

Remarks by Redstockings speaker Marisa Figueiredo Shulamith Firestone Memorial September 23, 2012

In 1978, at the age of 16, while in high school, I lived in Akron, Ohio. I went to the public library on weekends and on one shelf were three books in a row that changed my life forever and are the reason I am here today: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, and Redstockings' *Feminist Revolution*. With my consciousness raised to the point of passionately identifying myself as a radical feminist in the tradition each book represented, I ardently wanted to connect with Shulamith Firestone and Redstockings, so I wrote to both. I heard back from Redstockings, not Shulamith, and since 1984, I have been active in Redstockings.

On May Day in 1986, Redstockings organized a Memorial for Simone de Beauvoir and I felt deeply honored when asked by Kathie Sarachild to read Shulamith's Firestone's tribute she had sent to the Memorial. It was several sentences in Shulamith's beautiful handwriting saying that Simone de Beauvoir had fired her youthful ambitions at age 16 and my heart was pounding as I read it, because Shulamith had fired my youthful ambitions at age 16, too!

In the early 1990s, Kathie Sarachild introduced me to Shulamith Firestone, and I remember immediately feeling Shulamith's intensity of observation and perception of details unnoticed by others. All this despite her physical vulnerability that overwhelmed me, which I soon learned from her, resulted from side effects of her medication and a recent hospitalization. She needed an apartment to stay in while friends of mine could help paint and put up book shelves in her very small 5th floor walk up studio apartment which was now all her space because she had just lost another small walk-up apartment in the neighborhood that she had kept as a studio.

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While staying with me, she paced and paced the floors, telling me how hard her life had been for so long, because of NO MONEY. As time passed, she began to tell me about her years in the beginning of the women's liberation movement, including the lack of financial support for the key leadership work she had done--the writing and editing for the groups she had founded and led, and the thinking up of a structure for New York Radical Feminists (Stanton Anthony Brigade). She gave concrete examples of rip off of the radical feminist graphics book she planned after *The Dialectic of Sex*, of opportunism and Establishment cooptation starting early on in the 1970s. Throughout all the years I spent with her, she encouraged me to stay in Redstockings, even though she was no longer active. We had theoretical disagreements about specific points in *The Dialectic of Sex* (sex roles and

population explosion), but these did not lead to a break in our friendship and our main agreement that the oppression of women was based on reproductive labor and the critical importance of knowledgeably building on our radical feminist predecessors of the first wave, Simone de Beauvoir, and the second wave of feminism she had been so instrumental in birthing (founding).

When Shulamith said she wanted to write *Airless Spaces*, we embarked on getting her a word processor so it could be done. I learned then and there how hard writing was in general, but in particular for her, when she felt she had a chemical lobotomy from the medications she was taking, and creative juices no longer flowed as they had in her 20s, for both writing and her painting. She persevered against all this and got it done.

I moved away from NYC in 2000 and did not see Shulamith again. I called her in 2006 when Ellen Willis died. It was the hardest phone call I ever had to make because Ellen and Shulamith had co founded Redstockings. She asked me if I had a child, and I said no, with her approval. I remembered that she had long before said she knew at age 16 that she would never have a child so she could commit all of herself to her art work. She encouraged me to look up Ellen Willis's daughter Nona, and convey to her Ellen's immense contribution to radical feminism. Just recently, this past March 2012, I finally met Nona and was able to do what Shulamith wanted.

I will miss all those hours with Shulamith in her apartment, while she learned a word processor, walking together in NYC with her piercing wit about everything around her, the spot-on one liners reacting to movies we had just seen, couples we had just passed in the street. But most of all, I feel an infinite loss of a radical feminist giant.