

Reflections on the Conscious Feminine Leadership Academy

By Karen Novak, CFLA 2013 Graduate



From my very first core class back in 2008, I've been in love with the mystery of Women Writing for (a) Change. There is an extraordinary spaciousness in the method we use to cultivate our voices, not only as writers but as women with individual minds and souls. How could something so intimate maintain its sense of ever-outward expansion? It wasn't until I read Mary Pierce Brosmer's book, her "Guide for Creative Transformation," that I learned this core class model wasn't an exercise in boundless freedoms. WWf(a)C works within a definite, bounded container wrought with compassion, intelligence, and rigor. Mary's book made plain that a person could learn to create such a container for herself and for others. I wanted to learn more.

Coincidentally—if you believe in coincidence—I happened to be reading Mary's book at the same time the Conscious Feminine Leadership Academy 2013 was announced. I attended several of the discernment circles designed to help those who were interested determine if CFLA was right for them at that time. These circles were a gift. I was a woman entering a new phase of her life. I had dilemmas to sort out concerning my future. Mary's discernment process was wise and kind. However, I knew I had to be at CFLA 2013 from the first I heard of the program.

Alums of what had been called the Feminist Leadership Academy counseled me to be ready to work deep and to prepare for change. They let me know this was a master class—although it pinches to use the word "master." A *mother* class is better. I filled out the application as thoroughly as I could, submitted it, and waited. When the acceptance letter arrived, there was much happy dancing in the kitchen. I immersed myself in the required texts and packed for the first week of retreat.

How to describe CFLA 2013? Sometimes there really are no words. A group of eleven wholly unique women, including our teachers, Mary Pierce Brosmer and Diane Debevec, gathered at Grailville on a June afternoon, and something wonderful began to emerge. It was a sort of spiritual alchemy. From the very beginning we were committed to that same spacious intimacy I had experienced in my core classes. We not only studied the Conscious Feminine, we lived it. We read and sang and danced and wrote our way fearlessly into our truths. We listened closely to one another's words. Mary taught the history and application of the Conscious Feminine with honest acknowledgement of the difficulty of living fully awake in a world that is semi-conscious at best. Beth Lodge-Rigal joined us for a couple days and shared many insights. We talked as friends between circles. We meditated as pilgrims alone. We walked in the woods. We wrote some more. The atmosphere sparkled with the energy we generated individually and as a group. We became sisters, the HearthKeepers. I will never forget the glorious sense of growth I experienced every single day. This is how I want to live.

After the first week's retreat, I brought back the courage to make overdue and significant changes in my personal life. After the second week, I was somehow more genuinely me. CFLA taught me how to hold space open for myself and for others. I won't lie; the learning process was at times demanding and intense. CFLA is the kind of experience that gives back what a person brings to it. We each brought everything we had. We got back a remarkable clarity of vision in what it means to live and lead with authenticity.

I can count many blessings over the course of my life, and I've made a few excellent decisions. Attending CFLA ranks with the best of them. I'm a more peaceful person. I'm a better writer. I feel prepared to healthfully attend to my own needs while holding compassion for the needs of others. I have eleven amazing new sisters, a bottomless well of beautiful memories, and a useful, serene way to be in the world that will also help to reshape it. I will be forever grateful. Namaste.

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