

Celeste Newbrough, Biographical Notes

Background: An author, lecturer, and independent scholar, Celeste Newbrough was born in New Orleans at *Hotel Dieu*, and currently lives in Berkeley California and Santa Fe New Mexico. She is the daughter of Southern representational painter, Norita Massicott Newbrough, and a descendant of John Ballou Newbrough, author of *Oahspse*.

Celeste's mother, Norita (1910-1971), had a studio in the New Orleans Vieux Care, and was exhibited during the late 1920s and early 1930s. She had five children, Norita, Andrew, Elaine, Celeste, and Diane. She was homemaker until her forties, when she worked as an art printer. She produced art works prodigiously throughout her life.

Celeste's father, Joseph Samuel Newbrough (1908-2003), was a ship journalist in early life, served as a Marine Lieutenant during the Second World War. He subsequently worked as a ship radio/electronics officer for military, commercial, and scientific voyages. He patented a number of inventions related to his work, and retired in his 80s.

Celeste grew up in New Orleans on Ursula Street and Pecan Street. In Baton Rouge, she attended St. Joseph's Academy and Louisiana State University (LSU).

Early Years: As a sophomore at LSU, Celeste participated in the LSU newspaper under the editorial leadership of Rex Reed. She wrote articles opposing Barry Goldwater's candidacy for U.S. President, and supporting the views of writers like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. With Bernie Benstock, and Alton Straughan she co-founded Aesthete, the LSU Poetry club. With Wayne Winterroad and others, she promoted modernist poetry through performative readings.

At the age of 19 and before completing university, she spent two years in the Village in New York City (1960-1961), where she read poetry and wrote and directed a one-act drama, "Walt Whitman, Was He or Wasn't He?" She then returned to attend the University of New Orleans (UNO) and LSU, graduating from LSU in English Literature in 1965. She was married briefly to Ronald Rice. She undertook postgraduate studies in Anthropology at UNO and at Tulane University.

Activism in New Orleans and Baton Rouge: During 1964 and 1965, Celeste worked with an interracial group of friends to integrate public facilities, including restaurants and cafes. In 1966 and 1967, she was a key supporter of Joe Delpit, who became the first African American elected to the Louisiana Legislature. In Baton Rouge, She directed neighborhood centers for the Office of Economic Opportunity and in New Orleans headed OEO planning for the City (1968-72).

In the summer of 1966 while in the Junior League, Celeste organized and chaired a precedent-setting interracial panel, "The Long Hot Summer," an interracial panel reviewing the Watts Riots of Los Angeles of the previous year, and race relations in Louisiana's cities. The panel was sponsored by the Junior Leagues in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. During the Baton Rouge panel, which was held at the Unitarian Church, a small bomb was thrown into the church. Celeste asked the attendants to disperse outside while the bomb was cleared away. All attendants then returned and completed the discussion.

In 1969, Celeste joined with Attorney Sylvia Roberts in the case of Lorena Weeks vs. Southern Bell. Lorena Weeks sued Southern Bell, which prohibited her from taking a technical job based on Protective legislation. Weeks pointed out that in her secretarial position at Southern Bell, she on occasion moved h typewriter equipment as heavy as or heavier than the 30 lbs. prohibited by protective legislation. Celeste organized a national picketing campaign against ATT&T. The FBI was a visible presence, photographing and documenting demonstrations against Southern Bell. AS National Coordinator of the Lorena Weeks Support Campaign, Celeste worked hard to provide background pressure to Sylvia Roberts's legal battle. The case was eventually ruled in Lorena Weeks favor by the 9th Circuit Federal Court of Appeals. The Supreme



Court refused to hear an appeal by AT&T, resulting in a nationwide precedent striking down protective legislation and enabling U.S. women to work at “hard hat” jobs.

In 1969 and 1970, Celeste worked to organize the feminist movement in New Orleans and the South. In the summer of 1969, she taught a summer seminar on feminism at Loyola University. Attending the seminar were a diverse group of creative and intellectual leaders in the region, including Sheila Jurnak, Roxanne Dunbar, Jo LeCoeur, Karen van Beyer, and others.

