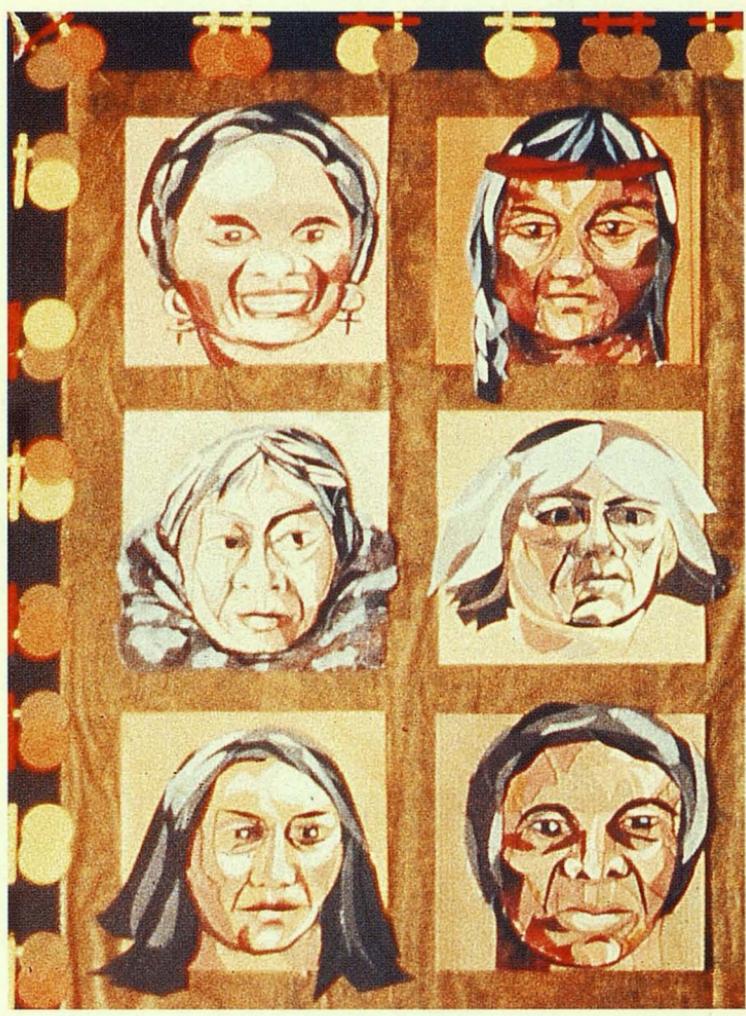


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sinister wisdom 53



Old Lesbians/Dykes



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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

Contents

- 3 The Guest Editors • *Introduction*
- 5 Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon • *Old Lesbians Are More Than Survivors*
- 11 Joyce Pierson • *Interview with Catherine Nicholson*
- 18 Dorothy Fowler • *6:15 Sestina*
- 20 Marjory Nelson • *Welcome Home, Kid*
- 23 Joan Corbin • *A Surprise*
- 24 Monika Kehoe • *College Teaching on the Move*
- 31 Bernice Dambowic • *A Lesbian Voice*
- 32 Carol Ehrlich • *Coming Home*
- 36 Ida VSW Red • *Seasoning*
- 41 Helen Howard • *Kissing Rosie*
- 46 Kate Rosenblatt • *Peg and Emily*
- 50 Rosemary Hathaway • *Ode to an Old Woman From an Old Woman*
- 51 Emma Joy Crone • *Notes from Hornby Island, B.C.*
- 54 Miriam Carroll • *Imani*
- 55 Pat Pomerleau • *Amelia Earhart Didn't Cook*
- 59 Janny MacHarg • *Niche Picking*
- 61 Mab Maher • *The Woman Across the Street*
- 66 Frances Lorraine • *A Day in the Life of One Old Dyke*
- 69 Elizabeth Freeman • *Is It Only Genes?*
- 71 Joan Miller • *Yes, a Happy Heart Attack*
- 74 Mary Flick • *Unfinished Letters*

Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural, multi-class, born-womon 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.

- 76 Ann Stokes • *Chalice of Green*
78 Grear Greene • *Friends of Dorothy*
82 Vashte Doublex • *Ageful Equals Rageful*
84 Catherine Nicholson • *"The View After 70 Is Breathtaking"*
86 Ruth Mountaingrove • *One Old Lesbian's Words*
91 Bernice Ybarra Miller • *A New Love*
92 Elaine Mikels • *In the Prime of My Old Age*
96 Rosemary Hathaway • *Anniversary*
98 Carmen de Monteflores • *Of Time, Trees, Apples and a River*
102 Shevy Healey • *Traveling with Ruth and Shevy*
108 Sally Miller Gearhart • *Wondercrone: Her Humble Origins*
115 *Guest Editors' Process Notes*
119 *In Memoriam*
121 *Contributors' Notes*
126 *Books Received*
129 *Ads and Announcements*
142 *Notes for a Magazine: Change on the Horizon*
144 *Upcoming Issues*



ART

- cover Mickey Spencer • *Old Lesbians: We Are Everywhere*
4 Cam Jancek • *The Guest Editors, April 27, 1994*
10 Elaine Mikels • *Jess McVey, Sculptor & Artist*
22 Marjory Nelson • *untitled*
49 Louise Gilbert • *Old Woman*
60 Ruth Mountaingrove • *Pat Bond as Lorena Hickock*
67 Frances Lorraine • *untitled*
85 Elaine Mikels • *Baba Copper*
90 Ruth Mountaingrove • *Buffy Dunker, 81*
101 Carmen de Monteflores • *Tree Trunk*
114 Marge Green • *OLOC Photo Collage*
119 Frances Lorraine • *Old Dykes Gather*

Introduction

We are nine old dykes over age 60. We name ourselves "old" to reclaim both the word and the respect for women and age diminished by patriarchy over time. We have volunteered to edit this special issue of *Sinister Wisdom* by, for, and about old lesbians/dykes because we want the voices of old lesbians to be heard. The works published in this issue reflect the lives, interests, choices, imagination, creativity, and emotions of many, obviously not all, lesbians over 60, as each one speaks only for herself.

