

sinister wisdom 50

the ethics issue . . .



. . . NOT!



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(Back) Julia Youngblood, *Kenya Women's Conference 1985*: Kenyan women waiting to participate in opening celebration of 1985 Women's Conference.

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

Contents

- 3 Sauda Burch and Caryatis Cardea • *Notes for a Magazine*
- 11 Upcoming Issues
- 13 Sally Bellerose • *Dancing Sisters* (fiction)
- 18 tova • *community circles* (poems)
- 28 Susan Stinson • *Tell* (novel excerpt)
- 29 Melissa Farley • *Ten Lies about Sodomasochism* (essay)*
- 38 Lucy A. Tatman • *Untitled* (poem)
- 41 Anonymous • *In Our Hands: a memory of assisted dying* (narrative)*
- 45 Joan Cofrancesco • *Blocked Writer* (poem)
- 46 Elana Dykewomon • *The Words for It* (novel excerpt)
- 56 Kirsten Backstrom • *Call* (fiction)
- 60 Neta C. Crawford • *Thoughts of the Wise Men* (poem)
- 62 Pamela Gray • *3 out of 4 (or more): a lament for 3 out of 4 (or more) voices* (poem)
- 66 Elliott • *Lesbian Legal Theory: a review of Ruthann Robson's Lesbian Outlaw* (review)*
- 73 Julie Blackwomon • *Late Anger in A Cathedral* (poem and narrative)*
- 76 Naja Sorella • *Paying Up!* (narrative)*
- 81 K. Ellen Kerr • *Mirror, Mirror* (fiction)
- 86 Jamie Lee Evans • *"I'm no Poet"* (poem)

Sinister Wisdom is a multi-cultural, multi-class, womon-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. *Sinister Wisdom* recognizes the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our communities and our world.

AM
SEN

8/9/93

- 89 Monifa Ajanaku • *Dissillusioned, Dismayed — Ready for Revolution: Without Ethics Community Cannot Exist* (narrative)*
 96 Aspen • *Muscle Fetish* (poem)
 98 Aspen • *Loving Song* (poem)
 99 Deb Hipp • *Loneliness Smokes Too Many Cigarettes* (fiction)
 101 Zoe Rhine • *Beyond the Sway* (fiction)
 105 Jen Benka • *Tracing* (poem)
 108 Emily Ballou • *Corn Moon Sister* (poem)
 110 Contributors' Notes
 114 Books Received
 117 Announcements and Classified Ads
 128 Notes on Scents

SSS

ART

- cover Ka Yin Fong • *Transformation* (mixed media)
 back Julia Youngblood • *Kenya Women's Conference 1985*
 cover (photograph)
 12 Dawn Rudd • *Untitled* (cut paper)
 20 Carole Graham • *Untitled*
 40 China Marks • *Barefoot! (1990)* (mixed media)
 59 Kathryn Kirk • *Alison, Brooklyn, NY 1989* (silver print)
 61 Peni Hall • *Untitled* (pen and ink)
 85 Peni Hall • *Untitled* (pen and ink)
 95 Dawn Rudd • *Once Upon A Time* (cut paper)
 97 Peni Hall • *Crip Companions* (pen and ink)

*See Notes for a Magazine, p.3, for explanation of asterisks.

Notes from the Editors

Sauda Burch and Caryatis Cardea

In February 1992, we had discussed guest-editing an issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. Some time in the future... on some topic to be decided later... a loose discussion. Then we learned Elan would be away during Spring 1993, and someone else would have to edit that issue of the journal. We decided that might as well be the one we did, and chose Ethics from the list of future topics.

To select the material, we wanted a guest group of editorial readers, high on ideas of what constitutes ethical behavior, low on the class and race privilege most commonly found among lesbian editors. It would be a group not predominantly white, not predominantly class-privileged. A year later, we had Kit Quan, Mady Shumofsky, Monifa Ajanaku, Jamie Lee Evans and ourselves to review material for the journal on ethics. It was a new kind of group for *Sinister Wisdom*, having a majority of lesbians of color, and a majority of lower-class lesbians, on an issue not exclusively related to race or class.

This is the Ethics Issue...Not! So little material was submitted on ethics, we were forced to cancel the theme. At deadlines, when we customarily have 75-125 authors submitting 1-3 pieces, we had received submissions from exactly 24 lesbians: not an auspicious beginning. We convened the group and read the material. We decided on fewer than half-a-dozen pieces as being truly applicable to the theme. We advertised, sent out questionnaires, begged by mail and telephone all over the country. We received two more pieces. We discussed book reviews, interviews, collections of quotes from various lesbians in various communities. We received one more piece. Finally, with the greatest reluctance, we acknowledged defeat. There would be no Ethics Issue as #50 of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Each part of this was a separate disappointment. There was the work we would miss doing together, the journal we had hoped to make. And, there was our feeling that the 50th issue of

SW should be a landmark, signifying the social, intellectual and artistic range of lesbian community. Why hadn't folks written? What we had wanted was simple. We wanted lesbians to tell us the ethical foundations on which they build their lives, and we would tell them ours. But, we asked our questions, such as:

What are our ethics? What does an ethical lesbian look/act like? How do we treat each other? What is our responsibility to our communities? How do our communities handle abuse? How do we impose justice? How does racial, ethnic or class identity affect your ethical outlook?

and got very few replies. We used the pieces we had selected (indicated by an asterisk in the Table of Contents), and completed the issue with other available material, including many excellent stories and poems. We're grateful to Elana and SW for allowing us to raid the reserve material. Each of us, Caryatis and Sauda, have written some thoughts on the significance of our failed Ethics issue and of SW #50.

Notes for a Magazine

Sauda Burch

My coeditor, Caryatis, and I joked about the cover for this issue. Why not call *Sinister Wisdom* #50, "Lesbian Ethics...NOT"? Although "NOT" is a bit passe, it's descriptive. It tells you that you aren't holding the Ethics Issue, but something else. It tells you what our intent was and what it ended up being. You are holding the pieces chosen for the Ethics Issue and a good deal of everything else—an Open Issue. And, though we are disappointed that this is not the ethics issue, the work that specifically addresses ethics is inspiring and inventive, creating a solid foundation for further work. This issue is a strong showing of "lesbian art and imagination."

I think many lesbians were waiting for the Ethics Issue to write itself, or for it to be written by "those other lesbians," the philosophers and academicians among us. Imploring my friends (some of whom I consider philosophers) to write was a monumental task. They wanted to know what we meant by "ethics," and what we meant by "community." What we wanted were writings on what they meant by ethics, and how they defined community. It became clear throughout the process that ethics wasn't the priority at our potlucks, social gatherings or political rallies. We continue to struggle to articulate our responsibilities to our lesbian "community." As editing of this issue drew to a close, I got the distinct impression that talking about ethics was thought of as dull, passionless and judgmental.

I admit that I too was initiallywhelmed by the task. I felt vulnerable. Thinking about ethics found me examining myself, uncovering my most unethical self, the behaviors that I have been least proud of. It wasn't enough that I could point my finger at some other dyke — how was I contributing to an ethical or unethical lesbian community?

I can easily recall when I have been unethical — being silent in the company of oppression, talking about other dykes behind

their backs, the way I have left relationships... I want to erase these episodes, and finally and dramatically wrench free of the patriarchal baggage that separates me from my essential self. Yet, if I refuse to pinpoint where I have benefitted from unethical behavior, where I "buy-in," I also refuse the lessons that may help me make ethical choices in the future.

Two months ago I suggested a free writing exercise to my writing group. For ten minutes we wrote on what an ethical lesbian looked like. I looked down at two pages of scribbles. I found my "ethical lesbian" nestled comfortably on another planet.

I had placed my ethics outside myself — so distant that they were unreachable. In doing so, I shifted responsibility. If I can't define and articulate my own ethical standards, or if I am unaware of my "bottom line," someone will set those standards for me. Placing my ethics outside myself also distances me from and helps keep me distrustful of my self — from the instinct which alerts me when I am moving away from my ethics.

In my writing, the ethical lesbian was free of concepts of separation, violence, limitation or misogyny. I thought that in order for a lesbian to be ethical she had to be untouched by fear or violence. Did I really believe that because of our victimization we cannot make ethical choices? Or that victimization itself makes one unethical?

Yet, back on planet earth, I am consistently making ethical choices. I struggle to work with other lesbians instead of against them; I maintain confidences, I own the ways I am oppressive — I am doing the work. Ethical and unethical attitudes and actions are different sides of the same coin. It is the balancing, the moving towards continual ethical decisions that is my goal.

I have begun to approach the question of ethics the way I have approached my work around dismantling oppression. First, I remain open to the fact that I can be unethical, that I live in a society that devalues. Indeed, the values that were handed down to me weren't all useful or harmless — indeed many were destructive. The land that many of us consider home was stolen from Native peoples; I am here because my people were stolen and sold from the shores of Africa. These and other atrocities are

the legacy which we have inherited. Second, I must define and be able to articulate what my ethics are. I must ally myself with lesbians who share my ethical outlook. Third, I must identify where I benefit from unethical behavior and choices. Fourth, I must believe that being ethical is possible, with work and increased consciousness. I must notice when I and other lesbians make ethical choices, and I must understand the benefit to the lesbian community in our doing so. Fifth, I must choose to act ethically and to continue to choose to act ethically. I must act on my articulated beliefs. Finally, I must continue this work until there is no more work to do.

Maybe next year we'll try this again. Perhaps some of the pieces in this issue will inspire enough of us to think about ethics. Maybe then you will want to write, to create art, to have your voice heard, to visualize lesbian utopia. We can hope.

Notes for a Magazine

Caryatis Cardea

Each time we act from privilege, we act without ethics. This was my starting point in preparation for this issue. Most lesbians I've asked have agreed that an ethical lesbian is one who is, at least, honest and just. But lesbians exercise privilege, which is dishonest, and inflict oppression, which is unjust. Our communities, our relationships, our lives, as lesbians, are, therefore, lacking in ethics. I wanted to talk about that.

I had hoped that lesbians would write about the ways in which their class background and racial/ethnic identity, their age, dis/ability, cultural experience contribute to their ethical perspective. Value differences are ethical differences.

This is the 50th issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, the journal for the lesbian imagination in the arts and politics. It was to be focused on ethics in the lesbian community. Living, as dykes do, outside the mainstream, we invent our lives as we go along. We ought to have been flooded with material about our trials and errors: the middle-aged dykes who trivialize your experiences because you're 23; the middle-aged dykes who maternalize you because you're 63; the white lesbians who stage all-white conferences but ask you to speak about racism because you're of color; the class-privileged dykes who offer financial help because of your poverty, but withdraw it when their homes need plumbing repairs; the years-long friend who abandons you for your abusive ex-lover; the gentiles who speak against the anti-Semitism you experience, then invite you to their Xmas party; the lover who abandons you for a fling with your best friend; the best friend. These acts are dishonest and unjust. They are unethical. Talking about them is talking about ethics.

In planning this issue, my co-editor, Sauda Burch, and I discussed what ethics means to each of us. One of the things Sauda said was, "treating each other as if we mattered." So far, no one has said it better. If lesbians treated ourselves and each other

as though we mattered, we would be well on our way to an ethical community. Not to mention a revolution.

In the United States, only white men of class privilege matter. Not to us, it's true — but to the dominant culture, that's who is considered important, worth thinking about, worth recording. They are treated by each other, and most other people, with deference, courtesy, respect. They are treated as though they have intelligence, as though they are entitled to good things. As though their health is of concern to everyone. As though their futures are worthy of consideration, because it is in the sum of their individual lives that their culture finds its meaning.

We must believe that, despite all messages to the contrary, lesbians matter. And our belief must be manifested in our behavior. Our health, safety and futures matter. Our relationships with each other matter. Our communities matter. We deserve courtesy, deference and respect, at least from one another. Because it is in the sum of our individual lesbian lives that our lesbian culture will find meaning.

The construction of ethical lesbian community requires a constant, conscious evaluation of ourselves and the culture surrounding us. Each of us must ask in what ways she has contributed to the furtherance — or the demise — of lesbian community. We don't need to agree on every political issue, but our behavior must be consistent with our political beliefs, and we must be accountable for the consequences of our actions. (Personally, I'm particularly tired of hearing I-fell-in-love as the excuse for every reprehensible action taken in our communities. Explain such politics to me: how does falling in love revoke our political accountability to other lesbians? In what way does falling in love rescind the obligation not to cheat, lie, exercise classism, racism and even physical violence? Lesbians need to talk about ethics.)

Every politically conscious lesbian must make certain that her presence is not one of the things that reduces the sense of belonging, the right to belong, of other lesbians with less privilege than hers. My presence, as a white lesbian, cannot be one which makes a lesbian of color feel at home. But I can struggle to make my presence one which does not makes every dyke of color

in my community say, "Damn, not her again. I can't work with her." I can avoid smoke and fragrances that exclude many disabled lesbians, I can refuse to stage events in places with chairs only for thin folks, with stairs and no ramps. I can speak up when I witness anti-Semitism; I can report my own racism to other white lesbians, so that we all learn from each other's mistakes. I can fight my own defensiveness. I can try, damn it. I can struggle and work, and take joy in that work and that struggle.

Lesbians with privilege too easily assert that a community which doesn't tolerate prejudiced remarks (as if we have even that) is an ethical community. But if words, or even beliefs, were enough, the european-descent founding fathers of this misbegotten country would not have owned human beings of African descent. Their words, after all, were consistently on the side of freedom, human rights, human equality, human dignity. But they stole this land, and bought and sold the people to work it, and it is not they who suffered from the contradiction.

An ethical lesbian can't tolerate a community in which dykes live in squalor (housed or on the streets), in isolation from one another, kept from public gathering places by inaccessibility, or by the community's ongoing embrace of dykes who batter other dykes. An ethical lesbian must do something. Not something about everything, but something about something.

Ethics is conscience. Conscience requires the willingness both to remember the past and to anticipate the future. Memory for perspective, and to learn from errors, pass on acquired wisdom; anticipation to judge the consequences of our actions, what our communities will be like, and how we will live with ourselves and with each other if we do or do not take certain actions. These are ethical choices.

Fifty times, lesbians have created *Sinister Wisdom*: this combination of artistry and drudgery, satisfaction and frustration, as much a part of, as a reflection of, our communities. I wish her 50 more, but with ever-deepening analysis of our lives and how to improve them. I never again want the response to a request for an evaluation of our ethics to be a near-empty mailbox. This is our lives we're (not) talking about.

Upcoming Issues

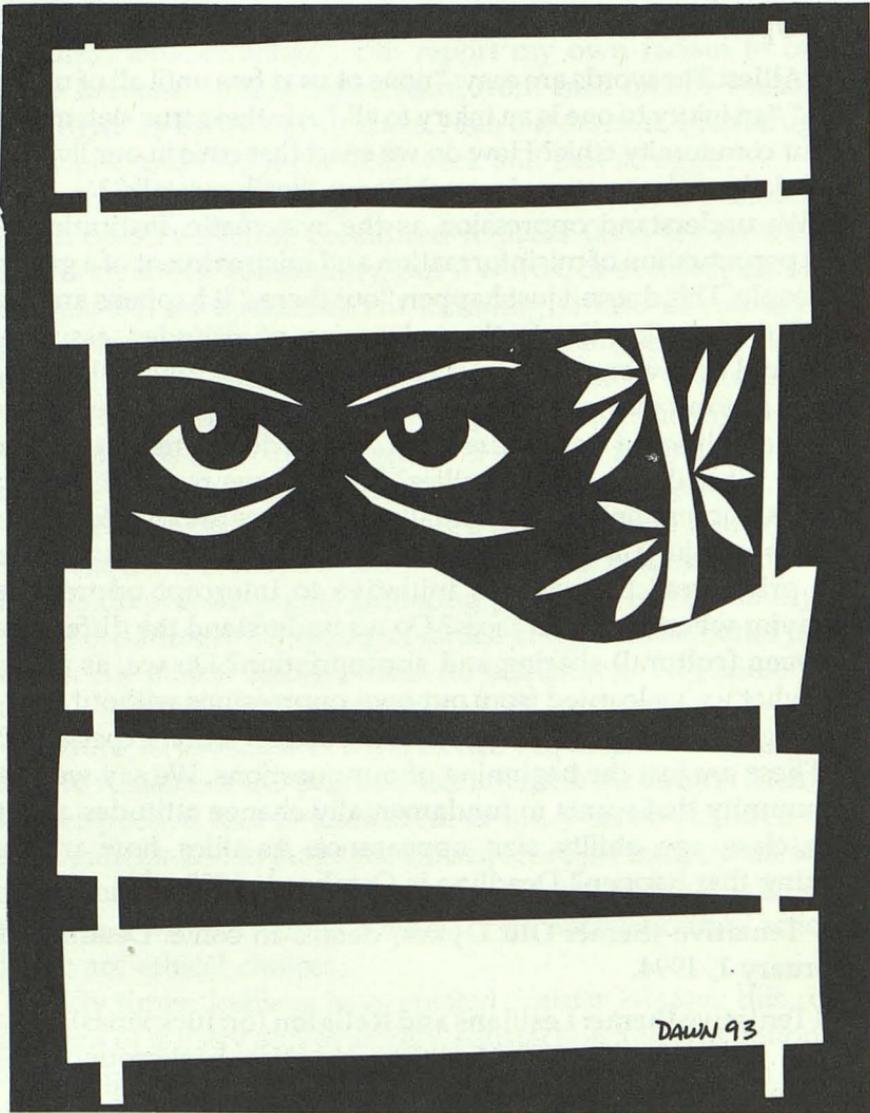
#51 Open Theme: all forms and styles. Out in December 1993.

#52 Allies: The words are easy: "none of us is free until all of us are free," "an injury to one is an injury to all." Are these true statements of our community ethic? How do we enact that ethic in our lives in both daily and exceptional ways? Do we "walk our talk"?

We understand oppression as the systematic, institutionalized perpetuation of misinformation and mistreatment of a group of people. This doesn't just happen "out there," it happens among us. Our liberation lies in the unlearning of attitudes, assumptions and behaviors. How, as a community, as individual dykes, do we live out our commitment to each other, how do we articulate the politics of being true allies? What do we require of our allies? What do we offer as allies? How do we respond to each other's oppression? Do we actually experience another lesbian's pain as an injury to ourselves? How do we acknowledge and use our privileges? Do we take initiative to intercept oppressive behavior when it's in our faces? Do we understand the difference between (cultural) sharing and appropriation? Do we, as allies, use what we've learned from our own oppressions without ranking or generalizing ("I know just how you feel") that experience? — These are just the beginning of our questions. We say we're a community that wants to fundamentally change attitudes about race, class, age, ability, size, appearance. As allies, how are we making that happen? Deadline is October 1, 1993.

#53 Tentative theme: Old Dykes, details to come. Deadline is February 1, 1994.

#54 Tentative theme: Lesbians and Religion (or: fuck xmas), to be edited by lesbians from other than christian backgrounds; all lesbians welcome to contribute. Deadline: June 1, 1994.



untitled

Dawn A. Rudd

Sally Bellerose

Dancing Sisters

I'm depressed. My girlfriend left me. Then I got cancer of the colon, so I had to have my large intestine removed, cut out, the whole thing, gone. I'm a lesbian alone with no large bowel and an ostomy bag hanging off the front of my abdomen. Who's going to love me now?

O.K., so my girlfriend left me four years ago, long before my ostomy, for reasons that have nothing to do with cancer. That doesn't make it any easier. It was hard enough trying to find someone to love me before this damn bag of shit took over my life.

I don't have the kind of family that talks things out, but they're all being nice to me, because I'm depressed. My family never talked to me about having a girlfriend when I had a girlfriend. They never talked to me about her after she left. My family never talked to me about having a colon. Now that I don't have a large intestine, they don't talk to be about the fact that it's gone.

I go to my parents' house for dinner. I'm not quite ready for solid food yet. My mother cooks a special meal for me. No one complains about all the vegetables being mashed or the lasagna being bland. Except my sister Jane. "This is stupid. Why are we all eating mush?" she asks. My brother's wife shushes her. She leans over to me and whispers, "If you were still on intravenous feedings we'd stick needles and tubes in each other's arms and Ma would hook us up to I.V. bags to eat."

After I mope around for a few months, Jane decides that it's time for me to start getting out more often. She says nobody who matters is going to care if I have an ostomy or not. If they do, to hell with them. She says dinner once a week with the parents doesn't count as getting out. My sister Jane is married. She's happy. She thinks that I should be happy too. She thinks that I should work a little harder at it. She thinks that I should avenge myself on the cancer and my ex-large intestines by being happy.

