

national news

A national health emergency

Petition drive and art exhibitions culminate National Breast Cancer Awareness month

by Bob Roehr

To declare the epidemic of breast cancer a national health emergency, and to demand a national strategy that will end it once and for all" is the objective of the National Breast Cancer Coalition.

One phase of their campaign culminated on Oct. 18 with a full day of activities, including the presentation of a petition signed by 2.6 million Americans to President Bill Clinton.

The 2.6 million signatures is not an arbitrary figure but represents the 1.6 million women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer and the one million women who have the disease but do not know it yet.

It is especially important for lesbians because some studies have shown that women who do not have children are up to three times as likely to develop breast cancer as are women who give birth.

The petition drive, begun in May, urges the Administration and Congress to:

1. promote research into the cause of, treatments, and cure for breast cancer through dramatically-increased funding and through vastly-improved communications in all parts of the medical community;

2. enhance access to high-quality breast cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment and care for all women;

3. and, to increase involvement of those living with breast cancer in the formulation of new laws and regulations, as well as in all aspects of clinical trial design.

The Oct. 18 activities began with a breakfast at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, which has been host to two powerful exhibitions tied to National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Participants then walked to the Ellipse, in front of the White House, for a noon rally. The petition was presented to the President later in the day.

Toni Morrison wins Nobel Prize for Literature

Award-winning author and lecturer, Toni Morrison, has won the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature. The brilliant author of *Jazz*, her recent work published in 1992, commented upon learning of her award, "I am outrageously happy... and I am of course profoundly honored. But what is most wonderful to me, personally, is to know that the Prize at last has been awarded to an African American. Winning as an American is very special — but winning as a Black American is a knockout. Most important, my mother is alive to share this delight with me."

Morrison received her Master's degree from Cornell University and has taught at colleges across the nation. During her career, she has been the

recipient of five distinguished lecturer seats at universities in New York, California and Michigan. She has received honorary degrees from 14 universities throughout the country including Sarah Lawrence College, Bard, Bryn Mawr and Yale. Morrison has also been an editor at Random House, where she worked with such authors as Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis and Andrew Young. Her five major novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby* and *Beloved* have won critical acclaim and garnished awards as well. Morrison currently holds the Robert F. Goheen Professorship in the Humanities Council at Princeton University. She teaches in the Creative Writing Program and participates in interdisciplinary programs including Afro-American Studies, American Studies and Women's Studies.

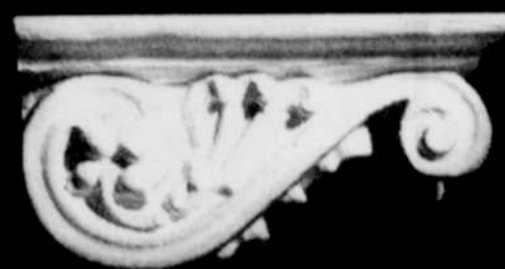
One of the exhibits, entitled *Breast Cancer Journal: Walking with the Ghosts of My Grandmothers*, by Chicago painter Hollis Sigler, is a haunting installation of 13 emotionally-charged works. Sigler was treated for breast cancer in 1985. It recurred in her bones in 1992, prompting this series of works. Echoing the AIDS cry of Silence=death, Sigler chose to go public with her disease and her work. "Only when women with mastectomies refuse to pretend normalcy will the silence be broken. The world will know we are many."

Her style is "faux-naif," a combination of drawing reminiscent of angular, angst-ridden German expressionism and the vivid color palette of Haitian primitivism. The scenes are largely void of people but filled with symbolic representations of daily life. The effect is evocative and unsettling, yet somehow avoids being depressing. Sigler combines the visual presentation with short paragraphs of copy affixed to the wall. They embellish on the title of the works, stimulating and directing thought through presentation of facts on breast cancer, helping to define the emotional concerns which prompted each particular painting.

The Face of Breast Cancer, the second exhibit, is a photographic essay of 63 American women who have died from the disease. Organized by the NBCC as part of its public education campaign, the exhibit is currently scheduled to travel to ten other cities. Contact the Coalition for further information on cities and dates, or to learn how to bring the exhibit to your area.

The National Breast Cancer Coalition is a grassroots advocacy effort, conceived in January 1991, to focus the nation's attention of the breast cancer epidemic. It can be reached at PO Box 66373, Washington, D.C. 20035, (202) 296-7477.

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