

# An Education of a Different Kind

by Elizabeth Sheehy

My three years at Salem College have given me many gifts not the least of which is my friends. I have made three important discoveries since arriving at Salem in August of 1989, I would like to share two very personal ones with you.

Throughout my entire life I was always under the impression that people who were in counseling were crazy, well not exactly crazy but inadequate in some way. I've always felt that if a person was having a problem in their life they should just deal with it and work it out themselves. I've always believed that your problems were your own and not something anyone else should be involved in or have to listen to. Unfortunately this is not always the best way to handle a difficult situation in our lives. When I was ten years old my parents separated. At the time my mother asked me if I wanted to talk with a psychologist about the divorce because I seemed to be taking it too well. I declined her offer because even at that young age I knew there were some negative stereotypes to being in therapy and I felt like why would anyone want to hear what I thought.

The first time I ever received any counseling was by accident. I was sitting in Ty Rice's office for a career

planning session second semester of my sophomore year. I had filled out a questionnaire about the satisfaction and quality of my life. Apparently, many of my answers left something to be desired because he began questioning me about them. After an hour and a half session I had tackled a few of the problems that had been troubling me. My career plans had gone no where but I felt like I had accomplished something even more important. I had overcome my fear of talking with a counselor and realized that that was what they were there for. Ty and I continued to discuss events and problems in my life that were bothering me. Even when everything in my life was going well I would still just sit and talk about things that were inconsequential. When I learned that Ty was leaving I was disconcerted to say the least. I felt like we had really built a good relationship and he had begun to help come to grips with different aspects of my life.

First semester my junior year I didn't know who had replaced Ty and honestly I didn't do too much investigating. In February I decided that I once again needed to talk with some-

one so I made an appointment to see Peggy McAlister. I went to see her filled with apprehension that I would resent her because she had taken Ty's position. I was also concerned that she and I wouldn't share the rapport Ty and I had. Fortunately none of my fears held any truth. By the end of our session I felt like we had become friends and I trusted her. Trust is very important to me because I have to believe I can tell my counselor anything. She is a wonderful listener and offers me the advice I need to her although sometimes its not exactly what I want to hear. I now go to her regularly even when there isn't a problem and just talk.

Another treasure I have discovered at Salem is Debbie Cates. I've always known Debbie was very friendly, but never thought of her as a counselor before. I became aware of her rare and special talent quite by accident (I seem to have a lot of accidents.) I was sitting in the Commons one morning waiting for a class when Debbie walked in (her new office is there.) This particular day was a bad one. I had just had what was probably the best and the worst 48 hours of my life. I felt like I had met someone I really cared about and lost all my friends in

what seemed like a matter of minutes. Debbie and I began talking about nothing of interest and she asked me was everything O.K.? That was all it took. I needed someone to talk to none of my friends seemed up to the job and she wanted to listen. I talked with Debbie a great deal over that week and I must say she was a vital part in my handling the situations that had begun to overwhelm me. Up until that point I had no idea that Debbie Cates did anything other than planning social events, however I'm glad she does.

There is a great deal to be said about someone you can talk with and share every confidence with knowing that they can be trusted. I have made wonderful friends over the past three years but confiding to them about certain things leaves me feeling very vulnerable. However for me Peggy McAlister and Debbie Cates are two trustworthy friends I know are there for me, and will help every way they can. They are both great listeners and have offered me some invaluable advice. I'm glad I discovered them and their rare talents to not judge but just listen. They are both a great asset to Salem College and I for one am very grateful to them both.

## -----A Sign of the Times-----

by Dawn M. Darby

Now is the time of which I must look back on my time here and make some attempts to capsulize my impressions of the Salem Community. I feel very confident in including myself in this family, although I must say that upon arrival, it was quite the contrary. I came mid-way through my sophomore year which may have been a part of the problem, however, I knew that the obstacles I was to face grew much deeper than being a transfer student.

Earlier this year I was confronted by a very well known staff member on campus who wanted to discuss my assessments of some managerial shifting in ARA. It was her opinion that the decision was partially based on race, I asked her what she thought the problem with race was and she said, "You know, it started way back in Africa when the slaves came here, that was the first sin and it has been just one sin after another"..... My naturally reaction was to remind her that slaves were brought here against their wills, they did not come to settle the new found lands rather, to help work for those WASPS., raise the children.....you get the picture.

I began to look at her analogy closer and closer and concluded that times have not changed as much as we would like for them to have but they have changed.

I compare this to my first couple of semesters at Salem, I truly felt like an outsider. I did not feel as if I was accepted as easily as some of my fellow transfers. I obviously was different, in more ways than my classmates realized. I definitely did not have much in common with most of my peers, I was an introvert who had a deep affection for blues and jazz, and I did *not* wear ribbons in my hair!! Those were some minor differences. A major barrier was the inability my environment had to communicate and celebrate with me these and other major differences. The fact that I was one of about four or five other Afro-Americans on this campus had disadvantages for us all. Those Old South, Rebel Flag, Whistling Dixie themes which apparently dominated many of the social gatherings had to dissolve. The butler, maid and nanny stereotypes which many of my fellow Salemites brought with them of Afro-Americans was being refuted. I began, unknowingly, enlightening my hall-mates on things ranging from; how my shampoo was no different from theirs and that my purpose was to clean my scalp, to sitting in classrooms explaining that it was just as incorrect to single out someone just because they were Black and expect them to be the general spokesperson for the whole

race, as it was to assume that all whites in the south believe that if you're from New York you're a yankee ( simply not true folks!)

It was finally confirmed that I was just as new to Salem as Salem was to me which was not an updated refelection for a liberal arts college. I had just left a place where the ratio of interracial couples equalled the number of non-interracial couples and their was a gay community and I guess you get the picture. The point is that environment accepted individuals not based upon socio-economic, sexual preference, or least importantly, race. The campus which was as compatible student to campus as Salem accepted people based on the fact that the world id diverse and equality on the workforce is a real thing. Therefore if you are not planning on cashing in on that M.R.S. degree anytime soon, you'd better learn that differences aren't negatives rather positives. And you can surley believe that tokenism is more prevelent among the sexes than the races. Salem just got a minority scholarship, and a women president *this* year, and the first Afro-American to graduate from Salem College was in the mid-70's. Salem is *not* cashing in off my attendance here that's for sure.

It's also funny to think of how just last year, many thought I was the most hate-

ful thing and everybody pratically was afraid to speak to me. Most of the Afro-American students all ate breakfast, lunch and dinner together and people very seldom joined us. It is hard to believe that we were so segregated just one year ago 1991!! Surely it's time to grow together to fight the ignorance-stemmed fear of things and people who are different. I was deeply inspired by Dr, Maya Angelou who challenged an auditorium fill with vibrant, diverse women writers to have the courage to step into the unknown for answers, compromise and change as well. Uniqueness is the key, days of assimilation are dwindling, I believe it went out with the Home Economics major here at Salem, the cirriculum is updating and so should we on population diversity. We first have to show ourseleves friendly we would not be here if we did not want to be here and that is a strong enough commonality to start breaking the ice of overlooking each other. I mean you know we really are too small in terms of being close-knit to have clicks. To the rest of the world we are a family of strong determined, leaders of today and tomorrow, let's start owning up to that properly.