During the past ten months we have been intensely committed to the myriad tasks necessary to produce this issue. We have learned that, despite our many similarities, we do not all have common priorities. Value conflicts often came to the fore in many compelling questions. For example:

What is politically oppressive language? Who is allowed to say what? While we agreed with *Sinister Wisdom's* policy of refusing to print oppressive language, sometimes we didn't agree on what was oppressive.

We seem to agree about identifying and combatting ageism, but do we require that contributors agree with us? We grappled among ourselves about what is or is not ageist.

What about "literary standards" in writing? How does that issue affect our commitment to being inclusive? Whose standards are they anyway? How can we respect and deal with our differences?

All these and many other important considerations had to be addressed within *Sinister Wisdom's* publishing schedule. We constantly struggled in our group process to reach consensus. We developed our collective answers as we could. We have tried to remain true to the spirit of *Sinister Wisdom* and its unique place in lesbian literature.

We encourage old lesbians to write and speak out — to write about being old, lesbians and dykes, to break the silencing of old women. We invite all of you to read this issue with pleasure and curiosity, and for the mirrors of your lives — past, present, and future.

Dotty Fowler
Ida VSW Red
Jeanne Adleman
Joyce Pierson
Kate Rosenblatt
Marge Green
Mickey Spencer
Rosemary Hathaway
Vera Martin



Guest Editors present at the April 27, 1994 meeting .

Cam Jancek

From l. to r., standing: Kate Rosenblatt, Joyce Pierson, Jeanne Adleman, Marge Green, Ida VSW Red; seated: Dotty Fowler, Rosemary Hathaway. Vera Martin and Mickey Spencer were unable to be present.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon

Old Lesbians Are More Than Survivors

In the 1950s, at a meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first national Lesbian organization we helped to start in San Francisco in 1955, a young Lesbian asked, "Where are all the older Lesbians? What happens to them when they get old?" We were in our early 30s then and had no idea. We had become involved with DOB in the hopes of meeting other Lesbians, no matter what age, and expanding our social circle. But now we know.

Lesbians of our generation who have survived to old age have lived through the McCarthyism of the '50s, purges of homosexuals from the U.S. State Department and the armed services, police raids of Gay bars and private parties, release of names and addresses of those arrested to newspapers and employers, and police harassment and brutality. Teenagers could be forced by their parents to go to a shrink to be "cured" or institutionalized and/or subjected to shock treatments as aversion therapy. Many were disowned by their families and had to cope in a hostile world.

Lesbians in our age bracket grew up in a time when sexuality was not discussed — let alone homosexuality. We didn't know what words to look up to describe our feelings, but we knew instinctively we should keep quiet. In isolation, thinking "I am the only one," we struggled with our sexual identity. Once we acknowledged we were Lesbian we had to work to achieve self-acceptance. It wasn't easy to maintain ones self-esteem when all the literature available described "perverts" who were supposed to be like you but with whom you couldn't possibly identify.

While there were never any laws against being a Lesbian, there were laws against its sexual expression. The church declared us immoral and psychiatrists said we had a personality disorder. With those three strikes against us — illegal, immoral and sick — many, as a matter of self-preservation, burrowed underground, lied by claiming lovers of the opposite sex, met

furtively in Gay bars, or hoped that “the one” we cared for would surreptitiously convey that the feeling was mutual. If we were exposed as Lesbian we faced losing our friends and family, our job or career. There was also the ever-present threat of blackmail.

Not surprisingly, many of us suppressed our feelings and opted for socially accepted heterosexual marriage. Others led a dual life, pretending to be heterosexual on the job and among family and being ourselves in the privacy of our homes and a network of close friends. Both these options had a price — lying to self and others, denial, hiding our true selves.

Being open — fighting back, taking risks, coming out, and working for social change — while having drawbacks, has many rewards. Discrimination still exists in many quarters and hate crimes are increasing. One can lose a family but gain a community, personal support and resources to challenge economic and social discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. One also achieves personal freedom and affirmation.

Lesbians have been blazing trails in anti-oppression activism for decades. Those of us who have reached old age — in or out of the closet — are survivors. We have been inventing our lives in various phases — learning how to turn negatives into positives. Old age is no exception. Ageism is another hurdle in our lives.

In 1979 we were asked by Betty Berzon to write the chapter on “The Older Lesbian” for the book *Positively Gay*. We were in our 50s then and hadn’t given the subject much thought. (Apparently we had gotten over the shock we felt when Jess Stearn in his book *The Grapevine* published in the 1960s referred to us as middle-aged women.) We culled the research literature and found only a few tentative studies with a small number of subjects — not surprising since most old Lesbians were in the closet. Berzon’s assignment forced us, however, to begin thinking about our own old age.

We went to a community college seminar on “How Not to Be a Bag Lady in Your Old Age.” As usual it was geared for heterosexual women. One topic of concern to us was how to protect the other if one of us was stricken with a catastrophic illness. A

lawyer from Legal Services for the Elderly explained that a married couple would have to spend down to the limit of cash assets allowed before Medicaid would kick in. He said the family home would be left intact as long as the "spouse" resided there. We asked, "What about us? — a Lesbian couple whose home is held in joint tenancy." He had not been asked that question before. He paused a moment, pointing out that, no matter the longevity of our relationship (now 41 years), legally we are strangers! "In your case, you'd probably have to sell half the house," he concluded. That would be difficult to do with one bedroom, two cats, and no inside doors except to the bathroom. Much later we discovered that as long as we kept saying that the one in the nursing home would be coming home, the government wouldn't force the sale of the house.

We had had our wills made when Del's daughter was a teenager. When she reached mid-life and our grandchildren adulthood we decided it was time to update our wills. We also found it necessary to draw up powers of attorney for decisions regarding health and financial matters in case one or the other was incapacitated. We had always kept our bank accounts and other assets in joint tenancy, but after the "bag lady" seminar, we divided most of them into separate living trusts so as to protect each other from being wiped out completely in case of a catastrophic illness. That's *eight* legal documents to cover what is taken for granted by married couples.