Out of the Loyola seminar emerged the New Orleans Chapter of the National Organization of Women. Celeste served as Founding President. Celeste also worked with Mary Capps, Sandra Karp, Meredith McElroy and others to found the Women’s Center. After the building closed, Celeste served as main contact person for several years.

Celeste was Chairperson of the Southern Regional Conference of Women held in New Orleans in 1971. Her mother, Norita, who worked alongside Celeste as a feminist organizer, attended the conference several weeks before her death in November of 1971. The poet, Evi Seidman, read at the memorial service of Norita. Anne Gallmeyer, Celeste’s partner, arranged a memorial exhibit of Norita’s work at the New Orleans Public Library in the spring of 1992.

An Activist Writer: In New Orleans in 1972-1974, Celeste co-edited with (Suzanne Pharr) the feminist journal, *DISTAFF*. In 1972, Celeste began reading and publishing her poetry. Her first book, *Baptism of the Stone*, was released by Womancraft Press (1973). She also edited an issue *Woman to Woman Magazine* (1974).

Along with other women like Susan Los Calzo, Celeste organized the New Orleans International Women’s Festival, a large gathering outside of the City featuring booths and performances around art, music, health and other feminist focuses and activities.

In 1973 a fire broke out in a French Quarter gay bar, The Upstairs Lounge, killing thirty-two people. A fire bomb had been thrown into the stairway. Celeste, along with Suzanne Fosberg and Bill Rushton, editor of the *Vieux Carre Courier*, Troy Perry, and others, spoke out in outrage over the massacre. Celeste and Bill Rushton appealed before the New Orleans City Council for a resolution on non-discrimination against homosexuals. In speaking before the City Council, Celeste stated she was a lesbian, marking the first such public coming out (covered by WDSU-TV news).

In 1973 when Celeste worked with the New Orleans Rape Crisis Center, she engaged in a very public debate with the Chief of Police of the City regarding incendiary remarks endorsed by the Chief about the interaction of race and rape. She pointed out that most rapes are intra-racial.

In 1974, Celeste read her poetry before the National Conference of N.O.W. in Philadelphia. During that year her poems and essays were published widely in feminist journals from Santa Cruz (*Matrix*) to Philadelphia (*HER*). While in residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where edited a film by Helen Barron, entitled *Sagaris*, which documented the in-house first feminist college held in the summer of 1974 at Goddard College, later to become the Sagaris Institute.

New England: Celeste moved to Norwich, Vermont. Along with Claudia Lamperti, Beth Dingham and Nina Swaim of the New Victoria Press, as well as with Julie Haines and other independent feminists of the Upper Valley around Dartmouth University, Celeste became part of the core of a feminist activism and creativity in the Upper Valley.

In 1976, Dorothy Beck, the poet Laureate of New Hampshire, honored Celeste by including her in an anthology entitled, *EXIT 76*, celebrating 200 years of best American poetry. She was also made part of the first New England Women’s Anthology of Art and Writing, of which Muriel Cole served as managing editor.

San Francisco: In late 1976, Celeste moved to San Francisco. She read frequently in coffee houses along with poet friend, Lynn Lonidier.

She became active combating homophobia as part of the Coalition for Human Rights, for which she chaired the first meeting in 1977, attended by well over a thousand activists. In 1978, working alongside Harvey Milk, Sally Gearhart, Priscilla Alexander, Cleve Jones, Barbara Cameron, Paula Lichtenberg, Anne Kronenberg, and Gilbert Baker, and many other great activists of the time, she led efforts to oppose the Briggs Initiative and to mobilize the gay liberation movement. She served as Coordinator and Co-Chair of the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day March of 1978. In 1979, she delivered the invocation to the parade and celebration. The Bay Area Women’s Caucus organized immediately after the

assassination of Harvey Milk. As members, Celeste and other women, including those cited above and also including of Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Donna Hitchens, Pat Parker, and others, made a successful effort to transform San Francisco City politics by infusing women's leadership.

Celeste met Iona L. Pixar in 1977, and the two have been life partners from that time to the present.

