

# Williamson CLUSTER PAPER

Faith & Values

## Talking Walls speak of racial understanding

By Art Toalston

The Talking Walls speak with the voices of a young black pastor and father of four, the Rev. Chris Williamson, and a white grandmother of 12, Kim Napier.

This time line of nearly 100 paintings depicts pre-slavery life in Africa through the civil rights movement and its current remnants.

Williamson conceived the idea, and Napier, who briefly was an art major in college, joined in nurturing the Talking Walls to existence at the Natchez Community Center near downtown Franklin.

The paintings also form the basis of a DVD and booklet titled "Hard-Pressed Coal," produced by Williamson, Napier and other members of Strong Tower Bible Church, which meets at the Factory in Franklin.

The Talking Walls and "Hard-Pressed Coal" do not sidestep the "Why?" questions about slavery and segregation.

History records "the depth of man's depravity as well as the sovereign power of God," Williamson said in an e-mail. "Within all of us is the potential of greatness and the capacity for catastrophe. God ultimately works everything out for our good and His glory. Even though He was often lied on, God never endorsed African slavery. ... Because Jesus suffered unjustly at the hands of others, we know that this powerful reality will bless and encourage people who have always wondered if God can identify with them in their pain. Jesus not only identifies with our hurts and struggles, but through His resurrection we can experience life, hope and peace," Williamson said.

*(For an expanded version of Williamson's comments and of this story, go to [www.ClusterPaper.com](http://www.ClusterPaper.com) on the Internet.)*

For Napier, the Talking Walls became an experience of "sorrow, conviction," of "information I never had."

When, for example, four schoolgirls were killed in the 1963 bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham, Napier acknowledges, "I didn't pay any attention to it. ... When atrocities would happen



Williamson



ART TOALSTON

Kim Napier & her painting of "the door of no return" through which enslaved Africans in Ghana boarded ships for America.

or when little girls or teenagers would integrate [the public schools], I never thought about what their day was like, I never thought about how difficult that was for them or their families, or the danger of it. ... If you'd asked me if I was racially prejudiced, I would have denied that. But I was totally dead to other people."

Napier was hesitant at first to undertake the project "because I didn't know how to paint people. ... I was taking art lessons, but I was drawing eggs and cups and dishes."

But each time she painted one of Williamson's concepts, "I would step back ... and I'd think, 'God, I don't know how to do that, and you just made it come off the brush and onto the wall.' I don't mean they're masterpieces in here, because it's flawed work by a flawed painter, but I saw that he [God] was turning out better work than I knew how to do."

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*For a tour of the Talking Walls, contact Iris Gordon at [irisgordon@aol.com](mailto:irisgordon@aol.com). For information about ordering the "Hard-Pressed Coal" DVD and booklet, e-mail [info@stbch.org](mailto:info@stbch.org).*

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