In the early '80s it was difficult to reach, organize, advocate and provide services for older Lesbians who were invisible. For example, when Del received the newsletter announcing her speaking engagement for a group of older Lesbians in Washington, D.C., she found herself referred to as the co-author of _____/ *Woman* rather than the title of the book, *Lesbian/Woman*.

Carole Migden, now a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, when she was executive director of Operation Concern, San Francisco's Lesbian/Gay mental health agency, decided that we were entitled to a share of public funds for seniors. She took our case to the Commission on the Aging, and eventually obtained funding for Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders

(GLOE). We were invited to serve on GLOE's Advisory Board. Thus began a new phase in our lives as activist aging Lesbians.

Of the 3.1 million Lesbians and Gays over 65 in the United States, San Francisco has its share, and GLOE, after a little more than a decade, has tapped only the tip of the iceberg. We have tried to educate and sensitize other senior centers about Lesbians and Gays with good results. It is only with persistence that we finally got a listing in the *Senior Information Directory* to let closeted Lesbian/Gay elders know that services they might need are available in a safe environment.

Betty Berzon edited an updated edition of *Positively Gay* which was published in 1992. When she asked us to update our chapter she figured we would just have to make a few changes. We told her we would have to write a completely new chapter. Times had changed since 1979, and so had we.

The first West Coast Celebration by and for Old Lesbians was held at California State University, Dominguez Hills, in 1987. That experience changed our lives significantly. The organizers of the conference limited participation to Lesbians 60 years of age or more, their brochure saying the "limit was imposed because old Lesbians are especially sensitive to those younger Lesbians and feminists who see themselves as committed to the old and tend to represent us, speak for us, and name us in ways that are self-serving, exploitative and ageist." The age was chosen, they said, "because the degree of oppression is greater beyond mid-life, after 60, when most of us know what it is to be perceived as 'old'."

Our first breakthrough was openly admitting our age on our identification badges. We reclaimed the word old in its positive sense just as we had done with the terms Lesbian and dyke. Old denotes chronological age, a stage of life which can be a new beginning, tying up loose ends, learning and changing, doing things we have always wanted to do but never seemed to have the time, creating new endings. "We refuse the lie that it is shameful to be an old woman," said the brochure.

Many participants had never before given thought to ageism and how it affected them. Some could not differentiate between

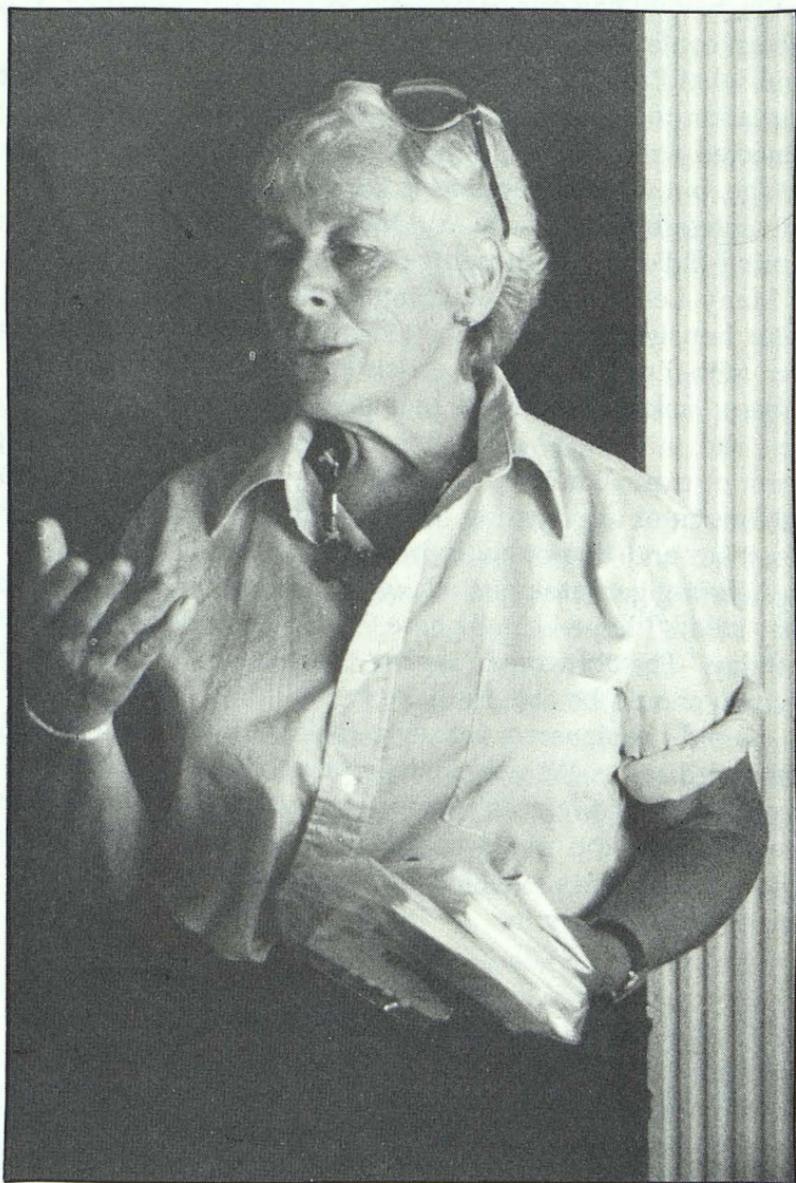
the natural process of aging and the unnatural practice of ageism.

We, having had our consciousness raised at both the first old Lesbian conference, and the second one in 1989, are learning to avoid what Page Smith, in his column *Coming of Age*, called the temptation to blame old age for a host of things not necessarily connected with it at all. Memory lapse can happen to people at any age, but when it happens to someone old, there seems to be an irrepressible impulse to say, "I must be getting senile." That's blaming old age, Smith pointed out.

