out who to work with, we knew that as a network of progressive women donors, we needed to work with someone who could understand the complexity of issues related to being a donor – grant-making, investing, advocacy, and partnering with others. And Class Action emerged as an ideal partner and came highly recommended."

Taking Practical Steps

Jennifer Ladd, Class Action Co-founder and Senior Trainer and former WDN member, led a team of Class Action facilitators who worked closely with

Rebecca to design opportunities for reflection and action. At eight regional facilitated discussions, ranging from San Francisco to Boston, from Seattle to Philadelphia, members strategized about how to take concrete action steps to support race and class justice.

"WDN members wanted practical ideas about how to be good race and class allies," explained Jenny. "So we included activities about" continued on page three



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MOBILE DIGITAL STORYTELLING LAB HITS THE ROAD



By Jane Van Galen

The statistics are an indictment of classism. First generation (first gen) college students are four times more likely than their peers to leave college after their first

year. Nearly half leave college without graduating. Yet, the voices of first gen

students are vital in the work of creating college campuses where students from all backgrounds will thrive.

Amplifying Their Voices

First In Our Families, a new digital storytelling project, has been created to amplify the voices of first gen students.

**MY STORY IS ABOUT ME,
BUT THIS PROJECT, THIS
OPPORTUNITY WAS
ABOUT US.**

In this partnership between Class Action and the University of Washington-Bothell, where I teach, we are conducting three-day storytelling workshops in communities and campuses across the country.

Our mobile storytelling lab was crowdfunded by 192 generous donors. And the project is designed around the workshop methods of the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, where I trained as a facilitator.

One of our first workshops was held in May at the Democracy Center in Cambridge, Mass. It began with a Story Circle in which storytellers sought feedback on their script ideas and saw rich connections with those of their peers.

After audio recording their scripts, they used editing software to weave images, video clips, and music into digital stores of obstacles, resilience, family, achievements and doubts in their college experience. The workshop culminated in the screening of the very creative and moving stories.

In their final reflections together, the storytellers talked about how empowering it was to share three days of deeply supportive, creative work with others who “got” the joys and challenges of being first gen. They talked about how much they learned from others’ stories.

Uniting with Others

Reflecting on her workshop experience, one storyteller said, “It was healing, challenging, and validating. The experience was wonderful.” Another added, “My story is about me, but this project, this opportunity was about us.” Sharing their stories with friends and colleagues has helped to spark exciting new conversations about the needs of first gens.

To view these and other first gen project stories, or to request more information about scheduling a workshop for your campus or community, visit the project website at FirstInOurFamilies.org. **BB**

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY

Dear Class Action supporters,

With the momentum of the historic #BlackLivesMatter movement, I wanted to take this opportunity to show our solidarity. The past year has seen an unprecedented number of important conversations and demonstrations about the devastating impact of systemic racism in the United States. From our unequal schools to gentrification to the (in)justice system, Black lives bear the brunt of much of the inequities in our society.

Class Action has always addressed the intersections of class and race in our workshops, but recently about half of all requests have been for class/race intersections workshops. Obviously, the intersection is hard to navigate and so many people want to figure it out. As Senior Trainer Tanya Williams points out, “class and race make for a truly a muddy, mucky intersection where it’s easy to get stuck and get confused about where you’re going.” Our programs aim to validate

BLACK LIVES MATTER

the experiences of working class and low-income people of all races and leave participants with the knowledge that long-standing systems of oppression have made it harder for people of color in this country, especially Black and indigenous folks.

We applaud the amazing and brave work of #BlackLivesMatter. It is about time we re-energized and refocused the national conversation on race and racism, which will go deeper, generate more justice and include class conversations as well.

In Solidarity,
Anne Phillips, Executive Director

WE'VE GROWN!

We welcomed several new and talented board members this year: Gita Gulati-Partee (Open Source Strategies), Shane Lloyd (Brown University), Susan Ostrander (Tufts University, retired) and Jane Van Galen (UW Washington-Bothell). In July, staff and board members gathered in Cambridge, Mass. to spend a fruitful day getting to know one another, re-envisioning what a world without classism looks like in 2015 and strategizing for this next phase of Class Action.

