Editorial

No one ever said that paradigms make noise as they shift. In fact, they seem to change quietly, almost imperceptibly, unless one is keeping more careful watch than most of us have time for. But change they do with little things being different, like another woman headed for the Supreme Court, an Episcopal woman elected full (not suffragan) bishop, a tiny (if long overdue) lifting of the ban on lesbian/gay people in the military, light at the end of the tunnel on clergy sexual abuse.

No one ever said that change comes quickly, either. When the Berlin Wall fell, some acted as if it had just suddenly toppled, but had they been paying attention it would have been obvious how many decades of struggle had dismantled it brick for brick. The fall was dramatic, but the dismantling was a tedious process. We at WATER are learning this, ten years into our efforts, with most walls still up for women but mortar being chipped away at a steady pace. Our chisels get a workout every day.

Summer is usually a time when we step back and assess, look forward and plan. But with interns and many colleagues available to work and needing resources, our summer season begins to feel like late fall with air conditioning. We monitor denominational meetings, provide input at conferences and workshops, teach classes and write.

What is amazing is how much interest there is in, indeed how many people there are who share our commitment to, developing, providing and using quality materials for inclusive, justice-oriented religion. Keep the lemonade cold. We need it. And take a well deserved break for a spell. We need that, too, to gain and keep perspective as the changes continue.
diversity and not the divine was to be worshipped and adored. To the contrary. For example, panelists from each of the strands speaking on spirituality gave gentle answers to hard questions about how we use the resources which come from a particular tradition in another setting, e.g. how Native American women's spirituality can be used and not abused by other women. How do we pass on to our children our faith traditions as the content and dynamics of our involvement are changing? Far from divinizing diversity, women-church is about diversifying divinity. That, after all, is the most fundamental shift in power possible, a shift which is a constituent part of social change. But it is a shift that is taking place too slowly for the tastes of many women-church people, and meetings like the one held in Albuquerque speed it along.

More needs to be said about these and other tough topics, but Albuquerque provided a chance to start some conversations. More important perhaps, it was a chance to meet and be with other people who are asking similar questions, people who do not shirk from controversy or conflict, but continue together to push the horizons of hope. This is part of what it means to be religious, to be people who pay attention to meaning and value, and to do so in coalition.

Worship experiences, both in the whole using Native American bowls, and in subgroups with varied content from passing the pipe to passing the peace, from whirling dance to silent meditation, were occasions for women-church in the U.S. to feel its collective way toward comfort with spiritual diversity. This is not a cheap or easy task. One person's appreciation of silence can and will inevitably clash with another's need for chanting, but there is wisdom in the mix and freedom in the options which are all part of the weaving process. It remains to be discussed and clarified what differentiates "women-church" from "women spirit," this gathering from other feminist conclaves.

Likewise, we need to talk about what various forms of worship mean to us, how they define and energize our faith and what we do when we do not find them meaningful. But those are more intricate weavings than were possible this time through with a new loom which was, like a green stick, flexible if fragile, promising but not yet seasoned. We who are women-church were that loom, still new to our insistence on being many ways in the world but not yet sure what it is we want to do together. Rather than criticizing ourselves for what we are not yet, I suggest we give thanks for the fact that we have and are a loom, and get on with using it to full advantage for social change and spiritual renewal.

Clarity did emerge from lectures, focus groups, caucuses and workshops where women exchanged information and experiences on education, health, theology, politics and economics. Exhibits reflected the organizations, change movements and art forms that provide a framework for the movement between conferences. What was obvious is that women-church continues to be a movement committed to global justice and the empowerment of those who have been left aside. That spirit of women-church permeated the many special interest events, like the Women's Ordination Conference awards banquet and the informal meeting of international friends. Both, and many other confabs like them, were occasions to see the breadth and depth of where religious women are who claim ourselves church on women's terms. They were occasions for greeting old friends, meeting people whose work we have known from afar, and generally recharging the batteries which keep the low-tech loom moving.