I think she should back off and let me wallow in depression until I'm damned good and ready to be happy.

Jane loves to dance. I used to love to dance too. She harasses me until I agree to go dancing with her. I'm afraid she's going to take me to that place with the phones where she met her first husband. You sit in a booth with a number on it and hope that somebody thinks you're cute and gives you a call. I don't ask where we're going. I just want to get it over with. I'm asleep in a chair in my living room, dressed in my best T-shirt and the only jeans I own that fit over the ostomy bag when she blows the horn for me.

She drives straight to the parking lot of the GirlsClub, the only lesbian bar in town. She jumps out of the car like she's here every Saturday night. "Come on," says happily married heterosexual Jane. "I haven't been here in twenty years."

We were in high school the only other time Jane has been to the GirlsClub. We were on our way home from a basketball game. My father let Jane drive his car. I made the honor roll and she convinced him that I deserved a ride in a '67 Buick. She claimed that the GirlsClub was the bar where all the dykes hung out. The place was taboo, so Jane wanted to be there. I told her she was full of shit, how would she know where dykes hang out? I should have known better than to challenge her. She drove into the parking lot with her ponytail swinging like she owned the place, same as tonight, except that now the pony tail is gone. That night we got carded and thrown out at the door, but we got an eyeful. It made a bigger impression on me than it did on Jane.

It's after ten and the place is filling up. Women are joking around, checking each other out, making noise. Jane grabs the only table left and makes herself comfortable. She cranes her neck to get a good look around the room. She pays no attention to me. I'm happy to be left alone. Finally she gets her fill and asks me what I'm drinking. "Bud" I say. I shouldn't be drinking beer. Yeast. It's going to bubble up and make noise when it empties into my ostomy bag.

She walks up to the bar. I take a good look at her. She's wearing tight acid wash jeans and a french-cut tee shirt. I'm used to taking good looks at her. She's my sister. I've spent all my life

helping her decide which jeans make her ass look good and which color blouse shows off her blue eyes best. Usually when I look at her it's like looking at myself in the mirror. You get so used to yourself that you never really know what you look like. You never really get the big picture. Now I'm looking at her saddled up to the bar of the GirlsClub. What I see wakes me up. Sister Jane is pretty good to look at. It never really hit me before.

I must be seeing what other people see when they first look at her. She's a sexy, plump, ripe looking white woman. All curve in tight clothes, but that isn't what gets my attention. What amazes me is that you can see her personality in the way she moves, the way she carries herself. I always knew she had guts, but I never knew you could actually tell by looking at her. I'm sure of it. You can see who she is by the way she moves around the bar. It's all over her. She's a hot shit and she knows it. I'm sure that the other women in the bar see what I see. I keep watching her. She's older, she's smaller and she's got on tighter clothes, but she looks a lot like me. She looks the way I used to feel.

"Quit staring." She plunks down two Buds.

"You look pretty good," I say.

"Pick out a nice woman who's not your sister, stare at her, and tell her how good she looks."

"Shut up. Since when are you afraid of a compliment?"

"See anybody you like?" Jane asks, loud, turns around in her chair and takes in every woman in the place.

"Jesus. Will you shut up?"

"Why? You're in a bar and you wouldn't mind meeting somebody nice. Big deal."

"No. You're in a bar and you'd like me to meet somebody nice."

"What's the point of going through all the trouble of being q-u-e-e-r if you can't even look at women in a bar? Pitiful."

I decide to sulk. She's being an asshole. What would she know about how much trouble it is to be a lesbian? What does she know about how it feels to have an ostomy? She's never depressed. She's too busy poking her nose in other people's lives to get depressed about her own. She keeps looking around.

Watching women on the dance floor. She doesn't even notice that I'm sulking.

Suddenly I've got all her attention again. "Let's dance" she says.

"Dance?"

"Dance. See all those women shaking around? They're dancing."

"I'm worried about my ostomy." I lie. I'm not particularly worried about my ostomy. I had a light supper and I emptied it before I left. It hasn't come loose, fallen off or leaked in months. I don't want to dance. I don't want to dance with Jane.

"You're afraid to dance in a room full of lesbians," she grins.

"You don't know a damn thing about it." I want to hit her. "I've danced here hundreds of times."

"When?" she says. "When was the last time you danced? Even alone in your apartment. Or at Ma's. We used to dance with the kids at Ma's."

She stands up and takes my hand, dancing with me still seated. "Up" she says. She should be struck dead by the look I'm giving her. I'm depressed enough without dancing with my straight sister in a dyke bar. She knows I'm pissed but she ignores it. She dances around me even though I'm planted in my chair. She won't let go of my hand. It's getting embarrassing. She's making a scene. I get up and move around a little on the dance floor. They're playing some whiny new age music with no beat. I'm making plans to kill her as soon as this dance is over.

Then a miracle happens. Without so much as a fraction of a second between songs Aretha Franklin comes booming over the speakers. Aretha, R.E.S.P.E.C.T, Franklin. No two white girls have ever danced to Aretha Franklin as well, as often or as devoutly as my sister Jane and I. We danced to Aretha at both of Jane's weddings. Jane brought Aretha and head phones to the hospital after my operation. I can move to R.E.S.P.E.C.T. I wonder if my ostomy bag can move to R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

Jane squeals, "R.E.S.P.E.C.T find out what it means to me," and pulls me to the middle of the floor. She dances and shakes her sisterly ass at me. I try to stay pissed off but my ass shakes

back. It takes no effort at all. I can do it without a girlfriend. I can do it without a colon. I can do it depressed or not. Our asses shake back at us from three mirrored walls. We admire ourselves. I gain new respect for the lighting and mirror arrangement at the GirlsClub. I'm sure that women of good taste are admiring us. We display ourselves generously. We know when to shake our shoulders. We know when to grind our hips. She knows how many steps I'll take to the left. I know how many steps she'll take to the right. We meet in the middle, shake our asses some more, then step back the same way we've been doing since 1964.

Jane wipes the sweat off the back of her neck onto the back of my jeans and laughs. I'm sure that someone in the room must be admiring me. If I wasn't depressed I'd wish that it was the cute redheaded woman sitting at the table across the room. I walk up to the bar and order a Bud and an orange juice. I try leaning on the bar with my butt sticking out but the bar cuts into my ostomy bag. I sit on the stool and hear a gurgling noise. My ostomy bag is beginning to fill. My hand slips inside my jeans. I know I'm alright, but I can't help checking. A woman on the stool next to me says, "You O.K.?"

"Adjusting my ostomy bag," I answer.

I can tell that she has no idea what an ostomy is and she isn't asking. She plays with a big silver ring on her baby finger. After a minute she turns to me again. "Wanna dance?" she asks.

"An ostomy bag is an appliance that you wear on your abdomen," I say. No response. "It's kind of a heavy duty plastic bag that catches your waste." She looks at me blankly. "You know, your feces, if your bowel can't do the job." She gives me a weak smile. "I don't have a large intestine," I say. It feels so good to say it out loud that I decide to repeat myself. "My whole large intestine was removed."

"Oh" she says. "You sure can dance. So can your girlfriend."

She's ruining my big moment. I'm coming out to her and she's not taking notice. I don't correct her about the girlfriend. Maybe I will, if she starts paying better attention. But Aretha is churning out "Chain, Chain, Chain. Chain of fools," so I say, "Thanks, I'd love to dance."

tova

community circles

1. doorways

The women of my family
are in a tenement kitchen
my mother
with one hand
eats a pickle sandwich
frays the edges of the t.v. guide
with the other.

my grandmother
leans her face
into her hand
clucks with her teeth
pats her knee
as she tells a story
of her first try
at baking prune strudel.

my sister
listens and laughs
over a face of fear
she's had for forty plus years
put there by abuse
first from the family
then from her husband
and now from her children.

streams of women
of my family float in
as if there was a hora
they needed to dance there is
aunt sophie who speaks incessantly

aunt sadie who pinches everyone's cheeks
aunt ethel endlessly complaining
aunt betty with the deep red lips and mole
aunt bella small and shy and religious
aunt jean doing her needlepoint
and of course the cousins
and by now the nieces
are all there too.

i sit in the frame of the doorway
not in or out of the room
as if wanting safety
from an earthquake
that can bring down the house
if i read
my poems and stories
of the women of my family

i have tried to kidnap their lives
for a ransom of words
i have tried to seize
their laughter
their sewing and their lips
their abusiveness
their immigrant selves
their assimilated selves
their lives and their deaths and
their spirits coming to
dance a hora
in a tenement kitchen.

i sit in the doorway
unable to form a word
in their direction
my silence meets
what they refuse to hear,
and the earthquake erupts
only in my belly

i tell their stories
to the world
but not to them
and from the safety of a doorway
i take notes of their lives
as i watch them
dance their hora
without me.



untitled

Carole Graham

2. unnamed hologram

the essential feature of a hologram is that each piece of the hologram contains the entire structure of the entire hologram; each piece is not just a part of the whole, it has the entire pattern and way of functioning of the whole embedded in it. — ann wilson schaefer

if i could hold it in my hand
 all at once if i knew
 what it was
 maybe i could begin
 to understand
 how to have
 community filled
 with each piece
 of a childhood filled
 with immigrants
 who came on a boat
 looking for distant aunts and uncles
 family blood
 thicker than
 the ocean water
 they came across
 leaving europe behind
 but not a brooklyn neighborhood
 they refilled it
 with jewish everything
 and despite everything
 they stuck together
 with phone calls holidays cousins clubs
 political groups unions bar mitzvahs
 funerals i've attended
 they're mostly dead now
 these immigrant families
 that i left too
 because of abuse
 because I was a lesbian
 because amerika
 changed us all.

if i could hold it in my hand
all at once if i knew
what it was
maybe i could begin
to understand
how to have community
filled with each piece of
lesbian jew working-class
a family not of blood
but still of survival
not one neighborhood
but from one city to the next
like immigrants off the boat
we arrive still searching
for distant relations
didn't you know her
who lived there
in that year
who was lovers with
my ex-lover's lover.

connection, you say
across phone calls political groups
festivals moves parties lovers and ex's
funerals and births and
someplace to stay when you're away
is what we've learned
to ask ourselves
to build homes around.
if we could get our blood
to course through each other
would we be thick enough for each other
or would we move place to place
split in pieces but still
able to contain each other
hold it in our hands all
at once if i knew

what it was
 maybe i could begin
 to understand
 how to have community
 filled with scattered pieces
 of this unnamed
 hologram

3. passages

kabbalah, on the planet of the deontological megacrisis, is the inheritance of circle drawers; of awakened dreamers who will seize the real in the name of the possible and transform the given through the magic of mutuality.

whatever tomorrow is, if it is not all shards in the whirlwind of tohu and bohu (chaos and emptiness), it is the ontology of circles, where soul infuses mind and i says to thou 'i am present within you.' — martin buber

I.

bowl — 1. a hemispherical vessel, wider than deep, for food or fluids. 2. the contents of such a vessel.

the bowl
 is wooden
 i've had it for
 i don't remember
 how many years
 i've carried it
 house to house
 city to coast
 i've eaten rice
 with butter and yeast
 macaroni with ketchup
 ice cream with fruit
 from its circle i

drank herb mixtures
of moon tea rituals
to find new lovers
and hot soup
on cold loverless nites
i dunked it in rivers
poured its water
over my body
a *mikvah** to bring
me spirit i soaked
peas and corn in it
hoping its majik
would bring a good crop.

the bowl
started to crack
on the left side i held on
drinking bowls of soup
carefully filled below the crack,
people would laugh —
 why do you eat
 out of a cracked bowl?
 why do you bring it
 to potlucks on trips
so i wandered alone
through se asia
the bowl wedged
in my pack packed full
i barely even looked
 at it when i got home
the crack had widened
come full circle i tried
for days to use it
the thickest salad dressing
wouldn't stay

*a traditional jewish cleansing and ritualistic bath for wimmin done monthly.

ketchup ran out its sides
 it wouldn't hold anything but
 it wouldn't split in two
 so i let water seep
 out the crack
 over my used hands
 then put it
 on a shelf to see

II.

ring — 1. any circular object, for, or arrangement with a vacant circular center. 2. a small circular band, generally made of precious metal, often set with jewels, and worn on the finger. 3. any circular band used for carrying, holding, or containing something: a napkin ring. 4. a circular movement or course, as in dancing.

"when i'm dead
 you can have it."
 the nurse took it off
 before her fingers got
 too swollen she gave it
 to me she said
 when she was dead.

a simple gold band
 eight years pass
 everyday
 i wear it but there
 i was packing
 to go home and
 it was gone i yelled
 and screamed and cried
 at my lover all through the nite
 unpacked and repacked
 looked under the bed
 on the floor in the car.

i went below the equator
 cut my world in two
 to get to the other side
 of people and spirits and
 i crossed a line
 to a torrid region
 a hot jungle
 standing alone
 moving back and forth
 across the dateline
 days came and went as i
 sweated out memories
 of megacrisis

dreamers transformers majic.

i left a home
 so i could remember
 how to love it
 i passed a line
 so i could remember
 i am part of many circles
 i lost a day
 so i could find a different
 tomorrow
 not all chaos and emptiness
 but a vessel
 to hold and crack but not split
 a vacant ring of spirit
 to put myself through and dance
 across a boundary
 is only a line imagined
 through the ontology
 of circles i come through
 present
 within all of you.

Susan Stinson

Tell

I realized I had to tell Martha.

She'd given this gift to me: sex and an outpouring of words. I wanted Martha to be an adamant vision in the world, with her low-slung belly swaying in the morning of a culture. Martha: the woman standing on the scalloped shell emerging from the sea. Martha's hair is red foam, her fist is tight, her knees are dimpled. She poured water on my feet, and there's no part of me that can forget that.

I changed under the water and under her hands to an outspoken woman. It was inspiration. She brought me to sex and to voice. She gave me a mouthful of wine. I drank, oh, I put my tongue along her tensed lips.

The way I feel when I'm moving the words is so close to what she gives me with her knee between my legs, her fingers spreading me.

Please and thank you.

She's talking.

Rich. Reach me.

Reach inside me.

My uterus has tongues and they are lapping at her knuckles.
My cervix swells a story.

Her own breasts fall, cascades of fat and nipple, over her padded ribs. She is mammoth. She haunts me. My soul is my own, but when I write I find only Martha, the miracle, riding a gold cow. Much moaning and lowing, many small hairs.

There are three forces. One is the body and my movements, need to eat, desire for Martha. Another is the spirit and the leaves and the way it moves in the leaves. Another is the spirit and the words and the way it moves in the words.

It moved me. It woke me. It caught me. It disturbed me. Then I had a moment of absolute presence. Martha.

Melissa Farley

Ten Lies about Sadomasochism

1. *Pain is pleasure; humiliation is enjoyable; bondage is liberation.*
2. *Sadomasochism is love and trust, not domination and annihilation.*
3. *Sadomasochism is not racist and anti-semitic even though we "act" like slaveowners and slaves, Nazis and Jews.*
4. *Sadomasochism is consensual; no one gets hurt if they don't want to get hurt. No one has died from sadomasochistic "scenes."*
5. *Sadomasochism is only about sex. It doesn't extend into the rest of the relationship.*
6. *Sadomasochistic pornography has no relationship to the sadomasochistic society we live in. "If it feels good, go with it." "We create our own sexuality."*
7. *Lesbians "into sadomasochism" are feminists, devoted to women, and a women-only lesbian community. Lesbian pornography is "by women, for women."*
8. *Since lesbians are superior to men, we can "play" with sadomasochism in a liberating way that heterosexuals can not.*
9. *Reenacting abuse heals abuse. Sadomasochism heals emotional wounds from childhood sexual assault.*
10. *Sadomasochism is political dissent. It is progressive and even "transgressive" in that it breaks the rules of the dominant sexual ideology.*

A number of articles in this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* are about ethics, and I see ethics as nuts-and-bolts ideas about how to live life; how you treat other people, even when your back is up against the wall. Although formulated by its current advocates as an issue of sexual liberation, minority rights, or even healing, I consider lesbian sadomasochism to be primarily an issue of feminist ethics. I believe that lesbians who embrace sadomasochism either theoretically or in practice, are supporting the lifeblood of patriarchy. "The symbols, language and style of lesbian sadomasochist chic are the symbols, language and style of male supremacy: violation,

ruthlessness, intimidation, humiliation, force, mockery, consumerism." (De Clarke, in press) Choosing sadomasochism, given our oppression, is an act of profound betrayal. The ideas I'm writing about are not new (please see the references at the end of this article), but hopefully they will be a useful summary which can be used by feminists in the 90's to see that all that sadomasochists claim is just not true.

Lie #1: *Pain is pleasure; humiliation is enjoyable, bondage is liberation.*

This is the big lie. Part of the reason that we are vulnerable to this lie is that many of us were raised with religious notions that punishment is love and that suffering is redemption. A young acquaintance who rowed on a crew team showed me a t-shirt which said: "What does not kill me will make me stronger." As women we are taught that love is selfless devotion regardless of the pain suffered. We believe that love is pain because we keep getting hurt. Women are taught not to believe our senses or intuition. We are taught to believe that pain, suffering, and humiliation are challenges which we should look forward to because they teach us the important things in life. After that, what *can't* they do to us, what *can't* they get us acclimated to? We've learned to "consent" to subordination, even become culturally enthralled by it. If chains and a collar represent rebellion and "being in control," then Madonna is our "rebel" Barbie and Ted Bundy her Ken. (from Morgan, 1993)

Lie #2: *Sadomasochism is love and trust, not domination and annihilation.*

Sadomasochism has to do with annihilation. Contrary to the popular legend that sadomasochism expands one's sexuality, it restricts and ultimately destroys one's sexual being. Subordination, humiliation, and torture are means of deliberately destroying the self. I recently read an article about the way Texas patriarch Koresh entwined "sex, violence, love and fear" in order to control cult members. These techniques are not new; people have long harmed others in the name of love, religion, or politics. Today's lesbian sadomasochism is all dressed up in a new coat: the coat of "lifestyle choice," "oppressed minority," "sexual liberation."

Although the violence turns my stomach, I appreciate Jan Brown's candor which cuts through the liberal rhetoric about the

delights of sadomasochism, and gets to the core of the matter. In an article from *Outlook*, 1990, entitled, "Sex, Lies and Penetration, a Butch Finally 'Fesses Up,'" Brown writes: "Sex that is gentle, passive, egalitarian, does not move us. [Remember when we] emphasized the simple difference between fantasy and reality? Well, we lied. The power is not in the ability to control the violent image. It is in the lust to be overpowered, forced, hurt, used, objectified. We jerk off to the rapist, Hell's Angel, daddy, the Nazi, cop. We dream of someone's blood on our hands, of laughing at cries for mercy. Sometimes, we want to give up to the strangler's hands. We want to have the freedom to ignore 'no' or have our own 'no' ignored."

Lie #3: *Sadomasochism is not racist and antisemitic even though we "act" like slaveowners and slaves, Nazis and Jews.*

My silence about lesbian sadomasochism ended when I saw two anti-Semitic sadomasochists at a women's festival. One woman, who wore a yarmulke, was being walked on a chain around her neck, by a woman in Nazi "leathers." When I protested, the woman in leather politely listened, and agreed to remove her own Nazi insignia, and her captive's yarmulke. I had the impression that she had never even considered the political implications, that is, the anti-Semitism, of the "scene." Identifying as Nazi, in any context, is to identify not only as a sexually dominant sadist, but also as one who hates Jews, one who wants Jews to suffer and to be annihilated. Masquerading as a Jew, by wearing a yarmulke, chained with a leash, is not only to identify as a sexually submissive masochist. It also embraces the humiliation and torture of Jews under Nazi anti-Semitism: the Jew is the one who gets hurt, and here, see how much she likes it.

Some liberal gay newspapers "censor" ads for the KKK, but still publish personal ads for readers looking for Black, or Latino or Asian sexual slaves. Racism seems to be more acceptable to them if it is eroticized. Somehow, if eroticized, the humiliation, sadism and torture of racism and anti-semitism become acceptable. Torture always has a sexual component to it. If a radical feminist were to challenge the same newspaper on the issue of sadomasochism,

she'd be called "censors." The whole issue of censorship is used to intimidate us and silence critical dialogue about sadomasochism.