Clockwise from L-R Denise Moorehead (Blog Editor), Annie Hamilton (Administrative Coordinator), Jane Van Galen (Board Member), Shane Lloyd (Board Vice-President), Gita Gulati-Partee (Board Member), Susan Ostrander (Board Secretary), Anne Phillips (Executive Director), Chuck Collins (Treasurer) and Betsy Leondar-Wright (Board President).



ONE CLASS LIVES PARTICIPANT SHARES HER STORY...

Denise J. in New York

As a child, I saw firsthand how some people with power and privilege treated people who had less education and limited means. These encounters were primarily negative, and my child's mind began to associate power and privilege, and people who possessed them, with people who were condescending and judgmental.

That changed when I attended a writing conference many years ago. I was partnered with a woman who wore a very expensive suit and had impeccably manicured nails. Our assignment: to share a painful memory, a time when you felt extremely vulnerable.



She told me about the day she had a backroom abortion while attending a private women's college. She said, "I was young and scared. But I couldn't tell my mother because of the disgrace it would bring upon our family. So I went through that abortion alone and everything that followed afterward."

I heard the catch in her breath and saw the pain in her eyes. She taught me an important lesson. We are all vulnerable, capable of being hurt, regardless of our power, privilege or social standing. When we understand this, we are less prone to making snap judgments and move towards compassion and connection. **BB**

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Class Action Helps Women Donors continued from cover

growing up in their particular class, some larger economic and racial context, and then lots of what it means to be an ally.

"Through hands-on exercises, really practical stuff, not listening to a lecture, our work with WDN supported members to 'walk the talk.'"

The discussions, some in members' homes and others in civic spaces, all included lively, provocative discussion and action commitments by the members attending as well as by the organization as a whole. However, Rebecca noted that each session was unique, because the Class Action facilitators were very present in the room, and would take the conversation in different directions based on what emerged.

Addressing Power Dynamics in Grantmaking

Acknowledging that there are, inevitably, power dynamics in any grantor-grantee relationship, Rebecca said, "The question becomes how to be aware of them and manage them to be the best possible partner with grantee groups."

Class Action's work with WDN focused on helping women donors as they sorted through the complexities of race, class and power with the organizations they fund. "If you care about equity, the questions are who benefits and who decides," states Rebecca, "Within philanthropy, it is important to look at how decisions are made and to ensure that they are good decisions."

The discussions with Class Action are being followed by the organization's November national conference with Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a professor at UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School specializing in race and gender, who first coined the term "intersectionality."

Reiterating the centrality of WDN's class, race and gender foci Rebecca said, "We have heard from some folks an interest in having some sort of conversation next year as well. The issues we care about as progressives are so complex and intertwined that the only way we will succeed is to work effectively together." **BB**

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NEW RELEASE! ACTIVIST CLASS CULTURES ONLINE KIT



CLASS LIVES ANTHOLOGY SWEEPS THE NATION

From December through June, we gathered people across the country for storytelling events for Class Action's most recent publication, *Class Lives: Stories from Across Our Economic Divide*.

This anthology was the realization of co-founder Felice Yeskel's dream, to bring people together to share their class experiences. Between 10 events – in Colorado; Washington, D.C.; Pennsylvania; Massachusetts; Minnesota; New York; and Washington state – we brought together over 400 people to hear one another's funny, sad, shocking and inspiring stories.

A twist on the typical book tour, the events each featured different local contributors to read their pieces, each with a unique setting and a range of class experiences.

Audiences engaged with one another and were invited to share their own class stories. The participants varied in age, gender, race and class, and shared stories as diverse as they were, stories of hardship and discrimination, benefiting from injustice to others, and the powerful experience of mere observation of inequities.

After the Minneapolis event in May, contributor and Class Action Associate Trainer Fisher Lavell – who wrote about her experiences of being poor and Canadian Indian – shared her thoughts.



"I enjoyed doing the reading. It felt like an honoring, not only of we contributors who were present, but also of all the folks who conceived and nursed the book along its way. I come from a class of folks who never get a forum to say what is real and what is true, so it was also a small justice for my people."

Luckily, the conversations do not stop here. There will always be room for more Class Lives events, Class Action workshops, and story sharing across the class spectrum in many forms. We believe sharing our class stories is the first step towards our vision of a world without classism. **BB**