A mark of maturity in the movement was the frank way in which disagreement was articulated at Albuquerque. In the closing session, which left some women confused about what they had experienced and which, in my opinion, could have been better conceptualized in the overall program for deeper learning, women spoke of racism, ableism, class and ethnic differences, the invisibility of lesbians and other problems which were manifest at the conference since, they are part of our common life. Most instructive was not so much the legitimate and important critiques, though they were real and taken seriously by all, but the eloquent response of theologian Dr. Jamie Phelps on behalf of the program committee which itself sought to reflect the racial-ethnic diversity of the movement. After hearing the critiques, her response, "We have heard your critique and we are grateful," set a tone and an agenda for the movement and for future conferences.

There is plenty more work to do, but the women-church movement is exciting because it is attempting to replicate the art form called life on a loom it is just learning to use, indeed on a loom it has built itself. I can only imagine how beautiful the tapestry will be several generations from now. Meanwhile, the learning continues, the threads tighten and the design looks more appealing than I ever thought possible. Weave on, Women-Church, weave on.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., co-director of WATER, is a feminist liberation theologian and ethicist.
Who Came Out of the WATER?

by Helena Johansson

Dedicated to the WATER staff, whom I promised to write a book. This is the one!

Chapter 1

The art piece

A piece of art hanging from one of the walls in the office has been puzzling my mind since I stepped into WATER. It says “WHO CAME OUT OF THE WATER?” The text is cut out of black paper against a white and pink background. It was done by Sr. Corita Kent.

Chapter 2

Nancy

I left Sweden in the beginning of February; flew in over Manhattan, totally amazed by the lights that covered seemingly all of this part of the world; took ground in Baltimore and was picked up by Nancy. Since I was busy pinching myself to see if this was real, I was almost numb during the ride to Silver Spring. Obviously worried about the lack of conversation, Nancy told me over and over again that everything was going to be fine, that I would have a wonderful time and never would want to go back to Sweden again. How could you know all this, Nancy? Later I learned that the office “could not turn” without this wonderful woman, nor would the staff have learned this expression without her.

Chapter 3

Transitory human experience

Ash Wednesday I had my first experience of a WATER feminist liturgy. Asked to share something about what we wanted to pay attention to at this point in our lives, one of the women uttered a sentence which added the next piece to the puzzle in my mind: “transitory human experience.” Could you repeat that, please? Thank you, Diann Neu, for your way of creating liturgies that let the sacred happen!

Chapter 4

Tears in our eyes

(Title of chapter stolen from Mary E. Hunt, WATERwheel, Fall 1991)

During my first weeks “the jury was still out” (I was told). Mine came in with salt water in her eyes, convinced about the good work going on, and the concern and generosity that met me. Thank you, Mary E. Hunt, for sharing your experience and knowledge, and for your struggles to make my thesis a reality!

Chapter 5

The Montgomery college swimming pool

(Where I learned to swim like a fish and survive in the WATER.)

Chapter 6

The feminist baptism

The double symbolism of water, death and life, is constantly breaking down the walls at WATER. (Trying to stand upright in this flood for four months, I am now a bit exhausted!) Outstanding Swedish poet Karin Boye says, “The faith that is to come is not a new faith, it is only what is alive liberated from the dead.” (Free translation by me.)

Chapter 7

Berkeley Springs

Berkeley Springs seemed like the perfect place to rest for a (re)tired WATER intern. Could I have been more wrong? The time had come to give birth to my offspring of WATER. In the beautiful mountains of West Virginia (thank you, K and K!) the springs rose from the depths, the water broke and out came ... ?

Chapter 8

So, who came out of the water?

Back to the art piece on the WATER wall. In the background, written like seen in a mirror, I finally was able to read “LIFE.”

Chapter 9

Love and thanks to you all in the WATER!

Thank you, Diann, Mary, Nancy, Carol, Marilyn, and all who make WATER possible. Keep swimming!

Helena returned to Sweden in July.

Note: If you are interested in doing an internship at WATER write: Internship, WATER, 8035 13th Street, Silver Spring MD 20910.

Comings and Goings

Tisa Anders, seminary intern for fall 1992 was recently ordained in the Disciples of Christ denomination.

Kelly Cregan, a teacher in a Catholic high school in Cleveland OH, is interning for the summer with keen interest in feminist theology.

The Rev. Dr. Albert French has been helping out in the WATER office, dispensing her wisdom generously.

Mary E. Hunt, WATER co-director, spent the spring on the college circuit: St. Mary's College of Maryland, Smith College, Penn State, Hollins College, Catholic University of America, lecturing on a range of theo-ethical issues.