Many Lesbians fear winding up in a nursing home or in senior housing with only their memories and no one to share them with. Lee Lynch, in an article entitled "What about the Old Lesbian," asks "What if I fall in love with a woman down the hall like I did in college? Will I have the same choices of seeing a shrink or expulsion?" Indeed, housing is a high priority among Lesbians in or anticipating old age because of the threat of heterosexism and homophobia in existing facilities.

A young gerontologist who was at a woman's 85th birthday party said, "I hope I can be here to help you celebrate your 90th birthday." The old woman replied, "You seem healthy enough to me, you should be able to make it."

As old Lesbians we refuse to look at this phase of life as a terminal disease. We acknowledge that death is inevitable. We accept that. But we aren't about to sentence ourselves to death now. There is too much to do, too many new adventures to experience. Besides, we have a date for New Year's Eve 1999 to see the new century in.



Jess McVey, Sculptor & Artist
Elaine Mikels

Joyce Pierson

Interview with Catherine Nicholson

Catherine Nicholson, co-founder of *Sinister Wisdom*, was interviewed by guest editor Joyce Pierson for this special issue by and for old lesbians/dykes. Catherine gives a historical perspective that always brings fresh insights.

JP: What was going on in the women's liberation movement and what radicalized you before you founded *Sinister Wisdom*?

CN: In 1976 I was 54 years old and in love with a 30-year-old woman. The year before, I had quit my tenured full professorship at the university in rage against sexism. I was a member of Drastic Dykes, a local lesbian "terrorist" group. For the first time in my life I had become a political activist. My partner Harriet Desmoines and I created *Sinister Wisdom* (SW) out of our love for each other and our rage against the whole patriarchal structure. The style of the first issue expressed our defiance and rebellion against the oppressors of women. We saw ourselves as descendents of the Furies, the Erinyes from Greek tragedy as well as the contemporary Furies in Washington, DC, the radical group started by Charlotte Bunch.

The time was one of expanding consciousness, a sort of bursting out, kicking over the traces, sticking out our tongues at the fathers, the brothers, the bosses, the husbands — like Medusa on the cover of Elana Dykewomon's book, *They Will Know Me By My Teeth*, that's where we were — a leaving behind of our birth identities and changing our names. It was a time of naming the enemy: men and men's institutions. It was a time of simplifying, of cutting out in a way. The labrys, the double-edged axe I saw as cutting away the old and carving out the new. Moving toward other women, hugging in circles and believing in the power of women-loving; of discovering what women and we lesbians had in common. Coming together, we realized there were more than one of us — the sharing gave such excitement in

the 1970s. *Sinister Wisdom* in the beginning showed a real emphasis on feminist process. Harriet and I weren't looking for finished works and the results were rough and explosive. One of the writers included in that first issue was a 74-year-old California lesbian, Elsa Gidlow. In her book, *Ask No Man's Pardon: The Philosophical Significance of Being Lesbian*, Elsa wrote:

What needs to be understood is that erotic love between women is not a deviation from some presumed "normal." The Lesbian, to use a designation with an honorable history, is not a spoiled, failed or diverted so-called heterosexual woman. Neither is she a pseudo-male frustrated within female flesh and bones — the few who feel so are frustrated by society's ignorance and persecution. She is from birth and perhaps prenatally an essentially different being with different needs and desires. She is constituted as she is because Nature has made her so. After lifelong meditation on the matter (I am 74 years old as this is written), after observation of and discussion with others who do not fit the crude male-female categories, plus wide reading, I will go a step further and say, Nature needs the Lesbian as she is. She needs me as I am.

JP: What an exciting time

CN: It was a very exciting time and Harriet and I spent a lot of time with the Drastic Dykes, talking together, doing consciousness-raising, reading and thinking of ways to change the world [chuckling]. I was surrounded by younger women. Most were in their twenties, Harriet almost thirty, and there I was in my fifties.

JP: What was it like for you to be 20 to 30 years older than the other women in the group?

CN: I had to tread lightly then because of age and power differences. As a professor and director of plays, I was accustomed to telling younger women what to do and what to think. With these lesbians I was on a level playing field. We had come together to unlearn patriarchal behavior — to exorcise the "pricks in our

head" so for me it meant shedding the privilege and power that the university had granted me. It was terrifying at times, but exhilarating too. I was learning new ways of relating to the world, new possibilities — it was like being reborn as a character in a science fiction novel. And I needed this transformation. Living in academia for so long had made me cynical and arrogant; now I felt alive and creative, and full of hope.

JP: What did you and Harriet want to accomplish with *SW*?

CN: We wanted a national magazine. We wanted to give lesbians space to write — a journal that would stimulate lesbian ideas and writing that would break lesbian silence. And it did! *SW* and other publications nurtured the growth of lesbian literature. We began small with only \$1500 of our own money. That first issue came out at the U.S. Bicentennial — July 4, 1976. It was symbolic, a bold declaration of our lesbian independence.

JP: What impact has *SW* had on your life?

CN: My world got a helluva lot bigger! In the summer of 1976 after the publication of the first issue, we attended the week-long Women in Print Conference near Omaha, Nebraska. We met women — mostly lesbians — publishers, printers, librarians, bookstore owners and distributors. We helped to create a network of feminist publishing that is still alive today. As *SW* grew in size, circulation, and sophistication, we became acquainted with lesbian writers — poets, philosophers and activists. In the first five years of *SW*, we moved from Charlotte, NC to Lincoln, Nebraska, and we traveled around the country promoting the journal — at Modern Language Association conventions, women's studies conferences. We met all kinds of lesbians doing all kinds of shit work to support themselves while writing. We stayed in lesbians' homes, ate at potlucks — we talked and listened, argued, sang, laughed, marched to take back the night, held hot dripping candles in solstice rituals, applauded concerts by Alix Dobkin, Deidre McCalla, Meg Christian and Holly Near, listened to the poetry of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Judy Grahn. We talked shop with various editors from *Conditions*,

Womanspirit, *Spinster's Ink*, *Dyke Mag* and Daughters, Inc. SW definitely was instrumental in changing my life.

