

Newsletter 4

January 2017

"I just finished your book and can't describe the conflicting emotions when I realized my connection to two of the lynching victims. Would like to share my family history with you."

And, thus began a most educational and heart-warming relationship between me and a beautiful woman who turns out to be a DNA-connected cousin. More of this story will emerge in the coming year.

I write this on the first anniversary of *The Family Tree*. Over the past year, I have given more than 50 talks at bookshops, colleges, churches, historical societies, homes, libraries, book festivals, race and writers' workshops, as well as dozens of newspaper and magazine, radio and tv interviews.

Since my last newsletter, there have been many exciting developments. In early autumn I wrote about an unexpected meeting with descendants of Henry "Peg" Gilbert, victim of a 1947 lynching I discussed in the book. Since then, an in-depth report of an investigation by xx has been released (available at <http://nuweb9.neu.edu/civilrights/georgia/henry-gilbert/>) at a Congressional Black Caucus hearing in the U.S. Capital.

On the morning I met the Gilbert/Davenport family, I also met Police Chief Lou Dekmar and NAACP President Ernest Ward at a race workshop at Lagrange College. After a painfully honest discussion among many of the small city's movers and shakers, Dekmar introduced himself and told me he was thinking about apologizing for a 1940 lynching in which police failed to protect a young black man from a white mob. Soon after that he and Ward began talks about that and on Jan. 26 the mayor and the police chief will hold a public meeting in the black church whose minister wrote to Thurgood Marshall about the lynching soon after it happened. This will be only the second time that local public officials will have apologized for a lynching, the first time a police chief has done so. Some months ago the president of the International Association of Police Chiefs made a lynching apology. This year Lou Dekmar replaces him as president. He tells me he plans to make this kind of historical education on race a part of his work there and wants to continue his talks with me as he frames his messages to elicit understanding rather than rancor.

I will be back in Lagrange on the 26th to attend this historic event, just 20 miles from the place my law enforcement ancestors did their damage and where, today, no indications of official apology are in evidence. While there I'll do a TV interview and this week will be interviewed for the local paper. Monday I travel to my alma mater, the U. of Ga., for a panel, and a talk the next day at the Athens public library. After that, the Tubman Museum in Macon.

The paperback version of *Family Tree* comes out Feb. 28.

I don't need to tell anyone there's been a seismic change in the country since last January and while there was a hunger to talk race before the election, that hunger has grown and is being fed by increasing numbers of authors, activists, politicians, spiritual leaders. I hope to continue to be among them. I have seen an increase in awareness and activism among so many of you out there and am deeply strengthened by that.

This year on the road has brought me many new cousins, black and white. From Maryland to Brooklyn to Lagrange to Columbus, Ga., to Chattanooga, and elsewhere, both black and white men and women have stood up in audiences or come to me afterward or emailed me to say I am your cousin, I am related to people your people enslaved, I am a daughter of the moonshine mafia in your book, and so on. Some of these kinfolk will be coming to DC to march on the 21st, some I will be seeing for the first time. I cannot wait.

WEBSITE. Have you seen my conversation with Ed Ball (*Slaves in the Family*) and Rachel Swarns (*American Tapestry: The Story of the Black White and Multiracial Ancestors of Michelle Obama*) on YouTube (also on my website, under News)? How about my TV interview on a local Va. Cable show called "Inside Scoop?" Also YouTube and my website karenbranan.com). It's said to be quite good, though I must admit I can't watch my televised self; scared I'm going to say something stupid!

Wondering how you can help? Right now I'm putting together a new book tour to places I've not been (which includes most of the U.S.). If you have ideas or connections, let me know. I'd like some paying gigs along the way. Also, I could use some good reviews on Goodreads, whose reviewers aren't as generous as Amazon's (though I wouldn't mind more on Amazon either). Just a suggestion.

In closing I send deep gratitude to all of you for your ongoing support. Special thanks to those who've put me up for the night, cooked for me, transported me, organized and publicized my events, played good jazz at my readings, taken pictures, spread the word, given hugs....and begun to delve into your own family history. I was so afraid to do this research, even more frightened to publicize it...what was that all about? It's given me new life, new family, new hope grounded in truth.

Love and best wishes to all in the coming year. I hope to see you somewhere. Karen

Opened at carter, cameras snapping, they belonged to deborah dawson and curtis green whose great great greats slaved in the cotton fields of my ancestors. What a difference xx years make but as we'd all realize with a start by the end of the year, not enough difference to keep some of those white descendants from demanding a return to the old days.

A quick scan...from kate&rob's party to Carter Presidential (DDD, Curtis..photo here to the preacher's voice message to memorial service to ernie douglas's head on the

Lunch with lou, meeting other descendants of moonshine mafia, dinner with gale terry, rising in every audience, a new cousin, or 'linked descendant,' lynda tredway's quilts..kendrick's poems, harry's jazz..kaia's 'song'...contributions to this cause: beds, food, rides, organizing..a big gratitude letter...jasmine's painting..

keyboard..to Yasmeen & felicity..sro crowd at new neighborhood bookshop east city...

Round-up: the count// 46 presentations

Bookstores: riverby, near howard, B&P, east city, ch, durham, b&n, tattered cover, M&Q, potters house

Libraries: Decatur(2), lagrange (2), columbus, Manchester, Denver, carter, hamilton
Church-mpls (2), st. paul, dc (2), uu,
College..gmu

Festival-3

House-peri, olds, Winthrop, book club

Café -2

Other –writers workshop, second Tuesday, cttt workshop, asja(2), dc author festival,
Brooklyn historical society, writers center, mccullers, jung, wisewomen, apple farm

Writers I've shared with on panels: ross Howell, jr., ed ball

Other activities: research how-to, publicity how-to

Articles—observer, csm, wp, Columbus ledger (2), ajc, college2, cathy Roberts,
ancestry, mpls., chv, hill rag,

TV-Ron, Catherine read, Columbus, Maggie linton

Radio, Daily Drum, 2 twin cities, cow, lopate, headlee, knu

Alerts on website: bhs video, Catherine read,

Support work: bittersweet, cttt, surj, liberty Baptist....flood of emails (dna, writing,
connect...see 'readers respond.'....people: Harold and Claudia, fran and brad, china,

Meeting Elizabeth bishop..

Meeting victims' descendants: Sheila moss, evon lucear, Valerie west...

A blooming of interest, information, books on lynching, hark back to mid 90s...books out
this year, the memorial (when announced?)...dug up dirt.

Coming up: Georgia, wisconsin

How you can help...add to goodreads 'books white people need to read' or other
listsvffH

Next -- Academics:

Missing some important points: the role of miscegeny in lynchings (and other acts of
racial oppression)...how even a little bit of 'me' makes it 'all about me.'