Lie #4: *Sadomasochism is consensual; no one gets hurt if they don't want to get hurt. No one has died from sadomasochistic "scenes."*

"It is the focus on the bottom's desire that distinguishes sadomasochism from assault." (Califia, 1992) Is it ever OK to consent to one's own humiliation and victimization? I do not think so. Just because we "consent" to domination or abuse, does not mean it is not oppressive. "Has a woman who has run away from sexual assault by her father and ended up turning tricks for a living *consented*? Has a woman who learned sexual lessons from incest *consented* to a sexuality in which she can get no pleasure unless she has no power?" (Cole, 1989) Has a ritual abuse survivor, having been through her own Inquisition in childhood, *consented* when she reenacts sexual torture in adulthood which trigger her memories as an adult?

The ability of words to hurt should not be underestimated. The threat of rape is backed up by words, the weapons which define us as objects and which tell us we deserve whatever we get. Women's self-hate arises as much from verbal assault as from physical assault. Some form of verbal abuse is involved in most sadomasochist scenes. When these vicious words are delivered in the context of sexual arousal, they have a powerful impact. Sexually sadistic words contribute to women's self-hatred.

Sadists pay lip service to consent, but ignore the power systems which create inequality and make meaningful consent impossible. In this culture, we have no experience of equal power relationships. "It is not the acknowledgement of the hold sadomasochism still has over our psyches that conflicts with feminism, what we have a problem with is the unwillingness to reflect on its political meaning." (Fritz, 1983)

Extreme violence sometimes occurs during sadomasochistic "play." I have been informed of many instances where "safe" words were ignored during a sadomasochistic "scene." I also know that women have died during sadomasochistic activities and that these deaths are only whispered about — they are not openly acknowledged.

Lie #5: *Sadomasochism is only about sex. It doesn't extend into the rest of the relationship.*

Sadomasochism has everything to do with sexism, racism and class in the real world. It is very much related to internalized self-hatred. One Samoist member wrote: "To be a good bottom [masochist], to please my mistress, is a very powerful feeling. Those lessons I have learned in my bed, I can take into other aspects of my life and see how that makes me powerful ... to enjoy every moment of what I'm doing." (Linden et al, 1982) I see lesbians embracing the dominant/submissive hierarchy that feminists have spent their lives trying to eliminate in heterosexual relationships. Just the way racism and anti-semitism are eroticized in sadomasochism, so the domination, the sexism itself, is eroticized in sadomasochistic relationships. The sadistic sexual relationship sets the tone for the rest of the relationship. Submitting and giving in during a disagreement, for example, becomes a sexualized act. And real physical violence can and does occur as a natural extension of the inequality of the sexual relationship. Hitting someone is usually a sadistic act. Assault and battery do occur in lesbian relationships — and it is normalized by the patterns laid down sexually.

The dominating, coercive mockery of the sadist is sometimes forced on our communities. In 1988, I posted a notice for a workshop called "The effects of sadistic/violent sexual practices on nonparticipants: a support group; closed to sadomasochist participants and advocates." As a small group of us sat on the ground and talked, six or seven women with whips came and stood, arms folded, behind us. They said nothing; the intent to intimidate was clear. Another example of the pervasive effect of sadomasochism on a community occurred in 1990, when the organizers of a large women's festival wrote about how the sadomasochistic activity of some women infringes on other women's rights "to move freely and safely without fear or horror."

Lie #6: *Sadomasochistic pornography has no relationship to the sadomasochistic society we live in. "If it feels good, go with it." "We create our own sexuality."*

We internalize sadomasochistic fantasies because it is the sexuality which has been shoved down our throats from the day we were born. As women we're raised to be "bottoms:" lesbian "bottoms" tend to outnumber "tops" [sadists] by 10 to 1. "What feels good" is largely constructed by social oppression: racism, sexism, classism. We are not born with an innate sexuality where no elements of it are learned or manipulated. Yet many liberal, pro-pornography advocates deny any relationship between sadomasochism and the violence in the rest of our culture. It is no longer possible to discount the causal effect of pornography on violence against women. Diana Russell has recently published a summary of research about the ways in which pornography has been shown to cause women harm. (Russell, 1993) I believe that her argument can be applied to lesbian pornography in exactly the same way: pornography, whether straight or lesbian, promotes inequality and eroticizes that unequal relationship. Actually, sexuality is utterly conditionable. When we rehearse sadistic abuse in fantasy, pornography, and sexual games, we legitimize its authority in our own minds, and may end up helping other authorities in our lives keep us in bondage in other ways. Sadomasochism is everywhere in this culture — just take a good look at your workplace, your family, your church.

Lie #7: Lesbians "into sadomasochism" are feminists, devoted to women and a women-only lesbian community. Lesbian pornography is "by women and for women."

Pat Califia has said that she'd rather be stuck on a desert island with a masochistic boy than with a vanilla lesbian. Bottoms are seen as "generic, interchangeable, and replaceable." (Califia, 1992) Califia is committed to the role of sadist, not to any particular sexual preference. "Sex defined as a commodity [sadomasochism] leads to a marketplace where the gender of whore and client is irrelevant compared to kind and cost of services provided." (Clarke, in press) While lesbians who are "into sadomasochism" define themselves as lesbians, their sadomasochist practices are bisexual. I have no political criticism of bisexuality — what I am criticizing is sadomasochist posturing as devoted lesbian members of the women's community.

Pseudolesbian pornography, that is, pictures of women who are imitating lesbians' sexual behavior, has been a favored element in straight male pornography since it was first published. It sells. Despite the fact that it is often advertised as being owned and distributed by and for women, "lesbian" pornography sells briskly to straight men.

Lie #8: *Since lesbians are superior to men, we can "play" with sadomasochism in a liberating way that heterosexuals can not.*

I do not think that women are biologically superior to men. In fact, I see that notion as dangerous and reactionary. "Anatomy is destiny" is not exactly a feminist idea. Sadistic and masochistic attitudes and behaviors among lesbians, in fact, are a good example of how we internalize abusive ideas just like everyone else does. We're seduced by domination because we see that that is where power lies. Yet we delude ourselves if we think it is possible to "play" the rapist without becoming the rapist.

Lie #9: *Reenacting abuse heals abuse. Sadomasochism heals emotional wounds from childhood sexual assault.*

This lie really disturbs me. A greater percentage of women "into sadomasochism" have histories of childhood sexual assault, than those women who do not participate in sadomasochism. However, sadomasochism obscures the *real* pain and abuse of women. How can you tell the difference between "real" and "pretend" when someone has a flashback and becomes a child again in the middle of "consensual" sexual torture? Some feel an intense, even compulsive drive toward sexual annihilation that is expressed in sadomasochistic activity which mirrors the abuse suffered as a child.

The notion that acting out abuse helps to heal and eliminate abuse arises from the catharsis theory: do it once, just get it out of your system, then you will get over it. There is no evidence that catharsis works as a solution to social or psychological conflict, yet this theory is used to rationalize the dissemination of pornography. Pornography does not seem to have served as a pressure-cooker-release for men, thus freeing women from rape. On the contrary, pornography seems to have functioned as pro-rape propaganda. Sadomasochistic catharsis does not seem to heal

sexual abuse either: one woman wrote, "after seventeen years of almost continuous [childhood sexual abuse], the lesbians I met just wanted to do more of the same. I have nightmares and damage from both." (Anonymous, 1990) Sadomasochism is a repetition, not a healing, of childhood sexual assault.

Some have suggested that sadomasochism can actually be physiologically addictive. I have heard women describe themselves as being "in recovery from sadomasochism," the same way they speak of alcohol addiction. Perhaps the physical addiction to certain kinds of trauma begins with complex physical reactions to prolonged abuse in childhood which is then re-kindled in adult sadomasochistic relationships.

Lie #10. *Sadomasochism is political dissent. It is progressive and even "transgressive" in that it breaks the rules of the dominant sexual ideology.*

The posturing of sadists and masochists as "transgressive" can be confusing to those not familiar with feminist theory. By definition, the ultimate goal of feminism is to end sadomasochism. Our system is sadomasochistic to the core; how is celebrating it any kind of true rebellion? (Fritz, 1983) The political values of sadism are blatantly anti-feminist, totalitarian and right-wing. Sadomasochism is business as usual; power relations as usual; race, gender and class as usual. Sadomasochism is one ritual version of dominance and submission. Sadomasochism is *not* a creative deviation from normal heterosexual behavior. It is the defining quality of the power relationship between women and men. Sadism is the logical extension of behavior that arises out of male power. (Wagner, 1982)

We live in a misogynist world, and women have so little political power, that it's easier to fantasize about absolute personal power than to politically organize for change. (Clarke, in press) Several young lesbians recently said to me that their fantasies about sadomasochism were their "salvation" in a world where they see no possibility of attaining real power. Sadomasochist dykes play-act power and prestige in a world that crushes any attempt to organize for real power. The play-acting helps us to forget how much we are hated and hurt. And forgetting that is the *real* danger.

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Lucy A. Tatman

Like a woman I
labored to change
the furnishings of this house
carried away the over-stuffed sofa
the lines of up-right hard-back chairs
sentinels on guard before polished hard tables
like a woman I
stripped off imitation flower wallpaper
scrubbed clean away the horse hooves blue
long stuck beneath fake lilacs
and like a woman I
kept on
ripped out stained paneling
knocked down grey sheet rock
began to know
in those hammered moments
two different strengths
my unfamiliar muscled own
and that of the ashen taste of chalk-dry mockery
that comes with a destruction
only partial
now as bare as open as empty as one back two hands
strong arms legs can make it
I leave
for I cannot myself remove the foundation
cannot find to destroy the blueprints
tacked to some architect's wall
safe from these calloused hands

I leave this pre-planned confine
take what tools I have paid for
or have stolen
wrested away from the tight-fisted grasp
of those who would have me build as they
with neither thought
nor visible distinction
monument and mausoleum
like a woman I
take from the stoop
one last long look
at three potted plants
root-bound and dying



Barefoot! (1990)

8"x6"x1" — mixed media on gessoed masonite

China Marks

Anonymous

In Our Hands

a memory of assisted dying

When my spouse was dying of metastatic cancer, she hastened her death with thirty capsules of Nembutal (a barbiturate). Because she was dying she required assistance in this act. Giving such help is a crime.

We are in the kitchen. Jane's relative and I, feeling giddy, simmering like the water on the stove. We are emptying yellow pods, some to the tea cup, some to the yogurt. The empty capsules are evidence we will dispose of later, far from the house. In the bedroom a visitor pulls up a chair for intimate talk but Jane is impatient. "Let's get this show on the road," she calls, but too weakly for our hearing.

Jane's relative has had only one night to understand how Jane will die, but we have been discussing it for all the years of her illness.

Bianca was a friend, a young woman whose cancer had been showing signs of spread to the brain. She refused to be tested for metastasis. When she went into a coma, the doctor treated her aggressively, bringing her back to brain-damaged consciousness for a final two months. Jane and I had careful talks about our own futures — careful on my part because I did not have cancer and spoke with a luxury of conjecture Jane did not have, and care on her part because she had entrusted me with decisions for her life and death, and she needed to be sure I understood her will. She did not want to be surrendered prematurely to death. She did not want to live the way Bianca had in the end.

We followed her cousin's dying long distance on the telephone. Chris was slowly suffocating from the cancer in her lungs. She hallucinated large ants crawling on her. She wished, she said, that she had the health to live but she didn't, so she wished instead that death would hurry.

Jane visited an acquaintance dying in the hospital. Rachel woke twice from the morphine, moaning. Both times Jane asked, "Can I do anything for you?" "Kill me," Rachel said, "please kill me."

We had gathered pills but doubted we would use them. Jane wanted every second of her life. She knew I was committed to helping her have them. Now I am in the kitchen stirring the tea. Jane has had two weeks of dying. Not the slow inexorable dying we had been almost accustomed to — the years of loss accelerating to months of fragility — not that, but two weeks of active dying which began with intense pain, vomiting, and long periods of sleep. She has decided to stop because there is no life left in her.

The articles and books on care for the dying which I'd read so avidly all year assert that with proper pain control people don't need to end their lives "prematurely." We discovered they were wrong. After the first week, Jane's pain eased enough to switch medications and her vomiting calmed more often into nausea. She sleeps the sleep of exhaustion and drugs: there is no life left in her ... no food, no drink, no sunsets to enjoy, few words between us. And some of those words are coming out wrong, or lost altogether. She says "death" and mimes the swallowing of pills. We make a list of people she wants to see, and she names the day she will die.

This is a love story closeted for fear of arrest. But it is not an uncommon story: in hospitals, doctors, with and without their patients' knowledge, are prescribing morphine doses which suppress breathing to the point of death. In private homes, nurses are teaching caregivers: this much is safe, that much could kill. Many, I assume most, get no medical assistance. They guess; they hope; they ask around, carefully if their community is able-bodied, less discreetly if the epidemics of cancer and AIDS have already been felt. Sometimes the dose is too low. Sometimes the body may not function well enough to absorb the poison. Death is a terrible place to have to enter in such ignorance.

We gather in her bedroom, five of us related by our love of her. I remind Jane that the effects of the drug will be immediate.

We all bestow hurried goodbye kisses on her, as if we were seeing her off at a station, the train already there and whistling to go, not daring to hold the moment back, not willing to believe what this moment is. Jane's focus is not on us but on what needs doing.

I hand her the cup. She takes it: her two hands and my one still there to steady the cup, to catch it if need be — she is that weak. She drinks the tea while I murmur encouragingly — yes, good, there you go honey, wonderful. Her hands relax on the cup. "L'chaim," I say. "L'chaim," the others echo me. I move the cup away. She pulls it back to drink the dregs.

I get all the yogurt into one spoonful: here it is, just this, that's good, you've got it, mazel tov. "Mazel tov," soft voices support mine. She presses a tissue to her mouth and firms her lips as her stomach threatens to undo her labor. She is successful; in a minute or two her eyes slide apart and her breathing becomes deep and labored. We sit with her. In three hours she is dead.

Jane is dead. She died of metastatic cancer, the moment hastened by drugs. She chose not to spend her last weeks in mental and emotional confusion, not to spend any more days without her life. This is not a choice everyone would make. It certainly is not a choice one person can make for another. It is a decision as deeply personal as becoming a mother or having an abortion, as fundamental as the right to control one's own body.

I am leery of moves to legislate euthanasia. I have read of health insurers encouraging patients into hospice care, where the standard is comfort-measures only, so they can refuse the more costly treatments. The cancer specialists I've met through the years are an arrogant lot over all, uncomfortable with questioning clients and unable to deal with death. The world moves too easily to fascism for us to offer doctors, judges or professional ethicists the yea or nay over people's requests to die. Instead we need to decriminalize the "good death." As a society we won't be able to understand the needs of mortally ill people who want to die, and how to best assist them, until we are allowed to hear from them and their survivors. We need to discuss euthanasia not

as a sensationalized court case but as something your neighbor has participated in, something your mother might ask from you, something you might want for yourself.

I can still see our hands on the cup. This image lifts the pain of her final weeks into an emblem of our love, the last gift we exchanged. Such moments need to be recorded and honored, our story not whispered but broadcast: love and death and personal autonomy were joined here, speak of it.

Joan Cofrancesco

Blocked Writer

to Terry Stokes

& now I am so worried I cannot
write a line without thinking
am I fucking it up?

& this is only the title,
& I've taken every writing course
& I've listened to every poet writing in America
& I've memorized all of Grimm & I'm right

back where I began, in my mother's womb,
banging, weeping, wiggling my little
finger, searching for a key

Elana Dykewomon

The Words for It

(excerpt from a novel in progress)

The following is from a novel (a quest for my Jewish lesbian ancestors) set in the Russian Pale and New York City between 1850 and 1920. The Pale was an area in western Russia in which Jews were confined, forced to live under hundreds of laws regulating their every movement, routinely brutalized and killed. This section is from the midwife's diary, covering the period 1880-84. At 40, Gutke decided to follow the example of Glükel of Hameln, who had recorded her life story at the end of the 17th century.

Gutke and her mother, Feigele, were forced from their village when Gutke was a toddler, due to scandal surrounding Gutke's birth. They were taken in by Pesah Kohn, wife of the owner of the Kishinev bathhouse, who became their benefactor and employer (Kishinev was a small city, roughly the size of Eugene, Oregon). When Gutke was 11, she was apprenticed to the midwife Milcah. Milcah discovered Gutke's talent for "seeing things" — having small visions that indicate a doorway between the world we know and the worlds we sense — and gave her the tools to control and hide her sensitivity. In Gutke's world, the spiritual realm and "god" were palpable daily companions who shaped her community's understanding of self, place and time.

In her adolescence she witnessed lesbian relationships in the bathhouse and was befriended by one of those lesbians, Golde, a seamstress. After Gutke's mother died she decided to board with Golde.

I was happy living with Golde, as happy as I could be in that time. It wasn't that Golde had ever changed her mind about me. Often I wanted to kiss her, but I was ashamed to ask again. Her father had died not more than six months before my mother; he was an old man. She had the extra room, she said it would be good to have a border, if I wanted to come by her. As much as I hated to leave Pesah, the decision was almost made for me. Golde had the knowledge I needed next — how to be an unmarried Jewish woman, a rare thing.

Golde made up with Yetta, but it's not between them like before. Just after I moved in, Golde started to see a teacher from

the gardening school, Vera, a German. Vera heard there were beautiful lace trimmed skirts in Golde's shop; she came to see.

Vera was a very modern woman, handsome, tall. I never really took to her, but Golde was smitten from the minute the shop bell tinkled and she looked up. Who can afford such feelings in this world? Of course, Vera couldn't live with us, what would people think, a wealthy goy moving into a Jew's little house? So they would take a walk in the evenings by the river or maybe go to a concert. Sometimes Golde would suffer a fit of longing during the workday, and if we knew Vera wasn't teaching, we'd make up a little bundle from the shop, like a delivery, and Golde would go by Vera's apartment. Saturday nights Golde spent there, after shabbes. Sunday the girls didn't come to work until eight, she was always home in plenty of time to prepare their work for them.

There were new clothing factories which could make a dress much cheaper than from Golde's little shop, but many people, Jews and others, bought from her. Her work was good and of course much was made to order. Some bought from pity, I think, because it was a house of old maids and poor working girls, but there was no need to pity us. Golde was good to the girls, they worked usually only twelve hours a day, she paid a few kopeks a week better than the factory and we did our best to make the light good for sewing. She encouraged the girls to know about the Russky Zyuse workers' union and the seamstress' self-help society, and they in turn told the girls who were going to work in the factories.

This kept the girls from gossiping too much about Golde. To them she was more like a patron, a teacher, than a boss. And Golde kept the sabbath, contributed to the all the Jewish funds for orphans and burials, always went out with a babushka wrapped around her hair even though, as an unmarried woman, she didn't have to. She was a good businesswoman, an honest Jew, and to most of her customers, an unfortunate. The marriage brokers pestered both of us, but we managed to always put them off.

If Golde likes to touch the bodies of women, and I liked to think of her touching them, what difference could it possibly

make? I knew there were a few other women like us. Some of the married women even, I could tell, after awhile, how it was between them and their best friend who assisted at a birth. I was young and hungry for touch, but I couldn't see how it was going to come to me.

Besides, there was so much else happening. Alexander II, the czar, was assassinated. Then suffering was the air in our lungs. The uprooted filled the streets of Kishinev for more than ten years, so many cold houses in winter where the families had to borrow even coal to boil water for the newborn. Pogroms throughout the Pale — one year of misery, then maybe a little break; families moving from one town to another; then there is a famine in the north, more homeless; czar Alexander III enforced the May Laws, more Jews got thrown off their land, out of their shtetls; we got used to so many poor in the streets, living on less and less. There was a little calm, then a worldwide depression and the czar took it into his mind to expel all the Jews from St. Petersburg and Moscow — they arrived here chained together like criminals — doctors and businessmen.

You see, I get distracted. When you tell the story of your youth, there is only yourself and the way the world unfolds in front of you. You are a full figure walking among cut-outs of buildings and people, never knowing exactly what's behind them and you don't care. But gradually we grow smaller and smaller, until we are part of the landscape in which we move, and we see all around us others, moving, becoming part of time.

The whole catalog of human misery paraded before me and my own life began to seem like a blade of grass that's escaped the scythe — fortunate and insignificant. Golde worried about me. She took my hand, turned my gaze away. "You must find a little joy where you can, Gutkelle." She was the only one who called me that.

"And where does this joy live?"

"Saturday night you'll come by Vera's. She has guests from Odessa and Kiev, it's a party."

"I don't want to go to a party with goyim."

"Not just goyim, Jews too. Only women will be there."

I stop and look at her. Of course. If men have secret societies, then there must be some for women too. Only so secret no one knows until they're invited.

"You'll come then?"

