

# CENTER HONORS VOLUNTEERS

Each year Susan Ledy, the Center's volunteer Coordinator, plans a special evening to show our volunteers how much they mean to us. This year's "Salute to Volunteers" was held on May 14 at the Press Club. Hors D'oeuvres and wine punch were enjoyed by volunteers, Board members, and Center staff.

We were fortunate to have Nancy Skinner of Nancy Skinner and Associates as our keynote speaker. Nancy, a committed community volunteer herself, shared with us her view of the rewards of volunteering; service to others, self-fulfillment, development of relationships, and personal (and professional) growth. As Nancy reminded us, America is unique among its neighbors in the high value

it places on its volunteer workers.

Two special awards were presented this year. Barbara Gallagher was recognized for her five years of service to the Center as an intake interviewer, and Sherry Wilber was honored as our Volunteer of the Year. Sherry has served as an intake interviewer, an outreach facilitator, a member of our speakers' bureau, and an information and referral receptionist.

Each volunteer is special to us, and we thank each of them for their dedication and service:

**Intake Interviewers:** Gerry Adams, Cheryl Belo, Irene Bien, Denise Blair, Susan Carl, Maryanne Chamberlain, Rita Fallon, Barbara Gallagher, Mickie Hoxie, Phyllis Lee, Carol Lukas, Joann Martin, Joan Nelson, Marge Pattison,

Chris Tillman, Rita Vonins, Caroll Velie, Sherry Wilber, Ginny Young, and Janice Zwaanstra.

**Outreach & Speakers' Bureau:** Sara Albert, Silvana Apol, Denise Blair, Caroll Drudy, Mary Malone, Joann Martin, Rosalie Moore, Sallee Prieto, and Sherry Wilber.

**Information & Referral Receptionists:** Cherie Gross, Elyn Kallio, Doty Lorson, Sue Miller, Marion Peterson, and Sherry Wilber.

**Library and Special Projects:** Julie Chamberlain, Cheryl Clousing, Sandi DeLange, Rohini Nilekani, Martha Oates, Christine Puruleski, Judy Seutter, Alon Soderfelt, Marge VanDyke, Lynn Vinkemulder, and Linda Westveer.

## WOMEN IN INDIA

By Rohini Nilekani

*Rohini Nilekani is a journalist and free-lance writer from Bombay, India. Though only in Grand Rapids for a few months, Rohini has volunteered at the Center, and has graciously agreed to write this article for DIALOGUE.*

Women in India share many of the problems that face their counterparts in the U.S., such as sexual harassment, lower wages, political exclusion, and physical violence which, at its worst, culminates in rape and even bride-burning. In addition, however, most Indian women, and in fact many women all over the Third World, carry the double burden of humiliating poverty and debilitating illiteracy.

Rural women typically work all day long in the fields for subsistence wages and return home to the weariness of housework and the service of the "overlord" husband. It would be hard, even for less fortunate American women, to imagine what 'housework' in rural India implies. Often, it means collecting firewood for fuel, walking miles to fetch water for cooking, and scraping together enough food for the average family of seven.

The urban woman's life is only

marginally better. If she is born into the middle class, she is Ibsen's Nora. And if she is poor, she must submit to life in a hovel, to disease, to violence, to hunger, and to the demands of an uncaring husband. And she must still walk a distance for one bucket of precious water.

However, it is not all misery and gloom. The women's movement has come into its own in India, especially since the U.N. Decade for Women (1975-1985) has brought increased consciousness of women's rights. Women's groups everywhere are battling discrimination on all fronts, and dealing with issues from dowry death to unemployment.

As the global village inches its way to becoming a reality, as the modern world creeps closer to the inaccessible heartland of India, women are awakening to a greater sense of their potential. They have shown wonderful resourcefulness in devising ways to protect their interests. For instance, during the now famous Chipko movement, women from the state of Maharashtra physically prevented forest contractors from tearing down precious, life-giving trees by hugging tree trunks with their frail

bodies, and defying the bulldozers to run over them as well. The Chipko women carried the day, the bulldozers rolled back and the event led to landmark environment-protecting legislation.

While women in my country cross one frontier after another, it puzzles me to see American feminism in a setback mode, so to speak, after its early pioneering days. Why, in this country of plenty, is the feminization of poverty now a statistical fact? Why is there still abuse of women? Why do teenagers get pregnant? Worse still, and unheard of in India, what leads young girls to the despair of suicide? Perhaps these are the new issues that American feminists must tackle, as they try not to take their well-won freedoms for granted.

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