Helena Johansson, Swedish theological student and now longest-lasting WATER intern on record, returns to Stockholm and Uppsala to complete training for ordination. Her English is peppered with office slang, her thesis on women-church is nearing completion, and the Swedish scene will never be the same. Skol, Helena.

Diann L. Neu, WATER co-director, adds a social work internship at the Silver Spring Mental Health Center to her tasks. Diann's Masters in Social Work will add depth to WATER's counseling and social service outreach, readying us for groups and more individual therapy.

Margaret Sequeira joins the WATER volunteer brigade as the designer of the newsletter. She commands PageMaker with ease and adds readability to our prose. Welcome and thanks.

Naqueeta Wortham is the latest in a series of Life Experiences Activities Program (LEAP) clients who do-on-the-job training at WATER. LEAP people play an important part in WATER's administrative life, and so it is with 'Keeta.

WATERwheel Summer 1993 3
From Developing Girl to Changing Woman:

by Diann L. Neu

Background

Transformation can be so ordinary that its very familiarity renders it invisible. This is often true of menstruation. Girl children experience first menses. Women know the full meaning of this passage to womanhood. Every girl who so wishes needs to have a celebration of this special time in her life.

This ritual invites women to share with the next generations the treasures of womanhood. Use it as a guide to create the celebration that you and the women in your life need. You may wish to create a ceremony for one or for several girls who are passing into womanhood at approximately the same time.

Prepared the Ritual

Buy a tambourine, red ribbons, a decorative egg, a ring and herbs that will be given as gifts. Place a red candle, a green one and a purple one in the center of a circle of chairs. Put a basket of red fruits and pitchers of red drinks along with them.

The Ritual

Welcoming the Participants

Welcome to this celebration for (name of girl passing into womanhood). We gather today to welcome you, (name), to womanhood. You are a symbol of the passage to womanhood that each of us here and women of every culture experience. We gather today to honor monarch. We gather today to reclaim our sacred power as women.

Our flow of blood represents our life-giving powers. As changing women, we celebrate the transmission of our fertility, our creativity, our spirit and our intuition. As changing women, we dedicate the fertility of our life force to the next generations.

Naming the Circle

Let us begin by naming our circle here. Think of what the time of first menstruation means to you, what it did mean to you or what it will mean to you. (Pause).

Let us create our circle by speaking our names, sharing a word or phrase that comes to mind when thinking of menses, and giving a hand to the person on the right saying, “I am a woman” or “I will be a woman.” (Sharing). (i.e. I am Diann. I reclaim women’s sacred powers.)

Blessing

(The woman who started the naming completes the circle by raising the joined hands and saying.)

We are women together and our life-giving circle is sacred. May we be blessed beneath the wings of Shechina. May the Holy Source of Life wrap us in the mantle of Her love and protection. May (name of girl passing to womanhood) be blessed with the power of women’s energy. May we each be blessed with the power of (name of girl passing to womanhood).

Amen. Blessed be. Let it be so. (The names begins a swaying movement joining hands as the singing starts. When the song ends, everyone lets go of hands.)

Song

“Womanriver Flowing On” by Carol Etzler

copyright 1977 Sisters Unlimited

Womanriver flowing on,
Womanriver flowing on and on (2x)
Womanriver flowing on.

Womanriver, how you comfort me,
Flowing on through every century
Flowing on to what is yet to be,
Womanriver flowing on.

Lighting the Candles

We light three candles today to capture our experience as women. The red one is for those who are fertile, those who bleed each month. (The young woman honored in the celebration lights the red candle.)

The purple is for the wise women who have passed beyond the biological capacity to give birth and have channeled their energies through their whole bodies: mind, spirit and body. (A menopausal woman lights the purple candle.)

The green is for the young girls who will soon pass into womanhood. (A young girl lights the green candle.)

Reading

Today as we celebrate menses let’s listen to this reading, “Marvelous Menstruation Moments,” by Ntozake Shange from Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo:

(As Told by Indigo to Her Dolls as She Made Each and Every One of Them a Personal Menstruation Pad of Velvet)

When you first realize your blood has come, smile; an honest smile, for you are about to have an intense union with your magic. This is a private time, a special time, for thinking and dreaming. Change your bedsheet to the ones that are your favorite. Sleep with a laurel leaf under your head. Take baths in wild yarrow, white water lilies. Listen for the voices of your visions; they are nearby. Let annoying people, draining worries, fall away as your body lets what she doesn’t need go from her. Remember that you are a river; your banks are red honey where the Moon wanders.