JP: Tell us about SW #10 in 1979, *Sinister Wisdom's* first special issue on age and ageism.

CN: Susan Leigh Star, who was our poetry editor at the time, had become close friends with Baba Copper, a 59-year-old lesbian from California. The first issue on age and ageism grew out of their collaboration. I remember being aware of the irony that in 1979 I was 57 and it hadn't occurred to me to do a special "on being old and age." Of course I was in complete denial about ageism. I continued to be for another ten years. I attended the 1987 West Coast Conference for Lesbians over 60 because my good friends Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich urged me to. I had read and valued *Look Me In The Eye*, but I really couldn't apply it to myself.

JP: It's been seven years since that first conference. How do you connect old lesbian analysis to this stage of your life?

CN: Oh, it's a central factor of my life now. I was in San Francisco in '89 for the second West Coast Conference and was in on the creation of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing Committee, now Old Lesbians Organizing for Change). When I moved to Durham in 1990 to be part of a cooperative apartment complex founded by old lesbian Elizabeth Freeman, a former West Coast activist, I felt less isolated — at least there were two of us! Now there are four of us here and we're beginning to make some impact locally. In March 1993, I discovered that the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) was planning to hold its biennial national conference in Durham. When I learned that old lesbians and gay men had not been included in the planning and that "creating change," the theme of the conference, did not include ageism, I suddenly turned into a fire-breathing dragon. At The March on Washington, I met with OLOC's organizing committee and asked for their support. We worked hard to get the NGLTF planning staff to understand the distinction between "aging" and "ageism." After much negotiation, we finally got five minutes during

the opening plenary to advertise our "fishbowl" session, which was scheduled during the lunch hour to make it accessible to everyone. We were determined to attract the attention of the young lesbians and gay men. We composed a guerrilla theater performance designed to shock them. Vera Martin, Rosemary Hathaway and Ruth Silver, three California OLOC members, and David Pittman, a member of NGLTF, were our performers. Ramona Morgan, an artist from Durham, designed the outrageous masks the performers wore, and I announced, as the side-show barker:

I want to invite you to a performance: When?: 1 PM today. Where?: Here. Admission: FREE. Bring your own lunch if your stomach can stand it! What?: A Freak Show, A Horror Show unlike any you've ever seen before. Right there before your very eyes, appearing with special dispensation, (albeit reluctant permission), of the staff of NGLTF, are your deepest and scariest fears — not creatures from outer space but monsters from inner space — old lesbians and old gay men. You've seen them in cartoons; you've seen them on birthday cards you've received since you were 22; you've seen them in commercials on TV, advertising security systems; but you've NEVER seen them in the flesh until today. COME and get your thrills without fear of contamination: you will not be forced to speak to them, or — god forbid — to touch them. They will perform in the prophylactic of a fishbowl setting. They will tell you how they've experienced ageism in this youth culture — they will ACT UP before your very eyes and all you have to do is LOOK and LISTEN. Here are some of the monsters you will SEE and HEAR!

It worked! At least 100 gay men and lesbians found their way to the remote room where the planners had stashed the old folks' activities. I'm very proud of our action at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Conference.

JP: Catherine, what do you think of SW now?

CN: I really appreciate the quality of writing in *SW*. The issue on multiculturalism was wonderful, "Tellin' It Like It Tis'." Both "Lesbian Resistance" and "Lesbian Body" were exceptional. The editors have been very successful in attracting writers of diverse backgrounds. Elana's notes in *SW* #51 expressing concern about decreased circulation and what that means about *SW* caused me to think about why some people no longer read it. Many still recognize *SW* and have great respect for it despite the fact they're not reading it. In reality, the lesbian world has changed. I find *SW* is seen as essentialist, perceived as old-fashioned, which is heart-breaking to me. We worked so hard for lesbian identity and visibility, but now that lesbians are identifying with queer nation and gender studies, lesbian identity seems outdated.

JP: How do you relate to what is happening or not happening in the women's revolution, particularly the lesbian movement?

CN: My main goal is to make lesbians visible. Since the 1980s I have focused more on women's theater and lesbian drama, which in the eyes of the world lags way behind the gay drama now winning prizes. My major concern is how lesbians can be represented on stage, in television and in films in ways that reflect our real lives. The taboo against lesbians is so great that once lesbians become visible, they are immediately erased. Of course there was a brief period last year of lesbian chic, but that was just media hunger for novelty. Maybe it didn't hurt us but it didn't help much.

I was very interested in the media's interest in Roseanne Barr's lesbian kiss episode. Roseanne is powerful and her popularity is important to us. Television has the means to provide opportunities for lesbian visibility. The pitfall of course is that too much of current television programming reinforces stereotyping. Roseanne's lesbian kiss episode, for example, dramatized the fears straight folks have about homosexuality in themselves — they could laugh at themselves, see the absurdity of it. I want the whole world to know who we are, it's something I want to see in my lifetime.

JP: Catherine, you've given us a lot of information about *SW*, we'd like to know more about 74-year-old you.

CN: Well whew! Everytime anyone asks me what I'm doing now, my mind goes blank just like my new computer screen when I push the wrong button. I'm trying to learn how to use this goddamned machine that's smarter than I am. So, why am I dealing with a new g-d computer at my age? I'd finished a lesbian play I'd been working on for years, but the program on my computer had become extinct. Now I must retype the whole play onto this new microsoft dos brain.

This week I'm going to a North Carolina state conference on breast cancer with a group of lesbians from Durham who are protesting the omission of lesbians from their agenda. Last week I attended a city council meeting to support the Human Relations Commission's proposal to include lesbians and gays in those classes protected from discrimination in hiring and public accommodations.

When I succeed in inputting my new play into my new computer data base, I will proceed with plans for a reading by the Lesbian Thespians; then more revision, more reading, etc. until — maybe, if it's playable I can get it produced. If not, I will move on to the next project — perhaps another OLOC activity, perhaps writing more "breathtaking views after 70." * What I won't do is write my memoirs!

*See Catherine's poem on page 84.