Saturday afternoon a Mrs. Simkhovitch on Asia Street decided to deliver at least a week early; it was a protracted, difficult birth, thank god the mother and daughter are fine. Only midwives work on shabbes! So I was late for the party, Golde had gone on ahead of me. She left me a note, so sweet, I shouldn't forget to come.

To tell the truth, I was worn out, I needed a little shabbes rest. Then I thought again about Golde and Vera, how their hands find each other whenever Vera comes to the shop. I liked to watch their hands. How they try to keep them still, behind their backs, in their pockets. Suddenly a finger is pushing a curl back from the temple, a palm is against a cheek that blushes, turning to see if no one's looking.

I put on a clean skirt and a multicolored shawl. Pesah herself knitted it for me, it reminds me a little of Joseph's coat of many colors, although I have no one to be jealous of me for wearing it. There are four shades of red, one pale gold, a light blue and purple. I stand by the doorway playing with the fringe, for a minute unable to cross the threshold. Of course I do.

It's a long walk to Vera's, and dark already. I know the spirits look out for me, but still, I don't like to walk alone at night. I am lucky, no one notices me until I am just in front of Vera's apartment.

Suddenly my skin feels dry and hot, my palms wet. Nervous, this is what nervous is. Me! Brave enough to talk to demons, and I'm afraid to go to a party. But from Odessa and Kiev, goyim and the daughters of wealthy Jews — I'm only a midwife, Feigele of Kamenka's momzer daughter, what will I talk about with such women? Pacing up and down in front of the building, I don't notice there is a man in a carriage watching me.

"Is something wrong?" I hear a voice as he steps out of the carriage. There are only street lamps and shadows, but for a second I have the image of a flame. Just for a second, the crackle of fire in branches.

"No, I'm just catching my breath."

"Are you going up to Vera Lessing's party?"

I nod and look again. He is just a little taller than me, very dark, a neat little mustache, no sidelocks, probably a Jewish merchant from Europe, his Yiddish is formal, he doesn't come from Kishinev, that's certain. He smells of cologne and cities. Then I understand. We look at each other closely. The gas lights flicker. Her eyes are a light golden brown that shine from the olive of her face.

"Dovida Greenbaum," she says, "though mostly I am called Dovid."

"Gutke Gurvich." I don't know what else to say. I keep staring at her face, the little mustache.

"Are you shocked by me?"

"Oh. No. Not shocked, surprised."

"Surprised! Well, that's honest. May I have the pleasure of escorting you upstairs?"

Such manners. Now I really feel like a peasant, but I can see that Dovida means to be charming, not to shame me.

Vera's three rooms are stuffed like kishkes with women. Because of Dovida, I assume they're all women, though if you saw them on the street at least six or seven of them you would think are men. I thought I had seen every possible kind of woman in the bath house. Maybe these women were all from out of town, or they didn't bathe with other women? Did they bathe with men? No, they couldn't. The point, really, was to make men believe they were men, wasn't that it?

I had never spent more than a minute thinking about what it would be like to move in the world as man. A long time ago I divided men up into patriarchs, demons and ghosts. Patriarchs are worse than demons, because they make the rules, demons just torment you with them. Ghosts mouth rules, but they have no spirit in them.

Now here is Dovida, and women who look like Turks and Gypsies. Women who can walk where they want at night. Who could attend any university, if they had the money. Most of the women here look as if they have rubles enough for anything, although there are plenty of ordinary working women.

"What are you tisking about?" Dovida comes up behind me. I sigh. Well, I am what I am, I'm not going to pretend different. "I have never been at a party like this."

Dovida examines me closely, "How did you get invited?"

"I board with Golde — over there — who is with Vera two years now."

"And you?"

And me what? Oh. I want to look at the floor but I look in her eyes instead. Then I want to look in her eyes for a long time, and not speak. But I do. "I — I am just a midwife."

"A midwife! Well, well. That's a very important trade. But —" she takes my hand. She is wearing white gloves, what a thing! "— that's not exactly what I was asking."

"I know. I just have never talked about such things with anyone. Just a little with Golde."

"Ah," she lets go of my hand and I feel ashamed for not having words. It was with words God made the world, and now I can't find the words to make my life. "Then you're just here as a friend, an observer?" Her tone is arch, and her voice deepens.

"No." I don't want her to misunderstand me. "No, not that at all. I just — " How do you say this? What words can a person possibly use? "I just am innocent of my own desires." Oy, now she's going to laugh at me.

And she does. But she takes my hand again. "That's charming! You mean, you have never had the opportunity to act on your imagination?"

She says something else in French, which of course I don't understand. Heat is spreading through my face and legs. Embarrassment, shame, anger, longing. Is that what desire is? "I'm not a joke." The anger wins. Anger is cool and relieving.

"Please forgive me. I didn't mean to laugh at your expense. I have seen many women with desire and no opportunity, and that seems like a sin to me."

A sin? I look around me. For a moment I am glad my mother is not alive to see such a party. Then I am ashamed for thinking any bad thoughts about these women — how amazing for them to have found their way here, how difficult. "I suppose you have

taken it upon yourself to right this sin?"

She laughs. "You know the Talmud says that we will have to account to God for the pleasures we did not take."

"The Talmud says that?"

"I don't suppose they intended us," she gestures across the room, "but every generations of Jews has to make its own interpretations, nu?"

Golde comes up behind me, puts both her hands on my shoulders. "Already you've made a friend! Introduce me!" She shakes Dovid's hand, moving beside me, putting her arm around my shoulder. I can't remember when she has been so affectionate or happy. Who could have known she'd come alive at a party? "Now don't take advantage of my roommate, she's an orphan!" That she had to say! I'm furious but before I can even give her a look she is off to another part of the room.

"An orphan. I'm sorry."

"Please don't be sorry for me. I loved my mother, may she be blessed by God, but she is dead seven years now, I have my own life."

"Yes. I apologize. I seem to just be blundering here, perhaps you'd like to meet some of Vera's other guests?"

"No! I mean, if you like." But instead we just stare at each other.

"Perhaps some wine?" Yes, we go over to a table which is full of pastries and cheeses, very nice. Kosher, even, it looks. Well, the plates can't be kosher but it is all dairy and I think this is very respectful of Vera. In fact, suddenly I like Vera much better.

"So, now you know I'm a midwife, an orphan and Golde's roommate. But all I know about you is that you dress like a man."

"Is that anyway to ask me about myself?" We get a little wine and cheese, we make our way over to the corner. I notice the innkeeper's wife is in the middle of the room with Golde's second cousin. Who would have guessed?

"I'm sorry if I'm rude, but I am curious, how did you —"

"I ran away from my home — in Krakow — when I was 16. My father got me engaged to marry a furrier, ten years older than me. Oy, how disgusted I was!"

"He was ugly?"

"Really, I don't know. He was ugly to me. My parents were orthodox, it was against my father's wishes that my brothers taught me Hebrew, and I used to sit in the back of lectures at the gymnasium, to learn German. I couldn't imagine to be stuck at home with a man who deals in animal skins. I left."

"You just ran away, a sixteen year old girl?"

"No, not a girl. I stole one of my brothers' pants and jacket, his hat, everything. I took every penny I could find in the house. Well, it would have been my dowry, right? And I got on the train to Warsaw. I wanted to go to Berlin, but I didn't think I spoke German well enough yet. I never meant to pass for a yeshiva bucher, like my brother, so I went into a tailor's shop and got a nice, modern suit. My breasts were still very small then and if the tailor thought something was odd, he didn't let on. This is what I've learned, though I hate to say it, money is freedom."

"Why do you hate to say it?"

"Because it means so many are slaves. Do you read Marx?"

I'm embarrassed. I don't read much, medical texts and once in a while pamphlets the socialist mothers give me. Last year I read *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, but I don't really care for the shlemiels of Yiddish fiction. "I don't have much time to read." Then I am mad at myself for lying. "Besides, I'm not an intellectual. I read just biology, for my work."

"I read for my work too."

"For what kind of work do you have to read Marx?" At least I know who Marx is.

"I'm a banker. Not a banker, exactly, but I work drawing up and transferring negotiable instruments, especially between banks and companies in different countries."

Now I am almost frightened. What does that mean? How can a Jewish woman do such a thing? But I am confused as well, "What kind of banker reads revolutionaries?"

"Bankers who want to understand what they do. The more I know, the easier it is for me to move around in the world. And that's what I really want, the freedom to travel and do what I please. Even I myself don't exactly approve of what I do for a living."

This is the most interesting person I have ever met, even more than the prostitutes who came to the bath house on Mondays. All over Europe, she goes, speaking German, Polish, French, Yiddish, who knows what? She knows intellectuals, revolutionaries, the daughters of barons and now a midwife. I am afraid she will find my little life — just that, little. You could take my life like a pinch of snuff to clear your nose and never think about it again.

I must have talked to other women that night, Dovida must have left me and come back at least once, but I don't remember it. She offered to give me a ride home in her carriage. On the stairs she looked at me and said, "but perhaps you might like instead to come to my hotel?"

Almost everyone else has been afraid to hold my gaze. But for her, my eyes were a doorway, a scene where there is a mountain and lake and she could never decide whether she wanted to rest staring at the mountain or the water. Back and forth her eyes go, into mine, so far I can feel her walking inside my breastbone. She has strong legs, but each step is gentle.

"I am afraid to make a scandal." Of course what I really wanted was to make such a big scandal that I would have to leave Kishinev in the morning and never come back.

"Gutke, in 1884 it is not such a big scandal for a woman to go to a gentleman's hotel room. Besides, I have a feeling not too many of your patients live by the hotels on Alexander Street."

So I went.

Even now, sixteen years later, it was the best decision I ever made. But the words for it? I believe things can come into being without a word, because didn't God make Adam name everything in the Garden of Eden? So even if God had the words already, people didn't. Every tree, every animal had to have its own name. Every part of the body has a name. Sometimes I lie in bed with Dovida, she'll be asleep, she sleeps sound and late, and I will name each knuckle on her hand, I name the crease behind her knee, I trace the big muscles of her forearms and I call the left one Simcha and the right one Latke, it's good enough to eat.

"What are you doing?"

"Just talking to Simchalle here."

"Should I be jealous of my forearm?"

"Well, you, you've known so many women, I have to make it up somehow. If I find twenty women in your body, will that even the score?"

She's sleepy, chuckling, pulls her arm around me. "Are we keeping score? You're the one who gets to look between other women's legs. You can't fault me for what I did before I met you."

Once something comes into being, shouldn't there be a name for it? I could call this love, like the rich goyim do or young girls dreaming about who they'll marry, but to call it love would be like to call it God, no offense to the Creator. Everything is God's, isn't it? And all pleasure in life is love. That is not enough. What's between me and Dovidia must be very close to God, because even if there is a word for it, you couldn't say it out loud. Just like the name of God, you must not speak it. You can look at it, written out, but not even the whisper of it should cross your lips.

"So serious, my Gutke, always wanting to understand what makes us love. Maybe it's not such a serious thing. Don't your medical books tell you human beings are mostly water? We are just water, moving towards each other. Like this —" she rolls towards me and takes my lips in her mouth. Her lips are soft and expanding, until I think my whole face is inside her, so much excitement, sensation, I have to pull back, look at her.

I have to pull back a little, so often she's away on business. Now we keep an apartment together in Odessa, as if we are man and wife, but I keep living with Golde in Kishinev, bringing new lives into this world. I love my work. Dovidia does hers for the adventure of it. I suppose I could say the same, though it's a different adventure. Once in a long time when a girl is born I see that flame I saw when I first looked at Dovidia. This one, I think, will be like us.

Even if I have no word for it.

Kirsten Backstrom

Call

The phone rang around ten o'clock, and I got up to answer it because Catherine was pinned under two cats and the Sunday paper. I set aside my textbook, roused another cat off my bathrobe, and went downstairs. I thought it would be my sister calling. She'd been having husband-trouble again. I answered the phone, expecting a familiar voice.

Will you accept a collect call from Molly Humphrey?" There was a cat leaning against my leg in an attempt to buckle my knee so I'd sit down and provide a lap. The name didn't click, but I was distracted so I thought I might be forgetting someone I should be remembering.

"Just a sec," I said, then covered the receiver with my hand and hollered upstairs, "Hey, Cath! You know a Molly Humphrey?"

"Don't think so... No."

"Sorry." I hung up.

As I came into the bedroom, I had that easing sensation in my chest that I often get when I step onto the domestic scene and suddenly realize that this is my home. It still astonishes me that I'm a grown woman living safe and happy with another woman, no catastrophe looming over us. Catherine was sitting in the warm circle of lamplight, with her glasses shoved down to the tip of her nose so she could squint over the top of them at me.

"Wrong number," I said, "Maybe Bea won't call tonight after all. You want to sleep? I'll get up if the phone rings."

"Sleep would be great. You don't mind taking care of things?"

"Nothing to take care of. I'll just tuck you in..."

"Sweet," Catherine murmured. She let the newspapers slide to the floor as she sank down under the covers. The cats shifted (but not much) to make room, and I leaned across them to shut off the lamp on Catherine's side of the bed. I was debating whether to turn off my own light, when the phone rang again.

This time none of the cats followed me downstairs. I noticed how cold it seemed in the dark living room, with strips of stark white light from the street-lamps seeping through the blinds. I fumbled for the ringing phone, dropped the receiver, picked it up and answered, flustered, "Hello? Yes?"

"Aunt Edith?" It was a girl's voice, maybe a fourteen-year-old voice. It wasn't my sister, and it wasn't a voice I recognized.

"No, sorry..."

"Is my aunt there? I need... can I talk to her? Please?"

There was music blaring in the background. Heavy metal, I thought. When I was a kid that age, it would have been acid rock. It would have been some kind of bar with a bunch of people I hardly knew. Or it would have been a big party that was out of control. I'd be slightly high, and not admitting I was scared. No one to drive me home; no one to come get me. I'd sleep on somebody's floor if I were lucky, in somebody's bed if not. Or I'd end up on the road in the dark with my thumb peeking from my closed extended hand, tentatively hitching a ride. Between cars, I'd hide my hands in my pockets, hunch my shoulders in that thin denim jacket I always wore. I'd walk to keep warm.

"No, listen, I'm sorry but you've got the wrong number." I hesitated, then asked, "Is this Molly?"

There was a short silence at the other end of the line, and a muffled sound that might have been a sob or somebody taking a gulp of something from a bottle, "Please... I thought this was the number... If you know me... Just let me talk to..."

"I don't know you, but you tried to call this number a minute ago... That's how I knew your name. Listen, can I help? Where are you? What number are you trying to call?"

"Something and South Main... Norwood. I don't know. They're going to kick me out in a minute. Who is this? Maybe you can..."

"My name's Terry. I'm at 12th and Christopher... But you're calling long-distance aren't you? What city?"

"Norwood... I've got to go..."

"Wait, don't hang up... If it's not too far... Are you in Oregon?"

"Massachusetts."

"Oh, god. I'm sorry. That's three thousand miles from here. But what if you..."

She hung up. My hands were shaking as I fumbled the receiver back into the cradle. It was really cold in the living room. There was a chill in my chest, like I'd just swallowed an icy fizzing drink of something. Headlights streaked across a wall as a car passed in the street outside. Then it was dark again.

I felt my way upstairs and Catherine spoke softly, sensitive to the anxiety I was bringing into the room with me. "Was it your sister? Is it bad? Do we need to go over there?"

"No," I whispered back, "Don't turn on the light. It's ok. Just let me get in with you. It's cold." I burrowed in among the cats. I nestled close to Catherine.

She held me, tugged my ear gently, said, "Tell me."

"It was Molly Humphrey. The wrong number. She was just a kid, in some kind of trouble. She was trying to reach her aunt. It's so damn cold down there."

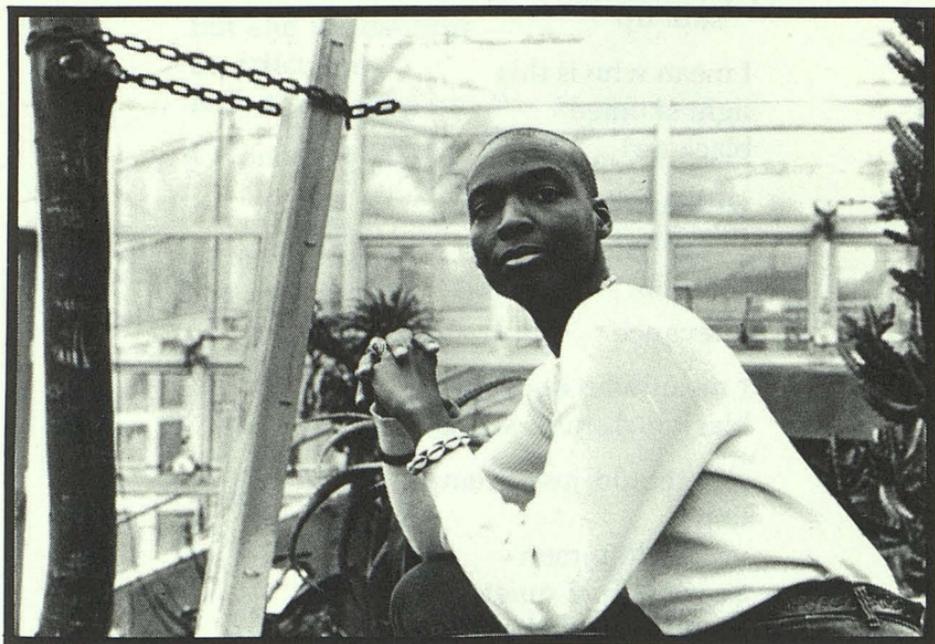
"It was long distance? Too far away?"

"Massachusetts. It's past one in the morning in Massachusetts."

"I hope she's all right."

I nodded against my lover's shoulder, but didn't answer. The warmth between us made me sleepy. I wanted to sleep. Somewhere in Massachusetts, Molly was probably leaving the bar or the party, trying to find her own way home. I couldn't stay awake to explain what I needed to explain to Catherine about the call. I half-dreamed of myself telling my sister Bea about it, about how cold it was when I couldn't reach her, when I couldn't reach anyone.

I imagined cars whizzing past a phone booth where Molly was trying to reach someone. She tried a few more numbers before she used up the last of her change and started walking. She wrapped her arms around herself and walked quickly, making for the next streetlight, the next stark bright spot on the dark road. I imagined that she made it to some warm place eventually. Maybe she was stronger than anyone expected her to be, in spite of those who couldn't be there when she needed them.



Alison, Brooklyn, NY, 1989

11x14 Silver Print

Kathryn Kirk

Neta C. Crawford

Thoughts of the Wise Men

God I wish she'd
shut up

I mean who *is* this
light skinned
black girl

with her light lips
flapping
rapping
relevance

I mean who does this
black girl think she is
she should just listen
to us
wise white men
as we talk in quiet
quite measured tones

starvation is
after all
nothing to raise our voices about
and how dare she accuse
us
wise white men
of racism!