Sharing

We women are rivers of life. Today we celebrate that life as it is flowing on to another generation. Mother(s), what do you want to pass on to your daughter(s)? (Pause.)

Let this tambourine represent our voice and let these ribbons represent our blessings for (the girl). As we pass the tambourine around the circle, hold it, attach a ribbon, and share what you want to pass on to (the girl) who embodies the next generation of women. (Sharing begins with the biological mother.)

Song

“Womanriver Flowing On” by Carol Etzler

Womanriver flowing on,
Womanriver flowing on and on (2x)
Womanriver flowing on.

Womanriver, flowing free
I feel you moving in the heart of me
Womanriver flowing on.

Giftgiving

(name of young woman), we have gifts for you to remind you of this special day. (The biological mother gives her daughter a ring saying: ) you traveled the road from nursing in my arms as a baby to maturing into a young woman. I bless you for these and all
A Celebration of Menses

the seasons of your life. Take this ring as a symbol of the passage well done.

(Another friend gives her the tambourine, saying:) ______, this tambourine represents our vision of womanhood. Treasure it and add to it your own words. Keep your body sacred. Don't use it as a plaything. Preserve your reproductive power for the time when you are fully prepared to take responsibility for another life. We bless you for becoming the woman you will be.

(Another friend gives her herbs, saying:) ______, don't be angry with your body for sometimes not letting go of blood. Take these herbs for soothing cramps and calming irritations. I bless you for caring for your body.

(Other gifts are shared.)

Blessing of Selves
Filled with the fullness of Spirit-Wisdom we take time to bless ourselves and one another. To embody our prayer we use an ancient tradition, the laying on of hands.

Touch your eyes and echo these words:
Bless my eyes that I may notice the beauty of women.

Touch your ears, saying:
Bless my ears that I may hear women's voices of wisdom.

Touch your heart, saying:
Bless my heart that I may be open to loving.

Touch your mouth, saying:
Bless my mouth that I may speak my truth.

Touch your body over your womb, or where your womb used to be, saying:
Bless my womb that I may give birth to my creativity.

Touch your feet, saying:
Bless my feet that I may walk the path of justice.

Touch your hands, saying:
Bless my hands that I may touch myself and others tenderly.

Touch and embrace the women around you and bless them with your own words. (Embracing.)

Song
"Blessing Song" by Marsie Silvestro

Bless you my sister, Bless you on your way
You have roads to roam,
Before you're home
And winds to speak your name.
So go gently my sister,
Let courage be your song
You have words to say, In your own way
And stars to light your night.
And if ever you grow weary
And your heart song has no refrain
Just remember we'll be waiting to raise you up again
And we'll bless you our sister,
Bless you in our way
And we'll welcome home all the life you've known
And softly speak your name.

Sharing of Fruit, Wine and Drinks
Red is the color of women's life source. Red is the color of women's passion. Red is the color of women's creativity. We eat and drink of food that is red to remind us of women's life-giving energy. (Women hold up the food and drink.)

Blessed are you, Life-giving Holy Source, for ripening fruit on the vine and for weaving women's energy into a generational tapestry. Bless us as we eat and drink, remembering our life cycles. (Sharing the food and drink.)

Sending Forth
We have welcomed our sister and daughter, _____ (name), into womanhood. We have remembered our journeys to womanhood. We have praised women's powers. Let us open our circle now in song, remembering that we will be there for one another.

Song
"Let the Women Be There" by Marsie Silvestro from Crossing the Line, Moonsong Productions.

If ever I give birth to another person
Or create a work with my mouth,
my eyes, my hands

Let the women be there (2x)
Let the women be there by my side.

