

The Family Tree: A Lynching in Georgia, A Legacy of Secrets, and My Search for the Truth

Newsletter #3

August 7, 2016

Dear Friends:

I am not happy that this turns out to be “a perfect time” for my book to be out, as many have told me, but I am happy that it is being recognized as a vehicle for discussion of racial inequality and its historical roots.

In recent weeks, I have discussed *The Family Tree: A Lynching in Georgia* at a new bookstore on Capitol Hill, DC, (an overflow crowd of 60!) and at an all-day Writing Workshop in Minneapolis. I am also co-facilitating a monthly Race Dialogue in a neighborhood near mine, which is undergoing gentrification and experiencing racial unrest. My co-facilitator, Lynda Davis, is trained in the STAR/Coming to the Table circle process. We meet at an African American Baptist church and have more than 40 participants. The director of Capitol Hill Village attended by East City Bookshop discussion at which several representatives of local racial justice groups made their pitches. She wrote a report for the CHV newsletter asking

members if they'd be interested in such a group themselves. I am also participating in a SURJ DC (Showing up for Racial Justice) study group. If you have them in your area, check them out. They are excellent.

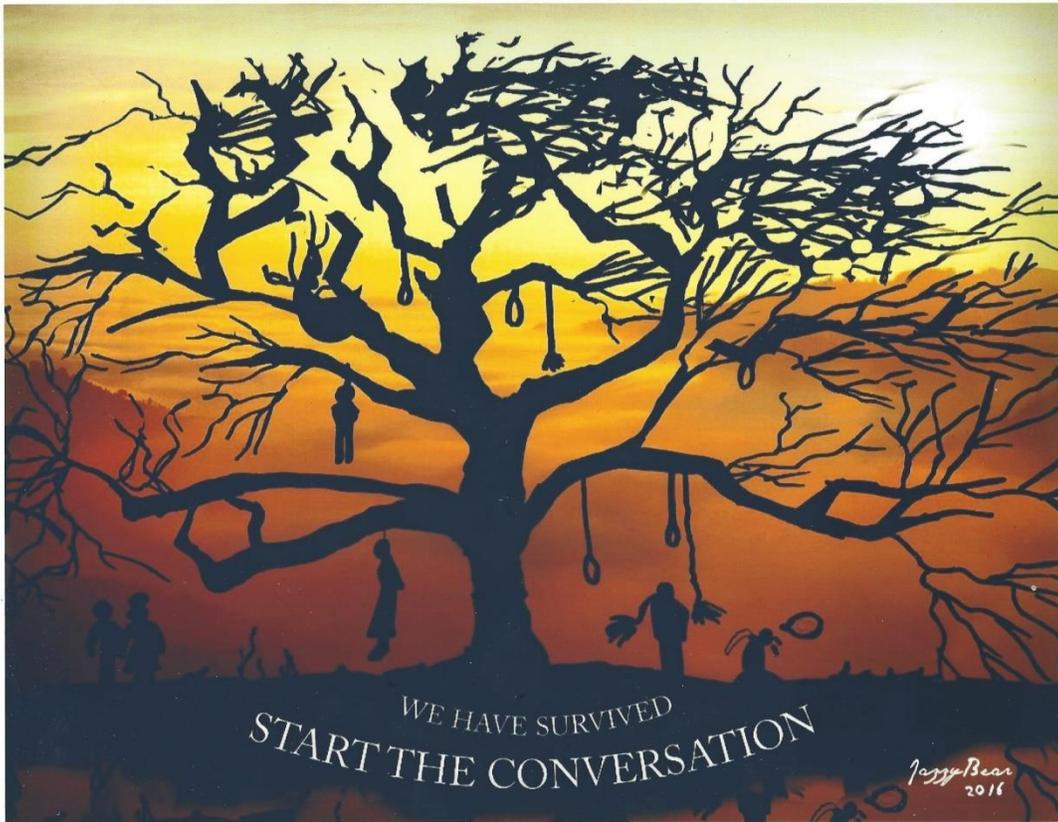
In late August I'll travel back to Georgia for readings and discussions at libraries in Columbus, Manchester, and Lagrange. (See karenbranan/events). On Sept. 3 I'll share a panel at the Decatur Book Festival (the country's largest) with Ross Howell, Jr., author of *Forsaken*, a novel based on the 1912 execution of a 16 year old black girl named Virginia Christian. I am reading it now and it's excellent.

Two of the Georgia libraries I'll visit later this month are interested in setting up on-going bi-racial study groups to explore racial history and its effects on the present. The Lagrange Library's wonderful Kathryn Adams has made my presentation an official part of the American Library Association's Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services' nationwide community-building series to observe the 185th anniversary of Nat Turner's Rebellion, as well as the UN's International Day of Remembrance of The Slave Trade and its Abolition. Another wonderful Ga. Librarian Richelle Brown, whom I met at the Coming to the Table national gathering in July, has invited me to speak at the Athens (Ga.) Library. I'll do that in January when I'll also share a panel with Steve Oney (*And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank*) and Laura Wexler (*Fire in A Canebrake: The Last*

Mass Lynching in America). This will be sponsored by my alma mater, the U. of Ga. School of Journalism and their new MFA Program in Narrative Media Writing, directed by Valerie Boyd.

On Sept. 27, at 6:30, I'll join Edward Ball, author of *Slaves in the Family* at the Brooklyn Historical Society. We'll be interviewed by Rachel Swarns of *The New York Times*.

On another note, I was recently overwhelmed to receive in the mail a stunning and heart-stopping painting by my friend and "cousin" Jasmine Dawson. Jasmine is descended from Isaac Williams, who was enslaved by my ancestors. She just graduated with an art major from Georgia State University and when her grandmother, my dear friend Deborah Dawson, asked her to commemorate the 1912 lynching with a piece of art, this is what she wrought. You can find it on my website at karenbranan.com/photos. There, if you'd like a copy or like to converse with Jasmine, you can find her contact information.



We have also started the Conversation but we have far to go. Thank you, Jasmine, for your contribution. I know how painful it was for you to produce this.

While on my website, please go to Blog and see my latest. It concerns history colliding with the present in the form of six members of the family of Henry "Peg" Gilbert, lynched in the Hamilton jail by the police chief and his men, in 1947. The blog describes my unexpected June 4 meeting with six of Mr. Gilbert's family members. I later learned that his case has been under investigation by the Civil

Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern U. in Boston. They found numerous infringements of the law and procedure, but are unable to bring any charges, criminal or civil, because it occurred so long ago. Still it is important to history and the family to have this compilation of the facts, such as they can be known, as well as the report's beautiful tribute to the fine man Henry "Peg" Gilbert was. I, on the other hand, discovered yet another relative involved in this tragic case. My great uncle Ramsey Williams was a police officer at the time and had some dealings in the matter, though few were specified in the Justice Dept./FBI documents the CRRJP used in their report. It will be available soon on their website. I will alert you when it appears. In addition, I am having conversations with Mr. Gilbert's niece and other relatives, and plan to write a magazine article about this soon. Sadly, word just arrived of the unexpected death of Gilbert's youngest daughter, Mattie Gilbert Moss. She was a young teenager when her father, her mother, and she and her three sisters were forced through their tragic ordeal, one which affected the survivors for a lifetime.

When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love.

Martin Luther King, Jr.