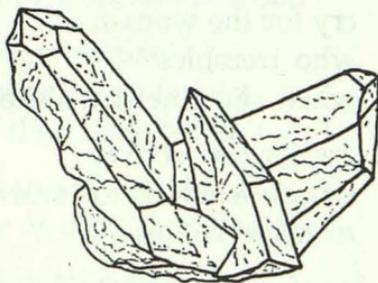
she should be happy
to be here
happy
grateful and silent

starvation is
after all
nothing

we'll just let her finish
but ignore her comments
ignore her

but she is beautiful
so articulate
look at her forearms flex as she gestures

I wonder what she's like in bed



untitled
Peni Hall

Pamela Gray

3 out of 4 (or more):
a lament for 3 out of 4 (or more) voices

*They left us with ghosts
who rise up when we're touched*

*they left us with memories
like Medusa's snakes
twisting and coiling
around our hearts*

*they left us with hunger
for a normal life*

*as clear and untainted
as river water*

cry for the woman
who always wears scarves
over her breasts

cry for the woman
who trembles
when she smells whiskey

cry for the woman
whose womb is too scarred
to make babies

cry for the woman
who always has to be
the center of attention

cry for the woman
who goes numb
below her waist
when she starts to feel passion

*they left us with ghosts
who rise up when we're touched*

*they left us with memories
like Medusa's snakes
twisting and coiling
around our hearts*

*they left us with hunger
for a normal life*

*as clear and untainted
as river water*

cry for the woman
who dreams of her father
throwing babies off rooftops

cry for the woman
who can't look at candles
or the color red

cry for the woman
who can only have orgasms
when she thinks about rape

cry for the woman
who can't walk in the woods

cry for the woman
who assumes all fathers
molest their daughters

*they left us with ghosts
who rise up when we're touched*

*they left us with memories
like Medusa's snakes
twisting and coiling
around our hearts*

*they left us with hunger
for a normal life*

*as clear and untainted
as river water*

cry for the woman
who eats cold spaghetti at 2 a.m.
if someone desires her

cry for the woman
who calls herself
damaged goods

cry for the woman
who hasn't had sex
with her lover for eleven years

cry for the woman
who can't take a bath
without locking the door

cry for the woman
who wishes she could cut off
her hips and cunt with a knife

*they left us with ghosts
who rise up when we're touched*

*they left us with memories
like Medusa's snakes
twisting and coiling
around our hearts*

*they left us with hunger
for a normal life*

*as clear and untainted
as river water*

cry for the woman
who can't climb stairs
without thinking someone
will pinch her ass

cry for the woman
who can't get a massage
cry for the woman
who won't wear a bathing suit
in front of her father

cry for the woman
who can't cry for herself

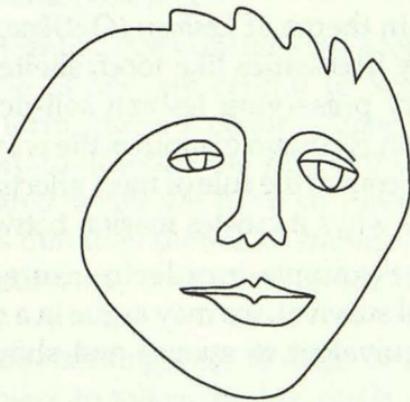
cry for the woman
whose ghosts led her flying
off the Golden Gate Bridge

*let your tears give us
Medusa's power*

*let your tears turn our ghosts
and memories to stone*

*let your tears wash over us
like river water*

*cold (cold)
clean (clean)
crystal (crystal)
clear*



Rya Philips
from Oregon Cuntree Dykes clip art

Elliott

Lesbian Legal Theory

a review of Ruthann Robson's *Lesbian (Out)law*:

Survival Under the Rule of Law, Firebrand Books, 1992, PB 185pp, \$9.95

At the end of my interview with Ruthann Robson in Philadelphia last fall, I asked her what else she would like to say about *Lesbian (Out)law*. She replied, "My real desire is that when I am an older lesbian outlaw, younger lesbians will look at me as quaint and not nearly radical enough."

Now, with an attitude like this, how could the book not be great? Actually, when *Lesbian (Out)law* first appeared, I avoided it, assuming, very incorrectly, that it would be more garbage about lesbians' fights to get legal rights in the institutions most antithetical to lesbian existence. But Firebrand has yet to publish a book that I hate, so I gave it a chance. I was astounded, and continue to be. Ruthann has not produced a book about the law; rather, she, *as a lesbian*, has used her training and experience as a lawyer to write about lesbians.

Ruthann is a white, working class radical lesbian, a woman who was never really meant to survive (she says about her childhood, "Let's just say that no one ever would have expected that I would have graduated high school"*), much less to survive as an academic, as a lawyer. Not surprisingly, then, the subtitle, and the main theme of *Lesbian (Out)law*, is survival, both in the sense of daily necessities like food, shelter, safety and love, and in the sense of preserving lesbian self-definition. Throughout *Lesbian (Out)law*, Ruthann examines the ways the rule of law, which is, she says, of course the rule of men, affects both types of lesbian survival, and the ways it creates tension between the two:

For example, in order to ensure our economic and physical survival, we may argue in a court of law that a lover is equivalent to spouse and should be entitled to health

*Interview, Philadelphia, PA, Oct. 92.

insurance benefits.... Our argument is essentially that our lover is "just like" a wife/husband.... In making this argument, we might lose our own definition of our lover. If we refuse to argue this way, based on the belief that our lover is nothing like a wife or husband, we might preserve our lesbianism but probably lose the benefits.

Lesbian (Out)law is the only book on gay, lesbian, or feminist legal issues that centers our survival as lesbians in this way. This in itself makes it worth reading and owning, but there is so much more here.

Lesbian (Out)law begins with Ruthann's explanation of her vision of what a lesbian legal theory might be. She rejects both feminist legal theory, which, as it stands, can never meet the needs of lesbian survival, and queer legal theory, which, as it is developing, is not including dyke voices. A lesbian legal theory must consider both types of lesbian survival while not co-opting lesbian meaning:

To have a lesbian legal theory is not necessarily to have a theory that puts law in the center of lesbianism, or even lesbian efforts at lesbian change. While we have begun to speak about the "therapization" and even the "professionalization" of lesbianism, we must also begin to notice the "legalization" of our lesbian lives [which] occurs when we substitute legal categories and concepts for our lesbian ones.

The dangers to lesbian meaning from unthinking acceptance of the boundaries of the rule of law are central to Ruthann's thinking; she introduces the term, "domestication," chosen partly because it is a gendered term, to describe the result of legalization. Lesbians are domesticated when we have so internalized the dominant culture's views that they seem like common sense. "Post-domesticated lesbian existence," she says, "is one purpose of a lesbian legal theory."

Lesbian (Out)law is not about creating a set of rules, or laws, or even a single strategy, for lesbians to follow. Rather, she is creating a theory that will meet lesbians' needs and expand lesbians' choices.

Her work, she says, is only the first part of a dialogue, the first attempt to consider lesbians and the law from a lesbian perspective:

If a lesbian legal theory is a theory of law that has as its purpose lesbian survival; if it is relentlessly lesbian and puts lesbians rather than law at its center; if it distinguishes between intralesbian situations and nonlesbian situations; if it is not feminist legal theory and not queer legal theory; if it does not seek to explain the entire enterprise of law, then some of the preliminary work toward developing a lesbian legal theory has begun.

For the rest of *Lesbian (Out)law*, Ruthann writes about the historical and current state of lesbianism and the law, examining the kinds of arguments that have been used, asking questions based on a lesbian perspective, and theorizing about what any of it means for a lesbian legal theory. (The word "lesbian" appears in this book more often than in an Alix Dobkin song, one reason why I like it so much.) In the section, "Outlaws," she examines crimes of lesbian sex, from ancient Greece until now. In "Privacy", Ruthann considers the tension between arguments for our sexuality being public and being private, especially the ways the courts have claimed either that lesbianism is an identity or a sex act, depending, usually, on which view will *not* protect us. "The Regulation of Lesbianism" addresses three institutions with definite policies about lesbians: the military, immigration, and prison. "Lesbian Relationships" considers lesbians as lovers and as parents. "Lesbians and Violence" looks at the violence against and among lesbians, especially hate crimes and lesbian battering. The final section takes up alternatives to traditional law, including mediation and a survey of lesbian legal workers. All of this is in 185 pages; the ideas come fast and furious here, in a direct, working-class no bullshit way.

The quality of Ruthann's questions, and her commitment to always center lesbians, anchor the book. Reading it excited me; my copy is full of underlining, notes, highlighting, and questions to myself about some of my own work based on her methods and ideas. I interrupted my girlfriends' lives for days to read sections to them, and worked something about it into conversations with my friends for weeks.

My excitement started in Chapter Two, where Ruthann takes apart the conventional historical view that European culture has condemned male homosexuality while ignoring female homosexuality. Ruthann's research belies this; lesbians have been persecuted, although often the lesbians found guilty were poor or working class, and their crimes were categorized as vagrancy, moral insanity, prostitution, crimes against chastity, or lewd behavior.

Ruthann also discovered the importance of looking for lesbians in silences, such as a Swiss court's declaration in 1568 that a woman be executed by drowning for a "detestable and unnatural crime, which is so ugly that, from horror, it is not named here." But beyond the historical record, Ruthann asks that we question what we "know" about lesbian history, especially reconsidering the way banishment, in which one lesbian would be forced to leave a city forever while her lover would be forced to stay, has not been treated as a severe punishment. She also urges lesbians to question "all comparisons of lesbianism with male homosexuality, especially where the results make men the measure of all things and make women's experience 'invisible' or 'less' or 'pale'." Furthermore, she adds:

...if we put lesbians at the center of our theories about lesbians in legal history, then it becomes important whether even a single lesbian was punished for her love for another woman.... One woman executed for being a lesbian, one woman banished or pilloried or flogged or incarcerated, is not incidental. It is not incidental even if that one lesbian was illiterate or dark-skinned or lower class, even if the "crime" of that one lesbian was prostitution or transvestism or lewdness. The punishment of one lesbian is a matter of great import.

This emphasis on the value of each lesbian life is central to *Lesbian (Out)law*. In discussing lesbians and the military, Ruthann moves the debate from whether or not lesbians make good soldiers to whether or not soldiers make good lesbians:

When a lesbian officer in the United States Army trains a lesbian recruit to think of current unpopular foreigners as "enemies," she is training one lesbian to hate another. To disregard the survival of lesbians because they live within

the national boundaries of Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua or Iraq is to disregard the survival of lesbians.

In "Lesbians and Prison," Ruthann considers how the professionalization of a few lesbians as "good" administrators who "follow the rules" pits lesbians against one another, with less privileged lesbians always losing:

It is horrific to contemplate even one lesbian correctional officer or prison administrator pursuing disciplinary actions against one lesbian for hugging her lover, or recommending the transfer of one lesbian... away from her lover, or confiscating a lesbian magazine, or taunting an insufficiently demure lesbian.

Ruthann's commitment to centering lesbians influences her discussions of lesbian battering, lesbian sex debates, lesbian marriage and child custody. Her commitment to the inclusion of all lesbians influenced the very structure of the book itself. It's style is meant to be concrete and accessible, without unnecessary legalisms and endless notes (although it is well documented). And, she adds, her politic of accessibility extends to choices she made about publishing:

While several university presses are publishing books exclusively in hardcover for lesbian audiences who can afford to pay large sums for slim volumes, *Lesbian (Out)law* is meant to be more widely available. For that reason, it is published by an independent lesbian and feminist publisher, reasonably priced given market conditions, and meant to be read outside of law libraries as well as within them.

The opposite of such lesbian-centered lesbianism is domesticated lesbianism, in which lesbians' self-understanding is based on the rule of law, threatening lesbian survival. Ruthann does not believe that it is creating or using legal reforms that harms us; many of these reforms, she points out, are very useful legal "tools" that can help us meet our daily survival needs. The harm to lesbians, the domesticating, occurs when we confuse reform

and when lesbians unthinkingly adopt legal categories as our own, therefore limiting our survival *as lesbians*.

In "Lesbians as Lovers," Ruthann examines legal tools as they affect our relationships, measuring them against her own statement that "the challenge is making the law serve lesbian relationships instead of having lesbian relationships serve the law." On this basis she rejects relationship contracts because they domesticate us by turning us into bargaining parties, because they rely on a rule of law meant to enforce the market economy, and because contract ideology legitimates privilege through the invention of neutral-sounding rights. She carefully considers the prospect of state-approved marriage, discussing the advantages, such as economic benefits and avoiding custody disputes such as the Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson battle, but also giving one of the most informed critiques of lesbian marriage in print:

While there might be many practical disadvantages for a married lesbian couple depending on their circumstances, including increased tax liability, decreased financial aid including public assistance, and the costs of any divorce, the opposition to lesbian marriage by lesbians is mainly rooted in concerns about the less tangible aspects of lesbian survival. One aspect is lesbian solidarity and the perception that state-approved marriage divides lesbians. A class division is evident in observations that the benefits of lesbian marriage mainly accrues to lesbians of a certain class. ...A sexual division is evident in observations that state-approved marriage draws lines between good lesbians and deviant ones. An acceptable lesbian is one who has a state-approved marriage and limits her lesbian sex to the marital bed.

Ultimately, Ruthann rejects marriage and marriage-like domestic arrangements because they domesticate lesbians, limit lesbian choices, and create divisions between lesbians.

Ruthann also discusses false divisions between lesbians when she examines the concept of the "good" lesbian and of "the whitest and the brightest." In "Lesbians with Children," she discusses, as

an example of this, the case of Jane Doe, described in court documents as "an exceptionally well-educated, stable, responsible, and sensitive individual" and mother of an eleven year old "well-adjusted and above average" son. Jane is allowed to maintain parental rights, in spite of her "unnatural lifestyle", partly because she is so wonderful, and partly because she promised to give up her lover, if needed, for the best interest of her son. Although Jane "won", her type of case sets up an impossible standard, one most lesbians could never hope to meet. Or would want to meet; Ruthann discusses other lesbians who lost custody because they weren't willing to sacrifice their relationships for their children. The category of "good" lesbian (agreeable, not radical, domesticated) also harms all of us in instances such as EEOC cases where a business might list its "good" lesbian employees in order to prove that it wasn't discriminating against lesbians as a class by firing a "toodykey" dyke. Or, as Ruthann explains in "Lesbians and Prison":

The rule of law's divisive violence that domesticates all of us by institutionalizing some of us can appear rational because we have internalized the categories *criminal*, *incompetent*, and *delinquent*. These categories appear especially rational to us as lesbians when we believe our lesbianism is not the cause of the institutionalization.

There are so many other ideas in the book that I find intriguing and/or exciting that I could go on and on, but then you might think you didn't need to read it yourself. You do. *Lesbian (Out)law* made me think, but, more importantly, it made me re-think so much. And have I forgotten to mention that it is gracefully written, with spatterings of a wonderful dry humor? To me, Ruthann's work is the best kind of lesbian theorizing: it centers our understanding, includes our great diversity, insists upon our continuing ability to make our own choices, and never forgets that we have to eat and pay rent.

Ruthann has also published two works of fiction, *Cecile* and *Eye of a Hurricane*, both from Firebrand.

Julie Blackwomon

Late Anger in a Cathedral

I wear stockings and dresses to work,
 as protection from people in a hurry
 who do not look,
 call me "sir"
 without intending harm.

But she was a woman.
 presumed to be lesbian.

I am not used to this
 So I stare at her lipstick and long hair
 until she notices my earrings,
 then I look away.

Later she apologizes.
 Again.

explains:
 "That happens to my daughter, too.
 And I hate it."
 "Yes," I say, "I hate it too."

The woman sitting next to her
 also in long hair and lipstick
 decides it was an honest mistake.
 attributes the error to my "higher evolution
 on the way to androgyny,"

As if androgyny were something I craved
 and did not know I had achieved.

I correct her.

"I am partial to looking like a woman," I say.
 Pooh poohing my objection as modesty,
 she assures me of my successful transformation:
 "You have reached the higher plane," she says
 "sometimes we have to accept these things."

I say nothing turn back around in my seat,
the conversation over.

Bitch.

Sometimes
It takes me a while to realize
I have been insulted
by a woman.

Late Anger II: And as Close as I Can Come To An Apology

I have been a feminist for twenty years. Although I might feel like it, I would not call a woman a "bitch" to her face any more than I would punch another human. I am almost fifty years old now and have learned to handle my anger in less aggressive ways. What I did was to write this poem.

As a feminist the idea of calling woman a "bitch" in a poem or piece of fiction is repulsive to me and crosses an enormous amount of boundaries. If someone else wrote this poem and I read it in a feminist journal it would stop me cold. I would challenge her right to call herself a feminist. I would stop to see who wrote it and remember her name. My decision to submit it for publication anyway has to do with personal integrity and a refusal to submit to self censorship. I wrote the poem and although it causes me some personal embarrassment, I will handle the negative feedback.

So what could I have done instead? I might have turned around again, continued the conversation, explaining that I felt particularly insulted by her because the conversation was not even between the woman who insulted me and myself. She intruded into my conversation with another woman in a misguided attempt to smooth things over and only made it worse.

I could have not written the poem. No, I lie. The poem wrote itself. I borrowed paper from a friend and wrote the first draft

within five minutes. I wrote the second version on the train back to Philadelphia.

I could have written the poem, hidden it in a drawer and not showed anybody except my friends, the women in my writer's group who know how difficult it is for me to call a woman a "bitch" in writing: which would smack not only of self-censorship but cowardice again.

I considered changing the word "Bitch" to "Heifer." But that too is not what I feel. That also smacks of my fear of negative feedback from my sisters.

It is Monday morning, I am home sick from work and bored. To entertain myself I read issue #47 of *Sinister Wisdom* from cover to cover. Right there on page sixty-eight are requests for material on Lesbian Ethics. Today is February eighth, which means I am at least eight days late. If I am lucky, either these pieces will not be accepted, or the poem will be too late for the deadline and I will be spared the angry letters in the Editor's Column.

Peace.

Naja Sorella

Paying Up

One of the most physically, emotionally draining things for me to do is constantly educate other Lesbians around different issues of oppression. For a bunch of years I did lots of education around disability issues, especially Environmental Illness (E.I.). Now, I mostly relate to other ill/disabled Dykes 'cause it's too exhausting relating to able-bodied ones.

Class is the issue most in my face these past several years. Even for Lesbians who're committed to dealing with their classism, I'm horrified by their amazing number of off-the-wall, totally outrageous statements and behaviors. Here's a few doozies.

- An upper-middle-class Dyke insists there's no class difference between her and a working-class Dyke. I want to shake the hell out of Lesbians when they say that shit.

- Two business Lesbians tell a workshop of business womyn that one way to keep business expenses down is to find a lower-class woman who'd be more than happy to work for a very low wage. The example they offer is their own secretary who happily works full time for \$700 a month. In reality, the "secretary" (a lower-class Dyke) is the office manager, and fought with them for years to get a raise. Which of course, she never got.

- Recently, a lower-class Dyke was at work when her upper-middle-class Lesbian boss walked up to her after just dealing with a delivery man, and exclaimed, "Working class men always smell so sweaty!" She turned and walked out of the room, leaving the lower-class Dyke stunned.

- This one is an example of what me and my lover, Frieda, call "empty middle-class offers." A class-privileged Dyke says to a lower-class Dyke, "I'm having a few friends over for dinner tonight, why don't you join us?" The lower-class Lesbian accepts, shows up, and there's no place set for her. She's told there's not enough food, and the class-privileged Lesbian is totally surprised the lower-class Dyke is there. The lower-class Dyke is

totally humiliated in front of this Dyke and her friends, and hightails it out of there.

- Another example of empty offers: A lower-class, disabled Lesbian gets what appears to be a sincere, from-the-heart, "If there's anything I can ever do to help you, let me know, really, I mean it, just call me," offer from a class-privileged able-bodied Dyke. They're in a support group together. A few weeks later, the lower-class Dyke needs some belongings moved and takes her up on her offer. The class-privileged Lesbian agrees to help, but acts distant and bothered when they move the belongings. So the lower-class Dyke asks her what's wrong, and is angrily chastised for assuming she had the right to make demands on the class-privileged Dyke's time and energy.

Sometimes I confront Lesbians on their classism, sometimes I don't. It depends on a number of factors: How much investment have I got in this Dyke? I don't consider it worthwhile confronting a casual acquaintance. Yet it's scarier with a close friend. I always fear the loss of the friendship. How open has she been in the past when approached about an issue of oppression? I'm not going to challenge a Dyke about her classism when she's been an asshole about other issues. I don't need the grief. Does she have any awareness of class issues at all? I don't waste my time on the kind of Lesbian who'd insist her upper-middle-class background is no different from a working-class Dyke. How often does she make classist comments/behaviors? If she spews classist shit every time she opens her mouth, I consider her hopeless and don't bother confronting her. I carefully choose who I'll confront because it takes an incredible amount of time and energy to:

1. Deal with the emotional trauma inflicted.
2. Talk with friends to get support, feedback.
3. Figure out exactly what issues I need to cover, decide what I want from her, etc.
4. Take time processing with the Dyke who made the comment.
5. Call my friends back to report how it went, and possibly get more support if the confrontation didn't go well.
6. Deal with the fallout.

I've got an average of 2-4 hours of functional energy a day, and need it for things other than tutoring class-privileged Lesbians. I'm fed up with giving a free education to these Dykes.

I know this frustration isn't mine alone as an ill/disabled Lesbian. Even for able-bodied lower-class Dykes, time and energy is an issue. The poorer one is, the less free time and energy one has.

To class privileged Lesbians: it's time to pay up! It's not our job to give you free lessons on how to stop oppressing us. Every time a lower-class Dyke calls you on a classist remark or behavior, the education fee is \$50 (no sliding scale!) After all, you'd pay far more than this for a workshop. Paying lower-class Lesbians for their time and energy is the ethical thing to do. Otherwise, it's exploitation.

Where should the \$50 go? My favorite is for it to go into a Lesbian money fund (for poor Lesbians, not for the class privileged to buy a vacation home.) Here in the S.F. Bay Area, there are two funds that I know of, that serve the local community. Other possibilities: pay it to the Dyke you just offended (or clean her house!); pay it to a poor Lesbian in your community; send it to a local clinic, group, etc., that serves poor Lesbians; ask the Dyke who just enlightened you where she wants it to go. Get your checkbook out on the spot and write the check. You just got a private seminar on class issues, you pay the fee now.