In 1979, Celeste learned of the cooption of the Iranian revolution by the Mullahs, who ordered all women to wear chadors. Along with Roma Guy and others, Celeste organized a demonstration down Market Street entitled "No More Masks, No More Veils." She and Ms. Guy entered the Iranian Consulate and debated the subject with representatives of the Mullahs who had taken over the consulate.

During this period the Swedish author, Britta Solving featured Celeste in her book, *Ärtagandet* (Stockholm), which documented her experiences of the North American women's liberation movement during her travels to the continent in 1972-1974. Stövling also met with Celeste in San Francisco and translated her more recent work in *Swarm of Bees* (Stockholm).

Berkeley: In 1982, Celeste published *Pagan Psalms* (Onecraft). Over the next several years, the book was internationally reviewed and translated. In publishing a Swedish translation, Britta Stövling remarked about the author that, "In her need to say what has never before been said, the poet constructs a new symbolic world." Celeste worked to promote independent authors as part of the East Bay Chapter of the National Writers Union.

In 1982, Celeste joined with Andrea Wachter and others at San Francisco N.O.W. in performing several actions directing public focus on the moribund state of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The group performed chained itself to the gate of the Pacific Stock Exchange, preventing its opening for an hour. They performed another nonviolent action at the Oakland Mormon Temple protesting the church's funding of opposition to the ERA. On the 4th of July of that year, the group formed a funeral procession with chains and flags, to mourn the death of the ERA.

In 1984 and 1985, Celeste produced several radio programs on woman-oriented topics including adoption (*Cry Not, My Baby, Cry*, still available for the Pacifica Radio Network); reproductive rights, and women's spirituality.

Working at the University of California at Berkeley, Celeste studied environmental philosophy under Carolyn Merchant. In 1990, Celeste co-organized with Professor Merchant a demonstration at the University of California Campus against Exxon, regarding the oil spill in Alaska. She participated in an ecofeminist study group and was featured in a forum at Berkeley on Ecofeminist Writers.

During this time, Celeste formed Academic Indexing Service, and began producing scholarly indexes. In this capacity, over twenty-plus years, she has contributed to well over a hundred scholarly works.

After the cloning of a mammal (the sheep, Dolly) in 1996, Celeste wrote an essay entitled, "Bah, Bah, Black Sheep" discussing reproductive technologies and the reproductive rights of women. The essay was featured on CNN and was used widely by high-schools and colleges in teaching bioethics. She subsequently wrote the article on cloning for the Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge (2000).

In 1997, Celeste undertook an independent review of her activism and scholarship at San Francisco State University, and was awarded an MA in Women's Studies, based on eminence. She taught History of the Second Wave of Feminism at the Harvey Milk Institute and at City College of San Francisco (CCSF). She founded the International Archives of the Second Wave, and the Pacific Forum.

Recent Life and Work: Celeste and Ilona spent two years in Steilacoom, Washington in 1999 and 2000. In 2000, Celeste published the first edition of *The ZanScripts*, a novel. Celeste is currently working on a second edition. Celeste also wrote a number of short stories, that she is currently putting together into a book.

Returning to Berkeley, Celeste undertook to self-publish a biography of her mother, entitled, *The Norita Book*, containing reproductions of the artist's work. She also collaborated with Stephanie Boris in producing a manuscript (as yet unpublished), or Norita's correspondence. Celeste joined with Joan Annsfire and other women writers in a working group.

Again at work on the Berkeley campus, Celeste studied evolutionary psychology with Professor Frank Sulloway. Under his mentorship, she began a non-fiction work on evolutionary feminism. Portions of the work, which is still in progress, have been published on-line.

In the past year (2010), Celeste published a retrospective of her poetry entitled, *The Archetype Strikes Back*. The 128 page book includes illustrations photographs by Celeste with a brilliant graphic design by Santa Fe artist Maureen Burdock, winner of the Judy Chicago Award for best young woman artist.

Celeste now lives in Santa Fe and in Berkeley, California. She continues to work on producing her writing and art. To learn more about her art, see her Writing Credits.