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In spite of adversity, woman still works to 'mend the sacred hoop'

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In spite of adversity, woman still works to 'mend the sacred hoop'

Virginia Sand

In listening to the stories of injustice experienced by African-Americans at the dedication ceremony to the new Martin Luther King, Jr. Plaza, I felt that one important story was going unheard — mine. When I was 18 years old, I went to a party where I was drugged and gang-raped by three black men in my hometown of Waterville, Maine. They had put drugs in the food that was being served. Up until that night, I had never experienced sex or drugs, and I was not given a choice. I did not know this could happen to girls at parties.

I became pregnant from the sexual assault, miscarried early, and then was told I probably would never be able to have children of my own due to the pelvic inflammatory disease I contracted from the rape.

Despite that traumatic, life-changing event, I have always held Dr. King's dream close to my heart. I have never allowed race to determine my friends. Moreover, I have never felt hatred toward the three African-Americans who sexually assaulted and traumatized me. What good would it do for me to become racist against all African-Americans as a result of the sexual trauma? If I carried the same hate and anger toward African-Americans that they directed toward me, I would be spreading the disease of racism and helping to keep it alive. We must break the cycle of racism with forgiveness and with a commitment toward positive change.

I know that Dr. King would not want my story to go unheard, because of his wise words: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Well, I believe that

my life matters, even though the three people who raped me didn't think so. I believe my story should be heard.

Dr. King also said, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." I have been oppressed both as a woman and as a Native American. I therefore want my voice to be heard for all women and for all Native Americans.

There have been many great Native American visionaries similar to Martin Luther King, Jr. who were killed in their quest for peace, truth and righteousness, including Black Elk, a Lakota Sioux holy man, who was able to share his vision before passing into the spirit world. Black Elk had experienced visions since childhood, visions of a sacred hoop that had been broken with the coming of the white man. In his visions he

I believe that my life matters, even though the three people who raped me didn't think so.

saw himself mending the sacred hoop and planting a sacred tree that would bloom in the center of the hoop. However, Black Elk felt his people's dream had died at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. On his death bed, Black Elk shared these words with all of America: "And I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth — you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead."

I carry on Black Elk's vision of mending the sacred hoop and planting a sacred tree that will bloom in the center of the hoop for the purpose of healing relations for the Earth and all her people.

Virginia Sand is a senior Native American studies student.



Jeremy Parker

Tuesday is Veterans Day. What does that mean to you? I was in boot camp on Parris Island my first Veteran's Day as a serviceman and definitely didn't consider myself a veteran then. I had not even earned my Eagle, Globe and Anchor yet. Coming up to my first Veterans Day in the Fleet — that's what Marines call active duty — I asked my squad leader what it would be like. What would happen? I was just 19 years old, barely out of high school, and most people mistook me for a 16-year-old. To me, a veteran was a grizzled old war dog who fought in Vietnam, Korea or World War II.

I have never fully gotten over that feeling. As a 27-year-old veteran — it feels strange to use that term for myself — it's difficult. On one hand, you don't feel like you're deserving of the praise and honor that the men and women who fought before you have earned, and on the other there are times when in civilian life, you just don't feel quite ... right. Fitting in can be hard after something like that. I'm not all that fond of talking about my negative experiences, though my friends can attest I tell some funny stories about the lighter moments.

I know I want people to listen. Trust can be difficult, but the catharsis that results from sharing those difficult memories with someone who cares and understands is a greater feeling than any "thank you for your service" I've ever

On Veterans Day, take time for service men and women

gotten. Suicide rates among both active duty personnel and veterans have always been tragically high. I've struggled for years with my own deep depression and regrets. It took far too long for me to trust anyone to talk about it, and it's still difficult. Even now I feel nervous writing this, but I know that it needs to be said.

So this Veterans Day, remember your friends, family members or maybe even people you have never met who served. Thank them, but also realize that many of us have wounds from our time in the military that are not visible on the surface. Don't push, don't bring it up unless they want to; just please be there for them. I have had too many of my brothers and sisters in arms succumb to an enemy they should never have had to face: depression. It's an enemy that fights you years after the physical danger has passed.