Paying up still applies even if you already give money to funds, clinics, poor Lesbians, etc. The \$50 fee relates specifically to what you did or said, and the precious time and energy a lower-class Dyke spent educating you. There's no two-for-one specials or discounts. Just because you've paid up before, doesn't excuse your next classist act, or exempt you from paying again.

The next step is to talk with other class-privileged Lesbians. Tell them about the classist comment/behavior you did, the issues brought up to you by the lower-class Dyke, what you learned, etc. Explain the concept of paying up. Tell them they must pay \$50 when they've offended a lower-class Dyke. As well, when you call another class-privileged Lesbian on a classist remark or behavior, she still pays \$50 to a money fund, clinic, poor Lesbian,

etc. Make sure she writes the check out there and then. True, this time you did the work, but you know that many times a lower-class Dyke instructed you for free.

Don't wait to be called on your classism, call yourself on it. If you suddenly realize you offended a lower-class Dyke last month, don't hope she won't notice! She has. Apologize to her, and pay up. Even though she didn't expend her energy confronting you, she spent time and energy dealing with the hurt you caused her.

Other thoughts about paying up: I originally thought of the \$50 as a fine, but decided it felt too related to punishment, police, courts, etc., and I didn't like that connection. If other lower-class Dykes think of it as a fine, that's up to them. My lover, Frieda, says she thinks of paying up as an amends. We talked about the example of a class-privileged Dyke who isn't confronted on a classist behavior, but later calls herself on it. Frieda says she pays up as an amends for the pain, hurt, humiliation, etc., her classism caused the lower-class Lesbian. Within my concept of money for time and energy, I say she pays up for all the time and energy the lower-class Lesbian expended dealing with the trauma caused by the classist behavior. As well, the reason the class-privileged Dyke called herself on her classism was probably due to free lessons in the past from lower-class Dykes. Whether paying up is considered a fine, amends, or a fee for time and energy, it needs to be paid. It's still the ethical thing to do.

More thoughts: Whatever the oppression is, we suffer from it. It often has devastating effects on our lives. We get fed up trying to educate other Lesbians. Paying up is so satisfying, I tried to think of how to apply it to other oppressions. Not so simple to do. Money and classism fit like a hand and glove, but money doesn't easily translate to other oppressions. I ran into conflicts as I tried to come up with other ideas. For example, I thought that an able-bodied Lesbian could give 4 hours of attendant time to the disabled Dyke she offended. Yet if the able-bodied Dyke was lower-class, and the disabled Lesbian class-privileged, that's a conflict that makes that idea unworkable. I realized that in applying paying up to other oppressions, there

isn't one easy solution, like there is for classism. Each situation will demand its own ethics. I can't begin to presume what'll work for Dykes who're Jewish, of color, fat, old, etc. They're the ones to decide what form of paying up they want.

Although paying up has a fun element to it, because we've turned the tables on a usually humiliating and powerless situation, this is no joke. After my most recent run-in with classism, I did the usual work involved in a confrontation, which includes telling the other Dyke what I want from her. This time I explained the concept of paying up and stated, "I want you to pay me an education fee, and I want it to go into a Lesbian money fund." I didn't ask if she was willing to do it, because I wasn't giving her a choice. I just firmly told her she needed to do it. To her credit, she didn't take it as a joke. She agreed, and paid up.

Thanks to Frieda and Caryatis for their good ideas, feedback, and advice.
Thanks to Caryatis for her editing work.

K. Ellen Kerr

Mirror, Mirror

Mirrors frighten me at night when I let myself think of you.

I thought of you the second I walked into Thackeray's and saw the woman across the room. I glimpsed her profile. She was standing in front of a bookcase, intently reading part of a thick volume. I hid behind the children's section to watch her. The woman was tall with grayish hair and hazel eyes. Those were the eyes, those very same eyes, that stared unblinkingly up from the driver's license I had saved out of your wallet. I had tossed the worn leather pouch into the trash bag with everything else, but I saved your driver's license. What did you use to call it? Oh yes, your 'ticket to freedom.' I sat on the corner of the bed that day, working, grinding it into my brain, memorizing your every feature.

That woman's features are yours. Her purple and white pants and blouse fluttered a little as she stepped closer to an open window and the warm breeze rippled the fabric across her abdomen. The outfit resembled a pantsuit you once wore to a PTA meeting just to add a little flair to the gathering. You walked into the church basement-turned-library with your silk swishing prettily around your legs and a halo of Tabu cologne lingering in the crest of your wave. You navigated around the room full of parents, nuns, and priests, to seat yourself next to the chairman of the board. The meeting was already in full swing. "Please, proceed," you indicated permissively, uncapping your good fountain pen with the gold flecks. Several years later I walked into that very same library. In my arms I carried a box filled with your books, dusted and packed slowly over a period of days. The last few boxes were filled with all my Nancy Drew stories, childhood picture books, and Henry Higgins books. I saved the Dr. Seuss foreign language dictionaries and *My Book About Me*, books you chose for me in your children's librarian wisdom. I also saved the copy of *Cinderella* from when you were a little girl. The other

books were unpacked and cataloged by the new school librarian, and marked with a label inside the front cover that these were a gift from _____, with my name typed in. If you knew that I had given most of my childhood books away too along with yours, you would frown.

The woman's frown puckered her bottom lip and drew the corner of her mouth up into a grimaced smile, just like yours. I had seen that frown in a half a dozen places since the day I gave those books away and it had always startled me. In the bus station when I left North Carolina the first time with my clothes crammed into a bag, those last children's books and your driver's license underneath it all. I caught a glimpse of your frown out of the corner of my eye. You were standing by the front window, gazing out between the cement posts, watching a man in a blue car drive away. What were you doing here? And why did it have to be now, just when I had finally decided that it was okay? I had stopped having those dreams, the ones that woke me up in the morning, unable to remember if you were dead or alive. I would finally decide that you were alive after all and feel relieved and disappointed and think about the books I had given away, wondering how I could ever get them all back. Then I would realize that wait a minute, no, you had died, not lived—weren't those obituaries and that glass sealed casket real? Or were those inventions of my nights too? Those dreams—the ones that confused me and manufactured feelings in me at random—those dreams had finally drifted into nothingness. And there you were standing in a bus station watching a man drive away.

The woman across the room glanced down from the window, turned more pages and looked at the back of the book, fingering her hair. Gray wisps strayed around her face. Those gray wisps first appeared on your temples and then worked their way back until all of your hair was salt and pepper. That, like your lupus, had happened so gradually that neither of us noticed at first. Then one day you were sitting up in my bed and had managed to stretch and grab the hand mirror from the dresser. I walked in carrying your lunch tray and tears were running down your cheeks, skin now wrinkled around your eyes. You looked at me

reproachfully and asked When did I become an old woman like your grandmother and why didn't you tell me? I honestly had not noticed before. Now I can pinpoint the gray hair as starting those first few months that you had been in pain but refused to go to a doctor. Insisting that it was just a touch of early arthritis, that all the women in our family had developed joint pain in their mid-thirties. By the time the gray was mixed evenly with the rest of your hair, we were spending Thanksgiving in darkness and silence because you couldn't stand the light or the sound. You lay in my bed and I lay on the floor because you were afraid for me to leave the room for long. When you were breathing deeply, I quietly stood up and crept out of the room, through the living room, and into the kitchen just to turn the blinds and look out the window. For dinner we picked at some turkey and stuffing that the ladies at the church brought by. You didn't want them to see you now. I had said you were asleep.

The woman put the book back on the shelf, folded her arms across her chest and stifled a yawn with her hand. Blue veins stood out against the paleness of her hands, forming dark purple mountain ridges. I used to place my finger over one of your veins and press down just to feel it pop back up under my finger. When it did, I would jerk my hand back and shake it, saying something about being 'grossed out.' Well then, don't do that, you'd snap and turn the page of your book. I saw your hands again after I had left for school and was attending a play with a date. I stood at the ticket window and my date pushed the money under the open half circle. The hand pushing the ticket back was yours. The skin was very pale, almost abnormally so, and the purple ridges stood in stark relief against your skin. I reached for the ticket and my hand touched a vein. The hand jerked back under the opening like a retreating turtle. Next please, you shrilled, and I let my date pull me away on his arm. Had you just moved away? Had you found my father and borne new children? Would I keep seeing you everywhere I went?

The skin on the woman's arms was no longer firm and taut, but lay against the arm below it as she stood with her arms crossed, studying more books lining the wall. Behind her arms,

her body was roundish, flattening downward with gravity. Like the body I saw changing into the swimsuit at the Y, bright with color and ruffles. You had been so delighted when you found a suit that fit and that looked cheerful and fun. It was because of that swimsuit that we began going to the pool every couple of days that summer for the mother-daughter swim. I studied you while you slipped out of your cotton slacks and shirt and into the swimsuit and wondered if your body was going to one day become mine. I wondered this again the last time I saw you, lying flat with tubes and wires and a monitor beeping, your arms bloated yellow and hot. Your eyes crusted almost closed, but not quite. Your hair patchy and flattened, unwashed for weeks with no one to brush it for you. I wonder if you heard me talking to the doctor as I assumed you were already gone. I wonder if you waited for me to speak to you as you lingered.

The woman turned from the bookshelf and looked directly at me before I had a chance to look away. Her features were yours—her eyes, her mouth, her hair, her hands, her body. She was you standing there looking me straight in the eye, unmoving, unblinking. Waiting. I touched my face and she touched hers. Like when I was little and you'd stand across from me and tell me I had an eyelash on my right cheek, touching the spot on your face opposite mine to show me. I would automatically reach up to my left cheek, reading your face like a map telling me You Are Here with a red arrow. You'd say No! The other side. And finally this turned into a friendly argument we shared until you died.

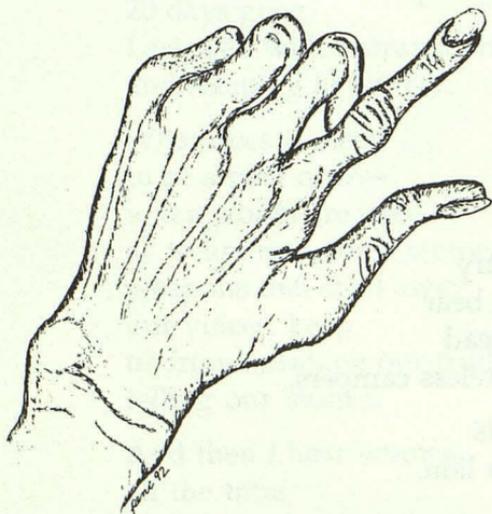
Yesterday was my birthday and I've lived my whole life with you, with mirrors frightening me at night as I step through the house, no longer capable of sleeping. Somewhere, from some storybook you read to me as a child, I remember that people whose souls have been stolen have no image in the mirror. And I know this might be true.

I've tried to evade your touch, yet I am unable to escape you. Unable to do anything but think of you as I noticed the first wild gray hairs creeping into my life. My eyes fill with dread and I count the hairs that fall out with each brushing.

The woman facing me is the configuration dominating my longings, dominating my worst nightmares. And her features are not yours—the eyes, the mouth, the hair, the hands, the body. Her features are mine. She is only my reflection, unwavering at last.

When I was little you told me that you had been unable to imagine continuing to live after your parents' deaths. But then your father died and you kept on living; later your mother died and you kept on living. You just do, you said. I wonder if you knew how no book could prepare me for this.

Yesterday I turned twenty-six and I've lived half my life without you.



untitled
Peni Hall

Jamie Lee Evans

I'm no Poet

*for Lisa Horan, my lover,
who always introduces me as her poet-girlfriend*

I am not a poet
my hands are not strong
the pen slips as I write
the words strain.

I don't handle language
with grace
balancing it
smoothly sliding across a marble table
unaware of its spoken eloquence.

Not me
my words are deliberate
forceful
my poems are simple
first person
me
My truth
My tongue
My sound
My life.

I come at poetry
like a hungry bear
to a loaf of bread
left out by careless campers.

I leap at words
as if to tame a lion.
Come here,
I yell at her
as if, in the struggle,
I will somehow gain control
or poetic ability.

I have to trick myself
into writing poems
(much like this one)
done backwards
under my bed
contorted,
still questioning itself,
a journal entry?
self-indulgent rambling?
a poem?

No, I don't write poetry
and my heart doesn't race
when my lover shows up at my door
with flowers and smiling.

No, I'm no poet
and I don't feel my blood clot
when I hear news that
my alcoholic mother is missing
10 days gone
20 days gone
Last seen with a strange man
and sleeping in her car.

What does it mean
to be a poet now—
when words are used
as weapons against women
weapons that steal away
our voices, keep
us from speaking our truths,
telling our stories.

And then I hear women
all the time
reading poems that say
they will speak for the *voiceless* women

and I wonder how they
think they know
what these women would say anyway?

And I'm no poet
but I have never felt better
than listening to the r-h-y rhymes
of another woman,
the rhythms of her song
delicately placed
in the framework of a poem.

The poem
would whisper my name —
Jamie Lee Evans, the writer,
say hello
and ask me over for tea.

Monifa Ajanaku

Disillusioned, Dismayed — Ready for Revolution Without Ethics, Community Cannot Exist

My ethical outlook is affected by my ethnicity. I am a woman-identified, lesbian-identified, female-born, out lesbian. I am personally empowered, outspoken and assertive. I have a poverty class background and have hidden disabilities. I am a lesbian of dark hue, and because of this I am not supported on many levels. For a code of ethics to be guiding principles that influence my daily reality is sometimes difficult, when I encounter intentional, repugnant behavior from Caucasian lesbians presenting themselves as allies and espousing a feminist politic. I remember and feel anew the rage and bitterness that is the legacy of dark-skinned peoples in this country. This behavior includes condescending, paternalistic attitudes, ethnocentrism, classism and downright sarcasm based on race and class privilege.

When lesbians of dark color believe the feminist rhetoric of these lesbians, it can be particularly demoralizing. Racism is incompatible with feminism. Lesbians who talk feminism and act out racism are pseudofeminist.

It is painful to have one's political thinking jeopardized because of interpersonal ethical violations. I wonder if some Caucasians are feeling beings when they seem barely capable of expressing love and compassion for me as an African American woman. Is this entrenched emotional illiteracy? After many tears and much anguished questioning, I still wonder when, or if, Caucasian lesbians will take responsibility for their role in perpetuating the status quo and in keeping lesbians of Color oppressed?

If I sound angry when I speak of my ideas and ideals concerning lesbian ethics, I am. And hurt, many times over, by the unethical behavior and attitudes of so-called progressive lesbians. However, these feelings do not preclude my ability to think

about or work toward manifesting a world where wimmin can live honorably — using a code of ethics exemplifying the depth of understanding, compassion and integrity necessary to create such a society.

How many of you with skin privilege have considered the cumulative effect that unethical behavior has on a dark woman? When it happens again and again, would you not expect that our trust level for light-skinned European descent wimmin would diminish? Not to mention that we would withdraw from certain spheres to maintain our emotional integrity in the face of blatant racism. I don't like losing faith in one of the movements I've worked hard in for over twenty years.

Yes, my recent and painful political disillusionments in the San Francisco Bay Area lesbian community* shape my current thinking on ethics. Within the community, it is not acknowledged that interracial relationships take a greater toll on lesbians of Color than Caucasian lesbians, or that long-time friends who switch loyalties from a lesbian to that lesbian's ex-lover cause pain. It is not acknowledged that an African American lesbian being pursued from a wimmin's establishment and publicly and falsely accused of a theft which did not occur is distressing news, as is the discovery that Caucasian lesbians take the incident lightly. We all lose when lesbians act out of a lack of integrity or consciousness and are untrue to the politics they claim to support. We lose because there is one less lesbian to do work. Faith in our possibility and potential as a community is deflated, undermined or lost.

What is required to develop lesbian ethics so that such community can even be pursued? We need to put a premium on honesty, ethics and principles. What are Lesbian ethics? We do not have any well-defined or articulated standards of ethical behavior. There is too much pain, insensitivity, emotional mayhem and turmoil among us. However, there are individual lesbians who

*Although I use the word community, I do not believe that we presently have a lesbian "community." If we do have community, it is dysfunctional at best. I believe we have the potential for a community.

possess viable feminist ethics and would like to discuss at length what this means.

An ethical lesbian acts like a warrior, possessing a quiet, gentle strength. She appropriately addresses lesbophobic and homophobic statements, attitudes and acts. She is actively committed to the causes of lesbians and heterosexual wimmin and behaves with the good of all lesbians or a particular segment of lesbians in mind. She understands that the personal is political. She takes seriously sisterhood and all that it can encompass.

An ethical lesbian never intentionally causes another lesbian or group of lesbians emotional or physical pain. An ethical lesbian is aware of the benefits of her skin privilege, if she is Caucasian, and relies on her personal integrity to prevent her from doing reprehensible acts to satisfy her personal wants, needs and desires. She promotes goodwill. An ethical lesbian allows a feminist philosophy of principles to dictate her behavior, particularly toward other lesbians. She prioritizes lesbians and takes her politics seriously. She lives by them, consistently and concretely working to expand her spiritual and political growth.

A philosophy of ethical behavior includes a constant critique of one's self and a commitment to expand growth in all areas. You can't be brutal and humane at the same time.

If we perceive ourselves as lesbians with political consciousness, then we have many responsibilities. We have the responsibility of being role models. We must never consciously perpetuate racism, ageism, anti-semitism, looksism, lesbophobia, ableism, sexism — all of the damaging "isms" that impact on wimmin daily.

Overall, we are responsible for keeping our community safe. Our most vital responsibility is to create positive change by whatever means necessary, short of hurting each other. This means committing to change based on principles of sisterhood. These principles are revolutionary because this society, like most, devalues wimmin. We are not conditioned to love ourselves and each other, and doing so subverts the system. Loving ourselves and each other constitutes revolution, not reformism. It sometimes means taking an unpopular position. This might mean not

succumbing to bullshit propaganda, not allowing vicious racist attitudes and behaviors to persist and prevail in our existing lesbian milieus. Remaining silent in the face of oppression is betrayal. Our silence is perceived as approval of destructive acts or attitudes.

People attempt to destroy what they fear, and Caucasians fear people of color; therefore, those of us who are feared are constantly under attack. This happens within the African American community as well as in the dominating culture for different reasons. Not battling internalized racism reduces self-esteem, confidence, and the ability to create self-loving and supporting environments.

Caucasian wimmin, feminist and nonfeminist must actively and consistently engage in anti-racist struggles. Although lesbians of Color struggle with issues of sexism as women, Caucasian women should not automatically expect support from lesbians of Color unless they are willing to recognize and work towards elimination of racism internally and externally. For African American lesbians, especially those of dark color, the greatest gift we can give ourselves, and what is imperative to our survival, is to believe in and love ourselves.

Reputable and credible anthropologists, historians, geneticists and other physical and social scientists speak of indisputable evidence that African women are the progenitors of the human race. If we believe in ancient female wisdom and hope to reclaim our connection to this source, it makes sense to honor the archetype which dark skinned lesbians hold. If hopes for sisterhood guide our hearts, each of us must accept our interrelatedness. In this way, we learn to know and share the knowledge of all our female ancestors.

I am not interested in communities, however, where Caucasian lesbians directly or indirectly hurt dark-skinned wimmin through their thoughtless behavior. A genuine lesbian community reflects the social and political harmony that comes from self-determination combined with empathy and ethical treatment of others. It also reflects a level of trust that enables the community to resolve its problems without the intervention of

outside powers. A community in its fullest sense reflects VIPS: the Values, Interest and Principles of all its inhabitants. Solidarity cannot exist if we are motivated by fear, or the need to control and have power over others.

Fear and the need for control and power create imbalanced and hurtful relationships. Communication theories suggest that there are three basic ways of handling communication difficulties in all relationships: confrontation, avoidance and cooperation. In order to have honest and nonthreatening confrontation and cooperation, we need to respect each other as human beings worthy of dignity. This is one of the key ingredients necessary for building trust.

How are lesbians to build trust politically if we are fraudulent in what we say and therefore how we live and treat each other? Unless our political convictions are expressed through our attitudes and behavior, we can never understand and accept how our differences contribute to the richness, beauty and strength of diversity. The flaw in the ethic of treating each other as we treat ourselves is that many of us often treat ourselves very foul.