If ever I should cry from the pain of injustice
Let the tears I cry run down like a river
and set us free. (refrain)

And when I am walking,
Spirit's breath last journey,
Let the wisdom I carry be the vision
I'm passing on. (refrain)

Diann L. Neu, M.Div., STM, is a feminist liturgist and therapist who co-directs WATER.
Begone, Religious Violence

The big religion story this year is violence, not just denominations speaking out against it, but churches and synagogues dealing with their own cases. This is not a new problem for the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, WA (1914 N. 34th Street, Suite 104 98103; phone 206 634-1903) founded fifteen years ago and directed still by the Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, widely recognized as the country's expert on these matters.

"Called to Make Justice" was the Center's landmark conference this spring in Chicago, a bi-national, interreligious effort which brought together activists and analysts to craft solutions to pernicious problems. WATER staff member Mary E. Hunt spoke on a panel about theological deficiencies which encourage violence, institutional duplicity and analytic disinformation (read: lies and cover ups) which have kept the plagues of gender sexual abuse, priest pedophilia, and more under wraps. Intern Helena Johansson took findings back to Sweden.

Women are most often affected by sexual and domestic violence, but what this conference proved is that women, and especially religious feminists, are in the forefront of eradicating the problems. Many participants and speakers were ordained rabbis, ministers, church bureaucrats, active lay leaders in their respective traditions. It became obvious during the conference that the empowerment of women as religious agents, ordained or not, was the single most important factor for bringing these matters to light. Catholics were in scarce supply at the meeting, with the institutional Roman Catholic Church conspicuous by its absence among sponsoring denominations. It has been suggested that it is time to ordain Catholic women for the children's sake.

A new generation of religious leaders, including Emilie M. Townes, Carol Adams, Julie Spitzer, Rita Nakashima Brock and Marie Fortune herself, among many others, has made the epidemic of religious violence their concern. Backlash is to be expected, and it is virulent among those who claim such efforts are veiled anti-sex moves. But a close reading of the materials reveals how sadly off the mark this is, as life and sex-affirming people in Chicago sought only justice. Men's efforts to break the cycle of violence and replace male privilege with human caring lent further credence to the notion that anti-violence work is an ecumenical religious imperative.

In Memory of Her

from WATER, Silver Spring, MD:
Margaret Crow, a creative, brilliant, if sometimes crazy woman who pushed the churches beyond where they wanted to go, though she never got there herself. Rest in well deserved peace.

from Trish Kaspar, San Jose, CA:
Sara Elizabeth Carlson, in honor of this young woman's graduation from Davidson College, Davidson, NC, a contribution for WATER's continued refreshment of women's lives throughout the world.

from Gail Demaria, Fairlawn, NJ:
Rita Moffett, a woman of energy, wisdom, integrity, risk and great vision, who opened doors for many others to enter. Rita, committed to truth in the church and a love of the mystery of God in our lives, we say... god speed.

And in Memory of Mothers

from George and Lila Anastas, Roseville, CA:
Our mothers, too - Leila Hurliman Larnmore and Kinna Popadoplou Anastas - exhibited indomitable spirit and perseverance and set a hallmark for being a "mother". Best of luck to WATER and the Mothers Fund.

Plus this welcome note from Judy Ross, Santiago, Chile:
Just finished reading your latest (spring) WATERwheel... I was so impressed with the newsletter, your journeys (esp. to Australia to visit Peg and Monica), the "Flo and Jo" fund (wonderfulllll) -- feel very very connected...we are trying to do what you are doing there at WATER.

Cancer in Two Voices

by Mary E. Hunt

I hated this book, Cancer in Two Voices by Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters Book Company, 1991). Actually, I hated that it had to be written. I hated that these two women lived such pain. I hated the medical world that made a major mistake which could have been avoided. I hated the cancer that took Barbara's life even though I never knew her. I hated the whole process of dying which was catalogued with such care. I recommend this book that I hated.

The authors find ways to love, deepen and support one another despite the illness. They are like me and so many of my friends, busy with the career demands of middle age, flying here and there and enjoying the good life that our education makes possible, oblivious, until we are confronted, to those dimensions of our mortality which we would just as soon ignore.

Breast cancer affects one of nine women. Women who do not have children before the age of thirty are said to be at higher risk, lesbian women and nuns right up there as the epidemic among my friends seems to bear out. But every case does not turn into the death out of time and an elderly mother forced to witness the demise of her first born in this case. Such sins should not be committed by nature, but they are, nature untamed by even the most sophisticated medicine money can buy.