Dorothy Fowler

6:15 Sestina

What good will it do anyone or me to write one?
I mean, will the world change if I find the right word
to end a line with? Then in turn find the other five
I'll have to find to fit together with the first one,
then after that have to squeeze out thirty more lines
from some drawer in my brain and onto the blank paper?

So here I am at 6:15 AM with this new piece of paper
at the second line of the second stanza of this early morning sestina,
a form described in the book as a poem in six six-line
stanzas from somewhere in medieval France. The six end words
of each line in the last five stanzas appear differently
than in the first one.

In thinking about it, maybe I should have started at five

o'clock in the morning instead of six. Actually, this is the fifth
time I've tried to get this form down on paper.

The other four were different from this latest one;
they were all attempts to describe in sestina
form the end of my last relationship in 400 words
or less, but I got so upset each time I tried I missed the deadline

when the thing was due. For me, the hardest lines
to write are the first and last lines of each stanza; the other five
seem easier by comparison. This may be because
one stanza's end word

matches the end word of the next one's first line — my paper
begins to look like some version of an FBI-censored sestina.
Stanzaically, there seems to be no safe place to go
after the first one.

The musing goddess says there's only 11 more lines
to go after this one,
which calls to mind from somewhere in the past a line
written by one now dead poet, "writing poetry [read sestinas]
is a series of narrow escapes." Like relationships, they have a 50-50
chance of survival — it's always a risk
to make commitments on paper,
hard as they are to keep — it's more like finding the words
as they fit together to move poems and lovers forward
to a finely worded
fabric made of lines, a whole piece wherein each one
stands together and alone. Sounds wonderful on paper.
So here I am, near the end of the sixth stanza (fourth line),
just a few days before my sixty-fifth
birthday — writing my first exponential sestina.

Marjory Nelson

Welcome Home, Kid

Toward the end of 1993, when nights were growing longer and the sun was on her journey south away from us, I approached my sixty-fifth birthday. It was a miracle, I thought, that I, who had expected never to grow up, could live so long.

Where would I go from here? I didn't know. What I wanted was not more new experience, but a period of time to reflect upon where I'd been and what it meant to me. I yearned for stillness, and close friends, for a place of not knowing, and space for that to be all right. I had a sense of wanting to gather in the fragments of myself I'd left along the way, as in a harvest, a sense of settling in.

Most of my life I have felt homeless in the world. In a recurring dream, I'm forced to pack up and leave my house, never to return. I decided that what I needed was a shelter for my soul. I needed a home.

What kind of home could shelter all these different parts of me: where could the trapped housewife visit the radical dyke, the wounded child be comforted by a nurturing grandmother? I thought about all the people I'd lost along the way. Where could I grieve? I wanted to think about the movements I'd been part of. What happened to them? What happened to me in them? What kind of shelter could protect an old woman with all those raw feelings I'd learned in therapy were mine? And could my body be my home? I thought about my struggles with being a woman; with being fat; with sexual desire; learning to accept and live with illness, disability and pain. What could be my shelter from approaching death?

I had a fantasy of spending my old age building little castles. With clay I shaped a round woman with moats and folds, with two strong arms for walls and two heads for towers, and called it my birthday castle.

I pulled out boxes of mementos to look for pictures of places I've lived, people I've lived with. The volume of my collection

was staggering. Was I expecting my children or my friends to go through it after my death? No. I decided to create one book to hold what mattered to me. The rest could go to archives, my children or the trash. I would call it my Soul Book. That felt right.

I gathered photos of various houses where I lived as a child, or with my husband and children. I found pictures of me as a teenager trying for glamor on the steps of my parents' house; me and my love, Polly, in front of the motor in which we left Buffalo, NY, in 1977 looking for an older women's movement.

I decided to take all the different places, combine them on one page, and in that way, create a new home for me. It would be a castle. At a copy shop, I had the pictures reduced to several smaller sizes, until some figures were about a quarter of an inch. In the center of the page went a painting of my current self with my inner child; around that, all the other pictures. To see all these faces on the same page was a stretch. I sketched steps, turrets and gardens to fit the scenes together. Ideas cackled. I cut out a picture of me, a fat old dyke, and set her in front of my Grandmother's house. Grandma was a proper Victorian lady. What would she say to see this lezzie on her lawn?

I have only a few photos of myself as a young child. One is of a 10 year old standing beside her playhouse in the backyard, with her dolls lined up on the porch. She is smiling because her Daddy told her to, but she hated that playhouse. I had to "play" there in the freezing weather of New Jersey with dolls that were clammy from the cold. When I'd beat out my anger on them, the windows steamed. Remembering steamy windows in a shaking motor home when Polly and I made love, I pasted the old dyke next to the child and her playhouse. That helped, but not enough. I drew steps connecting the playhouse to the house of the Woman's Party in Washington, DC where in 1970, a 42-year-old hippy me stands with a flag on her way to the women's march on the Pentagon. I invited the kid to come along.

How else could I help this child? There's a picture of me with my mother in front of our cottage at the Jersey bay shore where my father worked every summer; a place thick with mosquitoes, with no plumbing, no electricity, and a privy in the back. On that particular day, I hated my mother, I hated the shore and I hated

myself. The picture shows my mother smiling brightly and a fat, miserable little girl, head bowed, sitting on the step below her. There was so much pain in that child, I could hardly look at her, even the tiny replica of her on my home page. So, I cut out another copy of the child and set her on top of the motor home. All right! No longer in abject misery, now she was looking down at Polly and me, ready to ride along to Cambridge, Minneapolis, Spokane and Seattle, and then down to women's land in Oregon to camp out with the women of the Older Women's Network, and eventually to settle in San Francisco, the gayest city in the world. Welcome home, kid.

For my birthday celebration, I went out for dinner with my very closest friends. Maybe when I'm seventy, I'll be ready for a big party to launch me further into old age, but for sixty-five, I wanted quiet, warm intimacy. I showed the home page to my friends, pointing out the kid riding high on her new perch. I also brought my little clay castle, bright with colored candles, and asked each woman to light a candle and talk from her heart. I lit one too. It was a lovely ritual, one that still warms me. That's about home, too.