For all those who have served and those still serving: thank you, I understand how hard it can be sometimes. Please know you are not alone, and there is always someone to talk to; it really helps when you do.

To those who took the time here to get to know me well enough that I confide in: your friendship to me is greater than any thanks I could ever receive.

Jeremy Parker is a senior anthropology student.



Brian Curry

I hope that Obama can do 'something inherently great'

I am, by definition, an optimist. That being said, I find the challenges that lie ahead of me and other Republicans, Conservatives and general non-believers in President-elect Obama's mantra of "Yes We Can" to be a little overwhelming. However, something odd occurred on Wednesday morning. I awoke with a sense of hope.

I am sure there are many along the party lines who would say once you go down that road, you are sure to drink the political Kool-Aid. I imagine myself in some line somewhere, waiting for my weekly check as someone shouts, "There he is!" Suddenly, the rock star known as Obama hovers over us, spreading joy. And by joy, I mean a number of large bills taken directly from rich people's irritatingly hard-earned bank accounts. This is how one would "spread the wealth." All misguided tangents aside, I think the fundament of what Barack Obama stands for is true.

At least I hope it is. There was no real question in my mind that Sen. John McCain had an uphill battle. I may not have ever really been convinced he could have pulled it off. But on election night, I saw why I wanted McCain as my President: his grace. The will of a man in his 72nd year can easily be called into question simply by saying he is somehow "losing his bearings." Nonetheless, that will ought to invoke a sense of respect and even nostalgia. During the concession speech, he made clear that the fault of the campaign was his. He took sole responsibility while the media spoke in hushed tones about the fault lying with Gov. Sarah Palin. Incidentally, when he mentioned

his opponent's name, he followed by asking the crowd not to boo, lending himself to the idea of good sportsmanship. In his own way, he asked us to be American and patriotic in the most respectable of ways. John McCain asked us to gracefully accept his defeat.

He told us something I think most of us found surprising — he said Obama would be his president. Some would indignantly say, "You're damned right he will!" But do I need to remind a forgetful nation how many Hollywood celebrities and local nobodies said either George W. Bush wasn't their president, or that if elected they would leave the country? Well, truth be told, those people lied about that. I even offered to purchase a few one-way tickets.

I can find my optimism in the fact that Barack Obama will move the country in a "different" direction, even though "different" remains neutral on the scale of good and bad. Where I find my hope is that I dare to believe he could do something great for this country. Maybe he can pull it off and offer us more than just moving speeches and contrived stories of hope. The proof in the pudding will be in the eating, and in four years that will be some mighty fine pudding — regardless of the flavor. Until then, I will watch, I will hope and I will allow myself to believe that even though I didn't see my candidate elected, we are all ready for something inherently great. I hope I will find this in my President-elect, Barack Obama.

Brian Curry is a senior forestry and environmental science student.

Sports

from page 8

The University of New Hampshire has achieved some recent successes, and their attendance numbers show a lot about the UMaine community. They attracted 13,255 to a game earlier this year against William & Mary, who wasn't even ranked at the time.

I know I've ranted about attendance, but as a supporter not only of UMaine sports, but of sports in general, it is disappointing to me as a member of the UMaine community. No program will ever be in contention for a national

championship every year. Fans can't expect that. What can coaches and players do to help the situation? Go to the commons and encourage students to go? They shouldn't have to, but may have to resort to that. What are students doing during these games? I can only speculate, but instead of curing your hangover and sitting in your dorm on Facebook, fulfill your role in the UMaine community. Make the home-field advantage real. Support not only the football team on Nov. 22, but also other sports on campus as they all face similar challenges.

Adam Clark is sports editor for *The Maine Campus*.

LETTERS CONTINUED ...

theologian Martin Luther. Third, he was "Dr." King because of his graduate studies in theology. Fourth, he was the "Rev." King because he was the minister of a Southern Baptist Church — he was throughout his life an evangelical Christian. In fact, as he understood

himself, his fundamental task in life was to preach to America and the world the message of, and to carry out the work of, his personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prof. Michael Palmer, PhD,
Dept. of Political Science, UMaine

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