Treating ourselves as inherently beautiful beings, instead of our own worst enemies, depends on our being connected with and caring for our inner spirits. Being a lesbian is a spiritual reality and phenomenon. From this connectedness comes my notion of sisterhood. It entails maintaining bonds with other wimmin that involve a warm feeling, understood dependable support, trust, involvement on some level with one another's growth, a shared interest in the goals and values of the other, and most importantly, a compatible understanding of what constitutes ethical behavior. In this way, we can deeply connect on many levels while remaining free to explore our differences.

Community arises from connection; it comes from the heart. To live from one's heartfelt integrity it is necessary to create a healthy community. It's important to take risks with other lesbians and ask for honest feedback. We must take responsibility for the choices we make. Let us not be fooled by empty rhetoric but instead evaluate situations on the basis of attitudes we hold and

the actions we take. Arrogant ignorance is the cornerstone of patriarchy. Wimmin who fall back on the excuse of ignorance to cause and maintain pain in the lesbian community are the enemies among us.

If advocating a strong belief in karma, or following the golden rule or the ten commandments, or even following a guru or a UFO would prevent lesbians from doing harmful atrocious things to each other, then so be it. When dykes act unethically and hurt each other it makes a mockery out of my political faith in our ability to create community or impact positive change in the world.

Are wimmin afraid of revolution, even a spiritual/emotional revolution? Can we cease being a burden and terror to ourselves and to each other? We must, because we can't organize, agitate, mobilize or raise our community consciousness while our spirits are broken or shattered.

We must take our rightful places and clean up this failed democracy and institute a femi-cratic society. Only in this way can we create new ways to govern ourselves. We need to make the planet safe to make living even possible. There is so much disorder that needs to be rectified.

If we are to advance into the 21st century with ideals and convictions that will facilitate positive change, we need to put our spiritual and political houses in order post haste. What are we doing and what do we need to do today to make the world a better place? Will we leave a lesbian legacy of integrity or will we die embracing our fear of revolution?



Once Upon A Time
Dawn A. Rudd

Aspen

Muscle Fetish

*A dyke said to me,
'don't you love it when those
tasty women athletes
all pumping blood and oxygen
power through some personal hurdle?'*

I love it
when my friend asks me to comb her hair
so her strength is free to paint
those intricate visions just for herself

I love it when she sings
taking minute gasps of air between
each tiny voiced sound, each cascade
of melody so light it's almost gone
before it reaches my ears.

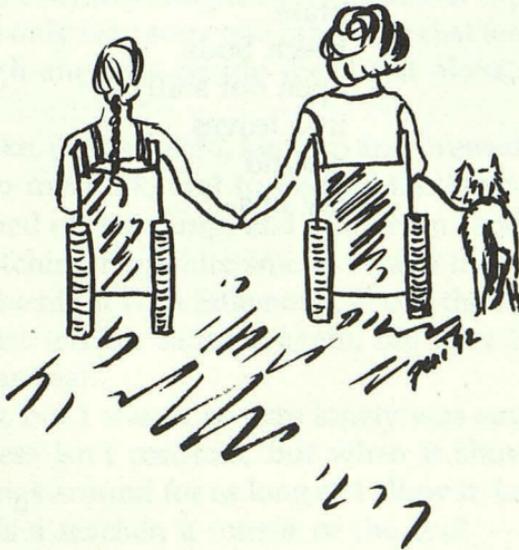
I love it when her worn-out, pressured
muscles, trembling with the onslaught
of a workout she never chose, the burn
which hardly stops, feels a hiatus
which allows her to move and dance

Dykes dribble over the muscles of dykes
who walk the hills
who mend cars
who dance till dawn

but ignore dykes
who lie all day in bed
who cannot direct their muscles
whose muscles tire easily.

Patriarchy told us we mustn't have muscles
but when they bowl, we don't have to bat...
we can refuse to play cricket.

You lust after muscles
I lust for spirit.
Watch out for the spirit of disabled dykes
you may not be able to take
such strength.



Crip Companions
Peni Hall

Aspen

Loving Song

Stretch marks
silver lines
pattern of twigs
and shadows
on your breasts
smell of
the forest
wet dew
soft and tough
grass
beech buds
open out softly
into leaves
around
my lips.

Deb Hipp

Loneliness Smokes Too Many Cigarettes

I dreamed one night that I was in my bed beside a woman that I knew in the dream, but not in my waking life. We were talking quietly. We stopped talking. I was propped up on one elbow, looking down at her head on my pillow. I moved slowly, tenderly, until my body was against hers. She put her hand up saying, "No, I don't want sex."

I just looked at her, then fell back onto the bed beside her. I was suddenly tired of having to explain myself to people who do not understand what I am about. I had not wanted sex, but only to feel the warmth of her body, her life, close against my own. I needed to listen to her breathing, close to my ear, and put my fingers into her hair. I needed to feel someone else's heartbeat in the dark. I didn't say anything to her. I could not explain it to her. I knew that the only way someone can know that feeling is to live it. Even though she was beside me, I felt alone, and deeply saddened.

When I woke, it was 4 A.M. I got up and brewed a cup of tea, walked over to my desk, and turned on the lamp. I could not write, so I turned off the lamp, and lit a green candle. I smoked a cigarette, watching the white smoke escape through the open window, into the night with little noise, above the streets with no traffic. I felt that terrible sadness again, but now I was awake. This time it was real.

I felt lonely, but I wasn't so sure lonely was such a bad way to be. Loneliness isn't constant, but when it shows up at my doorstep, it hangs around for as long as I allow it. Loneliness has a message. It is a teacher, a mirror of the soul — of what lies dormant, as well as what moves around crying or screaming or just being. It is the naked self. The scary thing about loneliness is its voice. It is a baby crying in the night, and a child afraid of the dark. It is the whispers of the unknown.

Loneliness is letting go of something, whether that something is a person, or an idea, or a way of being. It is a mediator between what was and what is. It is the journey between that is loneliness. Loneliness follows you like a shadow in the afternoon, then slips under the covers with you at night without saying a word. It's all in the look. The eyes of loneliness are your own.

At that moment, the only emotions I had to deal with were my own. No one would be walking into my living room asking me why I was up in the middle of the night, burning a candle in the dark, staring at empty streets. I had to explain nothing. In my aloneness, I remembered that the only relationship I would have forever is this relationship with my self.

Perhaps that woman in the dream was an aspect of myself. The part of me that tires of always having to understand everything. I wanted to go back to sleep that night and dream something wonderful — perhaps that I was flying so close to the stars, so close to myself that I would know I had always been able to fly.

I don't remember what I dreamed when I went back to sleep. I know only that there is a part of myself that is now more patient, more sure. When I can hold that part in my dreams, when it doesn't put up its hand and stop me, I will have learned my lesson about loneliness. And the next time, when I dream, I will fly.



At Home
Rya Philips

Oregon Countree Dykes clip art

Zoe Rhine

Beyond the Sway

It is Saturday morning and I am walking uphill on Aston Street by the Frances Apartments where Church Street crosses. I stop in front of the red brick church where the cypress trees are. I'm thinking about fate. The yard of the Trinity Episcopal Church is soft and shaded, with thin lime-green grass and a new layer of fallen needles. I've never thought about fate before. I'm trying to decide if I believe in fortune and final outcomes? It is Saturday morning and walking uphill I am thinking about love and loneliness.

Now that I live downtown, I walk a lot. I am only working part-time so it feels like I'm loafing. I feel it first in the top of my shoulders, small circles of nerves bursting, as if I'm losing some part of my self. But I've read that both Lao Tzu and Walt Whitman saw loafing as inviting the soul. I try to think of it this way. I make vows to myself never to walk again as if I'm going somewhere. I slow myself down now even when it is cold outside. I told a friend this, and then I didn't say anything, waiting to see if her knew what I meant.

"You want to see," he said quickly, like passing me safely through a gate at wartime.

"Yes," I said.

The roof of Trinity Church is green. I think of the ocean when I notice it, of some wavy, vulva-like sea animal lying on the ocean bottom. I think of my father or of his mother, my grandmother, both dead; the color of mints, it was their favorite color. The green church roof is the color of hard curly mosses that grow at the bottom of trees. It is copper plate that has tarnished.

The three domes of St. Lawrence's are green, also. So is the copper weather cock on the top of the First Presbyterian, and the flat roof of the Federal Building uptown. There were spots on the wood of my floor that had turned the same green when I first pulled the brown linoleum up. Green like an old copper penny. I

am living now in a room on a second floor. The building was originally a bank. It was built at the turn of the century, and I've seen a picture of the building when there were cobblestones reaching across the muddy, yet unpaved street. Sometimes, I lie in bed and picture the large safes, full of pads of money, that were in my room long ago, and the desks with secretaries typing, sucking on red and yellow candies, watching the same shadows from the cast iron window frames, crossing the wall, early mornings.

I am in love with a woman. Her name is China. She has black hair, which I always notice first when I see her, and what I like to look at when she does not know. The blackness of her hair is definite, and I like to believe that it symbolizes the unequivocalness of her love for me, and that our lives will soon join. We don't live together. She lives in a separate life, in a house with another person, and comes to see me. Sometimes we are not honest, because when we are honest we get close, and that jars against the other side of China's life that she is trying to make work.

"I am not in love with her," China tells me. "It is more like a business relationship."

This other person makes a lot of money; buys China imported cheese and lace lingerie. China works part-time in a sandwich shop, to have something to do ... One day China handed me a small piece of folded up paper. I was to read the note after she left, but not to ever mention it to her. It was something she had never told anyone. The secret she had written to me, folded over and over itself like she must have done with it inside herself, was that she longed more than anything in the world, to be an orchestra conductor. She had wanted to be the first woman conductor at the Met, but that had already gone on and happened without her.

At night, I think there must be more than only four ways to lie in bed. I never hear people talk about this. Last night I slept on my back with my arms and legs spread out, trying not to let any part of myself touch. I was trying not to lie on myself. Lao Tzu says not to have edges that catch. He says to remain "untangled," as well as "unconfused." Lying in bed this way seemed healthy, although it made the small of my back hurt.

Walking up the sidewalk, I think about walking into fate, and find myself wondering if this is how fate is? It is a rushing thought, the way new things run themselves into the mind. "I could take things as they come," is what I stand there on the sidewalk thinking, some new sense of courage occurring inside me. I take a deep breath. I realize that I seldom see things how they are. I've been living inside hard edges inside my mind, wanting things to be a certain way. Standing there under the high blue sky, I feel myself more. I feel the soft area inside the edges. I look up Church Street to the corner past the Swannanoa Dry Cleaners, and feel my life sweep open, as if my small lighted world becomes wide sideways, too. With what seems like clear insight, I say, "I will find my way with things exactly as they are." I step off the curb excited by the light in the grass and the strength of my own thinking. I feel larger inside. I will tell these things to China. I will tell her how much I love her.

There is rain and it is Monday when she comes. We drink jasmine tea from my blue china tea pot, and I talk to her all morning. Then she stands up to leave. She says, "I need to go think. . . I don't know what to do with my love for you." — She says to me, "It's as if there is no place."

It is in the middle of the first floor, below the blown up dinosaur left over from a Halloween party, where we stop hugging, and kiss each other, softly, like telling small stories. Our time always has a largeness to me like a long piece of sound, but I start feeling time fall off, into sections. We are struggling. Our bodies stop moving into each other. I feel time failing. Our closeness is a thin strand pulled tight between us. I do not say anything. Then she starts touching me. I lie in close to her, us standing up. She turns me around and pulls me close, my back against her. I think she is trying to say something to me, some jammed up feeling inside her. We kneel down to the floor with her back sliding against the wall and I rest on her bent leg and with her hand she reaches under my shirt and touches my stomach, and then she reaches between my legs and makes love to me. At first I think I will lose my mind and I say this, then I sob. The sobs are large like bowls. I turn and lay my head in her lap and

she puts her arms around me. First I feel the way it feels inside me when I feel how much a part of her I am. Then, secondly, I feel directly how I've been keeping away from my own life. Truth, like a lighted field, opens up across the inside of me. Here, unlike before when I thought I understood, there is no falseness, and I understand it is a place deep and always inside me, where these thoughts had already been. Where, inside, do words come from, is what I lay there on the floor, learning, China holding me. Then China leaves. I lock the door behind her.

I stand at the middle window in my room. There is a single pigeon sitting on the peak of the old Fine Arts Theater across the street, where they used to show dirty movies. The pigeon is standing still, looking out over the edge. "To be unconfused is to find balance," even beyond the sway of love. The pigeon has, I think, the high post of the world.

Jen Benka

Tracing

Had no blood on the wood boat creaking
 white sail full with air
 puffed out proud like the chest of the cock crowing.
 I own no Mayflower stock.
 My blood crossed on steel
 liners slicing ocean in half
 parting to the promised
 land of opportunity Lady Liberty
 Let Freedom Ring.

We lived along the Czech border
 in a mining region, Silesia.
 Lung dust malnutrition cave labor coal.
 With thick hands we dug into mountain bowels for soft black rock
 (I dig I sift I chisel I pick I dust I piece together)
 Dug until our hands didn't come clean.
 Dug until we died in the dead dark.

I am alone sitting in my Grandfather's parlor.
 I pronounce Silesia and it sounds like Silence.
 I pronounce my Grandfather's name which is my name.
 It is a short quick one-two name and ends with Ka
 like someone has hit me in the gut.

I rub rose lotion into my hands
 rub out the tension locked in my knuckles
 with a kneading dough rhythm
 these joints starch stiff rusted hinges
 Grandma gave me her hands.

I am alone looking into the reflection
my face is a quarry cut, drilled, excavated.
I see Grandma's hard silver-blue gun-barrel eyes
cold iron tunnels loaded with temper.
But I know my eyes are from two places.
They are points of lineage.
They are the other women who are somewhere inside of me.
Phoebe gave them to Elzora, Elzora gave them to Sis
(who is my mother) Sis gave them to me.
Women buried in a recessive blue-eyed gene
twirling beneath my skin.

I am a product of my own past
but I have also inherited whole condensed pasts.
I am a past within a past.
A context within a context.
A world within a world.

Only in flashes fast and bright as lightning
can I imagine the totality of myself, of anyone
and of this galaxy.
Everything I see is turned upside-down
then right-side up again.

This past, these women are secret codes
I don't know how to crack
stories I don't know how to spill.
Even Watson and Crick can't tell me.
(I dig I sift I chisel I pick I dust I piece together).

I pricked my finger with a straight pin
squeezed until I had a bubble of blood
smeared a silent scarlet streak
across the clear glass slide
rolled back the lens.

I was pretending I was Marie Curie
but where she found radium
I would find connections
inroads to the women who are me.
I saw only small circles.
I was no closer.

The car door is locked
I am driving south.
I think about movement
and dislocation.

How when I'm moving I am anywhere
nowhere everywhere at once.
how there is no such thing as destination
or conclusion. No such thing as time
with markers sign posts hands fingers
pointing telling.
How there is no toward no forward
only movement amidst constancy.
I am driving to the house I have a key to.
I am again looking for clues.

I find Aunt Genevieve's genealogy chart.
Names on lines connected to lines with names
no faces no hands no eyes no knuckles
no primary sources.

I am tracing lines
trying to locate histories
my skin speaks incessantly
(I dig I sift I chisel I pick I dust
I piece together).

Emily Ballou

Poem for Corn Moon Sister:
what I learned among women

*I was forced to change
the assembly of my bones.*

— Janet Lark

I am different.

The sky is pumpkin tiger
lily sexy, closing
up at night, never reopening
quite the same.
Who is this woman?
Who owns these bones?
birthday-sunset-walking into the corn
(husks rising, husks falling away)
husky bones entwined
in everything that has changed me.

I fall in
as if this field were a lap
held in a chant:
Corn-Mother, Corn-Sister.

Some leave her in the field to be buried.
some wrap her in moon.
Some crush her to make perfume for their necks.
What I have learned is that first
there are buttercups and daisies
then tiger lilies
(all at once, they explode overnight)
then loose strife purple sucking queen
anne's lace.

Some bathe her. Some bathe with her.
Some play her fingers, make music.

Some plant her and grow tomatoes.
 I have learned to pick broccoli
 before it flowers bitter and yellow.
 I have learned to let out my body,
 I have learned to crush
 herbs, to recognize cilantro,
 cumin, basil, turmeric.

Some drink her and see rose flour and fire.
 Some let her be eaten by the birds.
 Some hold her under their dresses and pretend
 to be pregnant. I have learned to love
 my body. I have learned that women,
 like fire made with sage, cedar or pine
 smell differently.
 I have learned that women my mother's age
 are women like me.

Some sing to her on that mother-swing.
 Some lock her in a box of treasure.
 Some lick her forever.

I learn and walk to blackberries
 at the abandoned house of thread
 and antique lace. My hands
 are loved blackberry hands,
 they are marked with this place.

Some fall into her and never want out.

What I have learned is that bones
 do not always move
 the way you want them to.
 That the Blue Heron body in the pond
 exists only for the motion
 of water and fish
 darting fists, dark waves
 under the loose strife;
 can only move in certain ways:
 smoke stretching and folding
 stretching and folding.

Contributors' Notes

Anonymous asks that people refrain from speculation about her identity. In each of our geographical communities, there are women who could have written this, and whose peace and legal status should not be disturbed by curiosity. Thank you.

Aspen is a lesbian writer living in England.

Carole Graham was a radical hellraiser... an artist, playwright and poet. Still raging against injustice and the medical establishment, she took her own life in June 1988, a victim of cancer.

China Marks: A recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, China Marks makes sculptures and drawings that have been shown in solo and group exhibitions at museums and galleries in New York and elsewhere in the country.

Dawn Rudd: I am a 30-year-old artist, activist, poet and healing warrior woman, committed to truth and integrity. I believe women are the healers and saviors of this planet, with the power to transform our lives and the lives of others through vision, love and determination. I am proud to be a woman, proud to be of African and Native American descent and determined to share all that I am with my communities. My creativity is a celebration of my love, my spirit and my diversity.

Deb Hipp: I'm a 34-year-old white lesbian, living in Kansas City. I grew up in a small middle-class town in Illinois, being told I should be like everyone else. I write for the child inside me, who never had a voice. In writing, I find the freedom of knowing who I am.

Elana Dykewomon is grateful and pleased when other dykes edit *Sinister Wisdom*. She remains a middle aged, middle class Jew out on a limb and waving.

Elliott: She is a white, working class lesbian, just turned 30 and disabled. She said too much already. She can think of nothing else to say.

Emily Ballou: I'm doing my Masters in Women's Studies at the University of Sydney. Just returned last year from Kate Millet's farm. Struggling white poet, 24-years-old, raised middle-class.

Jamie Lee Evans is a 26-year-old Mixed-Blood Asian Feminist Lesbian from the lower class and makes her living with two part-

time jobs: as a volunteer trainer at San Francisco Women Against Rape and as the marketing director of Aunt Lute Books. She writes and lives in Oakland, CA.

Jen Benka: I am a 25-year-old, middle-class Polish lesbian-feminist poet and performance artist living in Milwaukee. I have performed in Milwaukee, Madison, Chicago and New York City. I try, with my work, to combat denial, repression and silence. Mine and yours.

Joan Cofrancesco lives in upstate New York. She has a book coming out in June, entitled *Walpurgis Night*, by San Diego Poets Press. She grew up in a middle-class Italian background. She lives with her lover and two cats. She enjoys walking through the woods, reading poetry, listening to classical music.

Julia Youngblood is a southern transplant photographer and writer living in San Francisco. Other publications featuring Youngblood's work include *Outlook*, *Feminist Art News*, *Matrix*, *Bay Times*, *The Louisville Review* and the *Louisville Times*. Photography exhibitions include solo and group shows at The Mission Cultural Center, Tula Gallery in Atlanta, The Brick Hut, S.F. City Hall, 2 1/2 x 4 1/2 Fotogalerie in Amsterdam, Sargent Johnson Gallery, La Peña, Fresno Art Museum, The Photographic Archives and Speed Museum in Louisville, Kentucky.

Julie Blackwomon is a 49-year-old, working class, black Lesbian feminist who lives and works in Philadelphia. She seldom submits material for publication and submitted these pieces only because she is home with the flu. She is the author of a poetry book *Revolutionary Blues*, and co-author of *Voyages Out 2*. Most recently she is published in *Riding Desire*, *Women's Glib* and soon to be published *Parenting Anthology*. She is working on a book of short stories.

K. Ellen Kerr is my pseudonym. I am a 28-year-old, middle-class fat dyke writer of German descent. I am a displaced Southern writer living in Chicago with my three cats. I am finishing my dissertation on women's writing about incest. My work has been published in *Out/Look*, *The Heartlands Today*, and *Sanskrit*.