Marjory Nelson

Joan Corbin

A Surprise

There was your thigh
so round and full
so smooth in those
faded blue jeans
in the chair next to mine
as near as my knee
alive to me as no
other thigh in the world
my eyes loosed upon it
with no answer to the
why of such a communion
with you not aware
any more than a wild
mongoose lying there
would dream of my
desire
(still
sleeping)

Monika Kehoe

College Teaching on the Move*

Commencement in 1935 was a glad and sad time for me. At last I was to have the Ph.D. I had coveted for so long, but Sister Gretchen, the Literature professor, the one I wanted most of all to be at my graduation, was ill and couldn't come. I had not invited my parents, had not even informed them. I did not think they would be interested. My buddies from college all worked at hard-won paying jobs and couldn't attend either. Self-pity enveloped me like my academic robe as I watched other candidates being congratulated by their families. All the same, when my turn came I was too thrilled to feel sorry for myself.

Sister Gretchen had been my mentor all through college. She had been more than that — a spiritual lover who had encouraged me to persist when graduate school seemed impossible. On the days that were bleak with waiting for news from the university, she brought me pieces of cake or fruit from the convent refectory at lunchtime. She carried them across the campus, tucked up in the wide sleeves of her habit, while I waited in her office like a hungry puppy, greedy for a biscuit and the affection that came with it. Now that I had the degree I had coveted for so long, I wanted to make her proud of me.

The Great Depression was still limiting employment opportunities, but I was lucky enough to have a job lined up before my degree was conferred. I went almost directly from the August Commencement exercises into college teaching. My contract at a small metropolitan Catholic college stipulated room and \$1800.00 per year for six courses, or eighteen hours of teaching per week, plus "other related duties."

The secular faculty were required to observe the same hours as the nuns and dormitory students. We would not have keys and

* An edited, shortened version of Chapter V, "Pedagogue," in Monika's memoir-in-progress.

the doors would be locked at seven in the evenings during the week. Resident staff were also expected to attend Mass daily and receive communion. This was too much. After the first month I requested permission to live off campus. It was granted, providing I sacrificed the maintenance part of my contract for which the College could not reimburse me. The "Sister-President" called me in for a confidential talk and warned me that I was not to invite students to my apartment.

With such a heavy schedule and modest income, I was unable to celebrate when I got my first pay check. In due course, it was a great thrill to purchase my own car, a used Ford Phaeton with a collapsible canvas top — an even more gorgeous vehicle, to my eye, than the new rumble-seated roadster my mother had bought for me earlier. Sometimes, now that I no longer enjoy driving, I marvel at my youthful passion for cars, and I wonder why they have played such an important part in my life. Was it that they symbolized escape for me, first of all as a teenager trying to get away from home, then later from other feared entrapments? Or was it only because I was a member of the first automotive generation?

Thanksgiving recess was the first chance I had had to drive back to show my previous vehicle to Sister Gretchen and to take her for a spin. Religious rule still forbade nuns to leave the convent alone, so she had to bring another Sister along. We had an uneventful ride into the suburbs while my rear-seat passengers struggled to keep their veils under control. It was windy and noisy even with the top up and they had insisted on my fastening it into place before they got in. In those days the Sisters were not permitted to go riding just for pleasure; they had to have a destination whenever they went out in a car. In order to conform to the regulations, we stopped at the hospital on the way back, to visit one of the older nuns who had a terminal illness.

I was swamped with work. In addition to the extra-heavy schedule of classes I had been assigned, I had to prepare a lesson plan for each one with a copy for the supervising nun who always sat in the back of the room.

Besides the work difficulties, two lovers from my undergraduate days were planning to move in with me as soon as I was

settled, but by Christmas I had already become infatuated with Helen, a Senior student at the College. I wrote two of those "I'm sorry but it's all over" notes.

The following summer Helen and I set off to drive to California. I wanted to try to get another job, this time in a secular college.

By then it had been eight years since my last vacation. After that I had spent seven consecutive years in uninterrupted schooling — four as an undergraduate and three as a graduate student. I had taken full course loads even in summer, as well as during the regular sessions. I had to, in order to retain my scholarship. Now, I had just completed my first year of teaching under heavy stress. I was twenty-six and I thought I was burned out. I really needed a holiday and a change of scenery.

Three incidents stand out in my memory of that two-week cross-continental drive. The first was a rather frightening experience of being asked to leave a tiny town in Nebraska where we had stopped at a general store to buy some cold ham for lunch. We seldom ate in restaurants; they were not part of our trip's budget plan. We were, I recall, dressed in shorts; it was a hot day. The town marshal or sheriff met me on the steps of the store to tell me that my attire was indecent.

"Either you get some clothes on or you mosey out of here. We don't want your kind in this town." He had a shiny badge pinned to his left breast pocket and he chewed tobacco which he spat out of the side of his mouth, just as the cowboys did in the B-grade Westerns.

The next shocker happened in the evening, a few days later, when I walked into the rest room of a gas station and a woman screamed. I had on sailor pants and a pea jacket, to match, an outfit I thought quite jaunty and appropriate for touring through the Rockies. When I asked her what was the matter, and she recognized I was not a man, she apologized.

As we got farther West, we wore sneakers and jeans in the daytime. I bought a Borcelino pork-pie hat which Helen said looked sharp with my new cowboy boots that I began to wear most of the time instead of the sneakers. Their high heels gave me quite a lift and I tried to walk like William S. Hart, the John

Wayne of my youth. The next Sunday we stopped at a village church in Nevada where some kind of a fiesta was in progress. They were obviously going to serve food after the religious service so, being hungry, we knelt on the prie-dieu behind the last pew where we wouldn't be noticed — we thought. After the altar-boys with their swinging censers had passed and the bells stopped ringing, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around and an elderly priest motioned toward my hat. When I didn't respond promptly as he expected, he stooped over and whispered: "Remove your hat in church." I did what I was told and he hobbled away apparently satisfied. Undoubtedly he too thought I was a man, and men were supposed to remove their hats indoors, especially in church.