What struck me most in this story was ritual, the couple's move to have a commitment service a year before one dies, the dying woman's return to the rabbinical faith of her childhood, planning her memorial to coincide with what her aged, observant parents would want. I kept coping with this incongruity: will I, too, return to the "faith of my father" when push comes to shove? Will I, too, seek the public commitment I have avoided to these many years, a gesture of solidarity, a desperate effort to keep some of what has been a very public life private? Perhaps, but for equally good reason...

The book demands engagement like few I have read. Maybe it is simply coping with the news of another friend being nursed by her partner for which my tears streamed. Maybe it is instead really a great book, hidden on the book shelf with the other cancer manuals, most readers unaware of how normal it is for two women to love and lose just like everybody else.

Critical analysis eludes me; it is hard to type through tears. Thanks, Barbara. Thanks, Sandra.

Editor's note: Victoria Rue, doctoral candidate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA has adapted this book for the stage in a version she calls "CancerBodies." It is a brilliant performance, well suited for theological and ethical discussion.
Resources


There are now several options for inclusive language and imagery. This is a good one, putting to rest the excuse "But what do you say instead?"


Religion must have been a dominant gene in the Niebuhr family as this portrait of the sister of the famous Reinhold and H. Richard shows. She was a notable professor of religious education in her own right, leaving little "mystery" about the sexism that has kept her from our attention all these years.


Just the ticket to learn the history of the contemporary movement that has extended "family values" beyond "Leave it to Beaver."


A clear feminist treatment of central issues in psychology and religion by a writer whose important insights are well worth pursuing.


"Fierce critical interrogation..." is the author's goal, one which she achieves with style and broad-based cultural knowledge.


The clear voice of a complicated thinker makes this introduction a welcome volume to those wading through French feminism.


Some of the best of the new feminist psychological writing. Issues like anger and dependency get another definition from women's experiences.


The four women portrayed here are agents of their own religiosity, no easy job in a patriarchal church. A good look at them provides a glimpse into the other 99,000 U.S. nuns who are changing as they help change the Catholic Church.


5700 quotes by more than 1300 women on topics as diverse as laughter and superiority, meetings and magic, make a treasure trove.


A good man's start at the hard work of transforming body-hating Christianity into body-affirming faith.


So many women experience losses in pregnancy--stillbirth, miscarriage, etc.--all of which cause grief and require solace. This is a first-rate, up-front, learned approach.


These prayers can be used by themselves or as models for writing one's own, all part of an effort at inclusivity and empowerment of women as religious agents.


A good measuring stick for UU's to see how far they have come; a helpful collection for other denominations to imitate.


The range of women's spiritual experiences and the commonality of struggle to find meaning and wrest insight from a patriarchal world make this an insightful, if uneven, volume.

For the Children


These lovely little books are generally inclusive and delightful.

En Espanol


Essays by María Filar Aquino, Margarita Pintos, Mercedes Navarro, etc. make a valuable resource.

Other Gems on Tape

Bolen, Jean Shinoda. WISE WOMEN ARCHE-TYPES: MENOPAUSE AS INITIATION. Boulder, CO 80302: Sounds True Recordings, (735 Walnut St.) 1991 (60 minutes, $9.95).

A wonderful presentation on menopause, palatable even to those who usually gag on the Jungian pamphlet.


Percussion and vocal pieces which can be used for meditation, group work and general listening. A wide range of material handled with skill.


Starhawk at her best--full of stories, insights, commitment and verve.
New from WATERworks Press

Women-Church Sourcebook
by Diann L. Neu and Mary E. Hunt

This first, compact, invaluable compilation of resources to help in the definition and development of the women-church movement provides a concise exposition of the movement to date plus "how to" suggestions for organizing local groups. Included are sample liturgies, planning schedule, and other handy tools for those of us fashioning new structures for meaningful religious expression. In addition, this soft-cover book contains a preliminary directory of women-church groups in the U.S and abroad, as compiled from responses to WATER's pioneering survey.

58 pages, $12.50.

To Order

Please send ______ copies of Women-Church Sourcebook at $12.50 each = $____ + $2.50 postage /handling = $____ Total enclosed. Please make checks payable to WATER, 8035 13th Street, Silver Spring MD 20910.

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