Ka Yin Fong is a photoartist living in Toronto.

Kathryn Kirk: I became a lesbian and photographer almost simultaneously seventeen years ago. With roots in the Midwest and

after ten years in Northampton, MA, I arrived in New York city with Hurricane Gloria in 1985. I will stay until I have experienced and photographed more of the beauty and complexity of city life:

Kirsten Backstrom: I am a 32-year-old lesbian, white, from the lower-middle class. My fiction and essays have appeared most recently in *The American Voice*, *Trivia*, *Hurricane Alice* and the new Papier-Mache Press anthology *If I Had My Life To Live Over I Would Pick More Daisies*. I live in Seattle, where I teach community service writing classes, work in a bookstore and make sculptural baskets to supplement my writing.

Lucy A. Tatman: Age 27, white, uncanny resemblance to bespectacled, befuddled lesbian academic, with WASP-from-hell background. Eternally intrigued by the rhythm, taste, texture of words. Reads lesbian theory to stay sane, poetry to keep dreaming, and does the dishes cause she likes to. Has a fondness for incomplete sentences.

Melissa Farley is a 50-year-old feminist psychologist in San Francisco. She has taught home altarmaking, feminist performance art, and group therapy, and is currently doing research on long-term physical effects of childhood sexual assault. An activist for 25 years, she has been arrested 13 times, most often for shredding mainstream pornography. She is middle class, many of her ancestors were Celts and she has a green-haired feminist daughter.

Monifa Ajanaku is a 40ish, African American, Southern-born, raised poor Lesbian.

Naja Sorella: I was born in 1952, and grew up working-class, with a mother from an inner-city working-class background and a father from rural poor. Frieda, my wonderful deliciously round lover of almost 9 years, helps make life with chronic illness more bearable. The other loves of my life are painting, writing, reading, collecting stones/crystals and talking with other Separatists.

Neta C. Crawford is African American, in her 30s, and is a university professor. She is from the lower middle class and has been a vegetarian for 18 years.

Pamela Gray is a 37-year-old Jewish lesbian poet, playwright, screenwriter and comedian living in Santa Monica. "3-out-of-4..." won the first place Woman in the Moon Poetry Prize for 1992. Pamela wrote the "Violations" episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Peni Hall is a visual artist, video producer and technical coordinator for theater and video who resides in Berkeley, CA. Since 1985 she has worked as Technical Coordinator and has been a performer with WRY CRIPS Disabled Women's Theater. In 1991, she created "*Migraine 2000*," her first art video with Melanie Media. Peni is the originator of Hallways Productions, a series of disability-related art and cartoons. Her art has been featured in such journals as *Sinister Wisdom*, *Belle Lettres*, *Hikane*, *This Brain Has A Mouth*, and the upcoming disability anthology, *Range of Motion*.

Sally Bellerose: I am a 42-year old, white, working-class lesbian, writer, mother, nurse. My work has been published in various places including the anthologies *Women On Women Two*, *Sister/Stranger*, *The Poetry of Sex*, and *The Persistent Desire*.

Susan Stinson's first novel will be published by Spinsters, Ink in 1994. *Belly Songs: In Celebration of Fat Women*, a chapbook, will also appear in 1994 (Orogeny). She is a 32-year-old, raised middle-class, European-American who lives with joy in Easthampton, MA.

tova is a Jewish, working-class dyke whose poems have been published around and about over the years. She is an editor of *Bridges*, the magazine for Jewish feminists and our friends. She lives in Seattle, where she has been dealing with the mud pile she used to call her garden, before it rained every single one of the last 30+ days, except for today, when it's sunny and near 80, and she has to be inside at work all day.

Zoe Rhine: I'm a 36-year-old Francophile, living in Asheville, North Carolina, who loves gardening, animals, coffee, books, and Lisa. I am white and working-class.

Books Received

About the Books Received List: We list (almost) all the books we get in the mail. Unfortunately, we never have room to review everything we think should be reviewed. I tend to list books here by books/authors/presses I think are important (although all books from one press are listed together), with an emphasis on lesbian-owned presses. If I've read all or part of a book I may add subjective qualifiers like "read this." While the presence of adjectives can be interpreted as editorial endorsement, the absence of them only means I'm going by the publisher's press release — Elana.

QUICKSAND! African American Lesbian Erotica — the poetry of sex, coming out and celebration by Folisade. 1992, \$8, Black Angels Press, POB 14785, Oakland, CA 94614.

The Black Back-Ups — this first collection of poetry, spanning work over the past 20 years, reflects the faces, voices, feelings, words, and stories of an African-American family, neighborhood and town, by Kate Rushin. 1993, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Stone Butch Blues — a novel about a working-class lesbian growing up in the '50s, coming out in the '60s and deciding to pass as a man in the '70s, by Leslie Feinberg. 1993, \$10.95, Firebrand.

The Solitary Twist is the first detective novel where the PI uses *Sinister Wisdom* to pick up a client! Elizabeth Pincus' second engaging Nell Fury mystery. 1993, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink, POB 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Ronnie Gilbert on Mother Jones: Face to Face With the Most Dangerous Woman in America is a one woman musical of the life of Mother Jones, written and performed by folk singer and actor Ronnie Gilbert. 1993, \$9.95, Conari Press, 1144 65th St., Suite B, Emeryville, CA 94608.

Can't Keep a Straight Face, A Lesbian Looks and Laughs at Life — collected essays by activist and social commentator Ellen Orleans. 1992, \$7.50, Laugh Lines Press, POB 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004.

Childless by Choice: A Feminist Anthology — stories by women who see their decisions not to have children as positive, empowering and creative, edited by Irene Reti. 1992, \$8.95, HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Alma Rose is a debut novel, set in the West, of "life and love off the beaten track," by Edith Forbes. 1993, \$10.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Avenue, Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

Smokescreen — a mystery "probing the dangers of counterfeit passions in LA," by Lynette Prucha. 1993, \$10.95, Clothespin Fever Press, 655 Fourth Ave., Suite 34, San Diego, CA 92101.

We Oughta Be In Pictures — "two light romantic comedy screenplays that show lesbians as real, fun people," by Julia Willis. 1993, \$9.95, Alamo Square Press, P.O. Box 14543, San Francisco, CA 94114.

Silverlake Heat — a novel of suspense, passion and intrigue, set in LA's gay Silverlake District, by Carol Schmidt. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Saving Grace — a lesbian murder mystery with corporate suspense, by the author of *Passion Bay*, Jennifer Fulton. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

The Year Seven — in some near future everyone but a scattering of women up and die, by Molleen Zanger. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Curious Wine — a tenth anniversary edition of a classic lesbian novel, by Katherine V. Forrest. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Chautauqua — a romance and mystery novel set in Louisiana, by Catherine Ennis. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

A Fucking Brief History of Fucking — poems by Janet Mason. 1992, Insight to Riot Press, c/o 2300 Pine Street, #9, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

First Refrains, Selected Poems of 1984 (Part One of A Seven-Course Feast) by Kay Stoner. 1992, Stoner Productions, POB 8116, Santa Rosa, CA 95407.

Eating Our Hearts Out, Personal Accounts of Women's Relationship to Food provides the comfort of community for women who struggle with this issue and reminders of how society oppresses women's bodies, edited by Leslea Newman. 1993, \$12.95, Crossing, Freedom, CA 95019.

The Time of Our Lives, Women Write on Sex After 40, edited by Dena Taylor and Amber Coverdale Sumrall. 1993, \$12.95, Crossing Press.

On Intimate Terms, The Psychology of Difference in Lesbian Relationships argues that lesbian relationships are not patterned on heterosexual ones, but are a way of supporting personal growth and development with a partner who is different in some individual meaningful way, not in terms of gender, by Beverly Burch. 1993, \$27.50, Univ. of Ill. Press, 54 East Gregory Drive, Champaign, IL 61820.

Elizabeth Bishop, Life and the Memory of It traces Bishop's development as a poet from her childhood in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia, by Brett C. Millier. 1993, \$28, UC Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Seeing Through Clothes is a reprint of the 1975 work examining body and clothing in Western art, by Anne Hollander. 1993, \$18, UC Press.

Protest & Possibility in the Writing of Tillie Olsen argues that the most subversive function of Olsen's writing is the assertion that life can be other than and more than it is, by Mara Faulkner. 1993, Univ. Press of Virginia.

Living in the Margins: Racism, sexism & feminism in Australia analyzes commonalities and differences in the lives of Australians, particularly Aboriginal women and women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, by Jan Pettman. 1992, \$19.95.

The War Against Women proves that women's oppression is an intrinsic part of our culture, "a feminist call to arms," by Marilyn French. 1992, \$12, Ballantine.

He, She and It is a novel of morality and courage in the 21st century, by Marge Piercy. 1991, \$5.99, Fawcett Crest/Ballantine.

Coping with Chemotherapy — revised and updated information on the latest treatments and newest drugs, nutrition and exercise, emotional aspects, by Nancy Bruning. 1993, \$5.99, Ballantine.

The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men and the New York Times — New York Times, by Nan Robertson. 1992, \$10, Ballantine.

The Women's Room — a new edition of the 1977 straight feminist classic by Marilyn French, with an Afterword by Susan Faludi. 1977/1993, \$12.00, Ballantine.

Mothers and Daughters — many women cartoonists explore that very special relationship, edited by Liza Donnelly. 1993, \$8, Ballantine.

In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth — interesting, scholarly excavation informed by feminism by Tikva Frymer-Kensky. 1993, \$10.00, Fawcett/Columbine.

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PUBLICATIONS

ESTO NO TIENE NOMBRE, revista de lesbianas latinas en miami, is a new quarterly creative forum for latina lesbians with a Miami twist. Open to all forms (Spanish, Spanglish, English), \$10 per year (checks to: Tatiana de la Tierra). Guidelines, subs to: 4700 NW 7th St. #463, Miami, FL 33126.

MAIZE, A Lesbian Country Magazine. \$10 per year (4 issues). Single issue \$3.50. New address: MAIZE, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

WOMEN FIGHT BACK — monthly national newsletter to “tell it like it is” — wants personal statements of discrimination as well as subscriptions (\$36 for 12). POB 161775, Cupertino, CA 95016.

WE ARE HERE — national resource guide for lesbian and gay youth, pub. by the Gay Youth Comm. Coalition of the Bay Area, \$5 (pay to We Are Here) from: 2215 Market St., #479, SF, CA 94114.

SEP — publication for lesbian separatists only since 1986. Ask a lesbian separatist how to reach us. Be a part of the contagious spread of dyke separatist courage!

TEEN VOICES — by, for & about teenage and young adult women, \$2 for a sample to: Women Express, POB 6009 JFK, Boston, MA 02114.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

LESBIAN ADVENTURE STORIES anthology: wild women, eccentric characters, sexual exploits, fiction/nonfiction. Mikaya/Tough Dove Books, 11101 Eastside Rd., Ukiah, CA 95482. Deadline: January 1994.

Call for submissions by *BATTERED LESBIANS*. SASE for guidelines. E. Hodge/J. Malott, Univ. of Cincinnati, ML374, Cincinnati, OH 45221.

SPINSTERS INK is seeking feminist writing by women of color — full-length novels and non-fiction works. For more info: POB 300170, Dept. C, Minneapolis, MN 55403 (612) 377-0287.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE — Putting all "correctness" aside, let's be honest and claim ALL we are, have been and will be for centuries! All and every form (photos, bios, herstory, songs, jokes, rumors, anecdotes, fashion, art, names, organizations, bars, poetry, essays, stories, radical and separatist material) welcome. For guidelines, info: SASE to Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, running deadline.

MULTICULTURAL LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS anthology. First-person, cassettes, interviews O.K. Topics are: racism within and outside relationships, having/raising children; socializing/friendships; language differences, etc. For guidelines, info: SASE to Rene Dawson & Terri Jewell, PO Box 23154, Lansing, MI 48909.

ARAB FEMINISTS: Arab-American, Arab-Canadian, Arab/Middle Eastern women now living in the U.S. or Canada, for an anthology to be pub. by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, in order to promote visibility, provide a forum and sustain political activists. All forms. For more info, SASE to: J. Kadi, POB 7556, Minneapolis, MN 55407.

RISING TIDE PRESS, a new lesbian publisher, seeks full-length lesbian novels. For guidelines, send SASE to: Rising Tide Press, 5 Kivy St., Huntington Station, NY 11746.

AT THE CROSSROADS, new magazine combining feminism, spirituality and new paradigm science seeks essays, reviews, theory, research, narratives. PO Box 112, St. Paul, AR 72760.

LIKE WRITING ABOUT WOMEN? We need your stories! **LAVENDER LIFE**, 215 Cleveland Ave., Endicott, NY 13760.

BAD ATTITUDE is a new radical women's newspaper seeking international reports of women's struggle on every front. Info: 121 Railton Rd., London SE24 0LR, England.

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/FESTIVALS

OLOC — Old Lesbians Organizing for Change helps form new groups of lesbians over 60, provides ageism education, stimulates existing groups to confront ageism. Contact: OLOC, POB 980422, Houston, TX 77098.

AUSTRALIAN LESBIAN FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE, Oct. 15-18, 1993. Write PO Box 985, Fremantle, Western Australia 6160 for info.

INTERNATIONAL MARCH on the UN to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People, June 26, 1994, called by the International Lesbian and Gay Assoc. (ILGA) & U.S. organizers Stonewall 25. US org. meeting Jan. 15-17 in Dallas. Much more info: Stonewall 25, 208 W. 13th St., NYC, NY 10011-7799.

MICHIGAN WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL, August 10-15, 1993, oldest and largest of womyn's music festivals, 6-day all camping event. Contact WWTMC, POB 22, Walhalla, MI 49458, 616/757-4766.

NORTH EAST WOMEN'S MUSICAL RETREAT, Labor Day Weekend, September 3-6, 1993. Contact NEWMR, PO Box 550, Branford, CT 06405, 203/293-8026

GRAILVILLE, an education center conducting programs for women in SW Ohio offers residential semester, New Women, New Earth, January 25 - May 18, 1994. Contact: 932 O'Bannonville Rd., Loveland, OH 45140, 513/683-2340.

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SAPPHO'S, a program providing safe, affordable, transitional housing for women of all ages and incomes in San Francisco, CA. Information, volunteers, donations, contact 859 Fulton St., SF, CA 94117, 415/775-3243.

PARADISE RECOVERY CENTER, new facility for treatment of gay, lesbian and bisexual alcohol and drug abusers. 611 Truman Ave., Key West, FL 33040, 305/293-9929, fax 305/293-0587.

SPINSTERHAVEN, INC., a retirement haven for older women and women with disabilities, promoting physical, cultural and spiritual well-being of women. Membership info and donations, PO Box 718, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

OROGENY, a new lesbian press, is committed to finding the power and joy in fat women's bodies and lives, and seeks donations toward first book *Belly Songs: In Celebration of Fat Women*, by Susan Stinson. POB 433, Northampton, MA 01061.

SHE — Sister Homelands on Earth has purchased its first two acres — Saguario Sisterland — to primarily provide accessible space for lesbians with mobility/or allergy/chemical sensitivity disabilities and low-income wimmin. Money and support services are critical to SHE's survival — write to SHE at POB 5285, Tucson, AZ 85703, inc. SASE for reply.

WHIPTAIL WOMYN'S COLLECTIVE is trying to organize a womyn-only dyke-identified, drug-smoke-alcohol free space in S.F. & needs all the help it can get. Send \$, questions, energy to: 3543 18th St. Box #29, S.F., CA 94110.

LAVENDER L.E.A.F. is the Lesbian Emergency Action Fund of money given anonymously, available to any S.F. or Alameda County (CA) woman-born lesbian of poverty or working class background who needs it. Lavender L.E.A.F.'s long-term goal is to diminish economic disparities among lesbians. Send checks, queries to: L. Leaf, POB 20921, Oakland, CA 94620.

WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS — desperately needs money to continue, as well as volunteers to read and type. WBP provides over 750 titles to blind, partially sighted and print disabled women, and publishes a great newsletter. Tax-deductible donations, queries to: WBP, POB 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408, (612) 872-4352.

THE LABYRIS PROJECT: Helping Lesbians Heal from Incest — wants a safe home for all lesbians having trouble surviving due to incest memories, as well as a meeting place for local survivors. Community-based, holistic, realistic, feminist healing. Send checks or SASE for info: New Mexico REEF/Labyris Project, POB 40097, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

LESBIANS IN CRITICAL NEED have been sending us increasing numbers of requests to run announcements for their personal funds. Instead of printing these individual appeals, we urge you to contribute frequently and generously to local organizations. Imagine it as if we just told you your childhood best friend, your favorite gym teacher, an admired dyke activist or your first lover had metastatic cancer and couldn't pay the doctor bills; or had developed E.I., could no longer leave her house and had no way to get or pay for groceries. Then make a contribution to Lavender L.E.A.F., The Dykefund, the Charlotte Maxwell Clinic, The Women's Cancer Resource Center (these are Bay Area resources, find the ones in your community). We need full support networks as well as money — dykes willing to shop, drive, talk, listen, organize.

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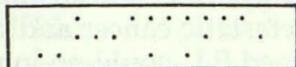
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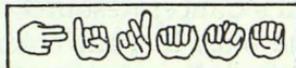
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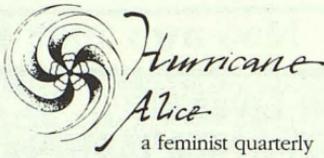
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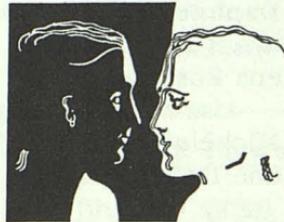
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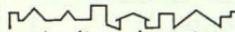
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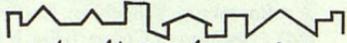


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Notes on Scents

A few weeks ago, I picked up the mail for *Sinister Wisdom* — one of my jobs here — and, when I tore open one of the newsletters I'm always glad we get, I thought perhaps a tiny little lesbian was in the manila envelope smoking a nonfilter. I quickly sealed it up, washed my hands, went outside to cleanse the smoke from my nose, and went back to the mail. A few moments later, I opened a letter asking for subscription information, and discovered there was apparently a tiny little department store employee in there with a spray bottle of cologne. This time escape was hopeless: I had a headache the rest of the day.

Of course, it turned out not to be a honey-I-shrunk-the-dykes situation, just paper sent to *SW* by some dykes who smoke, or use perfume or scented stationery. Yes, it's true, I'm here to harangue you about fragrances, and the deadly impact they have on people with allergies, EI, or a host of other health problems. Especially, I want to let you all know — which, it seems, most folks do not — that paper sucks up odors like a sponge, and then releases them just in time to poison the recipient on its arrival at, for instance, *SW*'s mail box. And, it is poison, just as if you slipped something into somebody's drink.

So, please, sisters, be considerate. If you smoke, stop it! OK, OK — if you smoke, keep a supply of paper in plastic; when you use it to send to other people, don't smoke from the time it comes out of its package until it's in the mail. (Not just sealed, but out of the building.) Those of you putting out newsletters, journals, etc. must be aware that smoking while creating the final product makes that product absolutely inaccessible to many of the dykes receiving it. It also makes them ill. And, scented stationery is a pretty bad idea, in general: toxic to folks who receive it, and usually not recyclable.

I know, I know, it never ends. Politics is hell. All that stuff. But it will be appreciated.

— Caryatis Cardea

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We publish only lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as lesbians of color, ethnic lesbians, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. See page 11 for details on upcoming issues. We are open to suggestions for new themes.



Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We provide free subs to women in prison and mental institutions (15% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subs for lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. • Enclose an extra \$10 on your renewal to help cover the cost of prisoner and reduced price subs (larger donations accepted). • Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, special occasions. • Consider doing a benefit or subscription drive for *SW* in your city.

We need lots of lesbian energy to keep printing. • We particularly need volunteer or commission grantwriters and ad sales reps. • Our equipment wish list includes (in order) an office-quality Mac-compatible laser printer, a scanner & OCR software, a CD drive, a fax or fax-modem. Thanks to each of you who participates in reading, writing for, building *Sinister Wisdom*.

Perhaps that woman in the dream was
an aspect of myself. The part of me that tires
of always having to understand everything.
I wanted to go back to sleep that night

PHOTO BY JULIA YOUNGBLOOD



and dream something wonderful —
perhaps that I was flying so close to the stars,
so close to myself that I would know
I had always been able to fly.

— Deb Hipp

from *Loneliness Smokes Too Many Cigarettes*