The next four years confirmed me in the androgynous lifestyle that society frowned upon. They were spent at Mills, a women's college where Helen took a secretarial job and I carried another heavy instructional program. The first year was again difficult. We had to live "in residence," a euphemism for dormitory accommodation, and learn to keep up a pretense of being "roommates" which probably fooled nobody. But at least there was no check-in time for faculty or staff, and we had our own keys. Nor were we required to attend chapel. It was my first real freedom from religion. Near the end of that year, however, the bad news came that Sister Gretchen had died of a heart attack. I was crushed. With her sudden death I felt a loss I had never known before. The last restraining influence on what she called my "wild ways" — although she never knew their extent — was gone.

By the second year at Mills, I was able to build a small cabin in a nearby canyon for \$2,000, a cost equal to my salary for one year.

Planning and designing our house, then watching the red-wood structure take shape, filled every day with anticipation. The interior of knotty pine, the fireplace, the half-door, the built-in bunk beds and desk — all were innovations that the contractor advised against. He said that such irregularities would reduce the resale value of the property. Resale! We would live in that house forever!

The place belonged to me legally so that I paid the bills and was the more economy-minded. Helen contributed her labor which included the housekeeping chores and was more than her share. We lived there for exactly two years before I got hopelessly entangled with Doris, a student-assistant at the College, and Helen moved out in disgust.

Such entanglements seem to be inevitable in academe — especially in women's college settings. The student-teacher relationship as in the film, "Liana," promotes what used to be called "crushes."

Doris couldn't move in because she had to keep up the appearance of still being a college resident. Her family called weekly, long-distance from the East Coast; she didn't dare be off-campus every time they phoned.

Besides, transferring to my house would have caused more raised eyebrows at the College. Students as well as faculty were already beginning to talk. One of my colleagues made a rather sly remark about my offering such a convenient student hostel near campus. As the youngest faculty member in a fairly stuffy academic environment, I was naturally popular with the students and turned to them for my social life. This did not endear me to my colleagues. Although I didn't really care what they thought, I did care about the job. I realized that I had to be more careful.

Just before Christmas in 1940, about the time that new college contracts were to be issued, I received a note asking me to visit the Dean's office. This was enough of an oddity to make me apprehensive, but I was stunned when I got there to discover that Helen, whom I trusted completely, had told the Dean all about our relationship. As a result of her disclosure, the President had decided my contract was not to be renewed.

The Dean spoke frankly, pointing out that, being the elder of the two, as well as a professional person, I was the responsible half of the affair. Furthermore, the College must consider its reputation. No students were to visit my house for the remainder of the academic year under threat of "appropriate action" being taken against me.

It is difficult, at this distance in time, to recollect what I thought about the moral question at issue then. I was no longer a Catholic and viewed sin as a culturally relative concept. "Situational ethics" is, I believe, the descriptive phrase used for what was then my point of view. I was almost completely unaware of feminism as a political movement. I had heard of the "suffragettes" but I had absorbed the conventional view that they were ridiculous. At that stage, at the beginning of the forties, I would never have connected feminism with lesbianism anyway. Feminism was relatively respectable while homosexuality was supposed to be equivalent to insanity. The Church condemned it as a mortal sin and most people abhorred it as "unnatural."

I blocked the entire issue from my mind, refusing to think about it, and continued to feel comfortable only in the role I had come to assume. I couldn't identify with women — faculty wives, for instance. I always tried to avoid them at college gatherings. They seemed to me such sad sacks with nothing to talk about but babies and cooking or other domestic trivialities. It was as if I feared that how I saw them would rub off on me. I did not perceive myself as female nor did I want any part of femininity. I wanted to be human; to be strong and lithe, not petite or pretty. My image of myself was boyish, not mannish. I wished I were taller, maybe five-feet-ten. I rejected the Hollywood polarization of masculine and feminine and was drawn, instead to male hermaphroditic types and tomboy girls. I coveted what contemporary feminist psychologists would call the androgynous personality.

One colleague at Mills, the Chair of the Philosophy Department, a middle-aged woman who shared a home near the campus with a much older female professor of Mathematics — both distinguished academics with tenure — seemed able (or dared) to give me emotional support. But even this was never expressed verbally. No allusion was ever made to the presumed cause of my separation from the College. However, I was invited to spend a great deal of time at their house, where I had lunch or tea, and was even allowed to stay one night in their guest bedroom. The entire matter was treated as if it were some unspeakable affliction which we understood had set us apart but could not be mentioned.

After I recovered from the initial shock of losing my job at Mills, I got mad. I looked around for some means of revenge. By a fortunate coincidence, a distant "cousin," a Notre Dame graduate I had known since our teens, turned up for a visit. He had gotten my address from my mother and, so long as he was in the area, had doubtless thought he would stop in for a little free hospitality.

When I told him my story, Jim admitted to being a homosexual himself and that he, too, was involuntarily unemployed, having recently been fired from his civil service post in Washington on the same charge. We found enormous comfort in our common "difference" and spent hours discussing whether or not we were crazy or the world was off its trolley. We decided in our favor and hit on a brilliant idea for recouping society's approval, to our mutual benefit. We announced our engagement.

Various relieved administrators gave showers for Jim and me, and we accumulated a large number of expensive electric appliances, cut-glass monstrosities, embroidered pillow-cases and valuable bric-a-brac of all shapes and sizes. We had enough ash trays to supply the Hilton chain of hotels. Much of the stuff we promptly returned to the stores that we could identify as the source of their purchase, where we collected refunds sufficient to live on through the rest of the summer until my house was sold.

Meanwhile, I was lucky to hear of a vacancy in a small Catholic woman's college in Ontario, Canada, where, at a time when relatively few women had Ph.D.s, I was promptly accepted. This second experience of teaching in a religious institution, even though in a slightly foreign setting, was almost as constraining as the first. By the end of the academic year, I was ready to return to the U.S. At the nearest point of reentry, Detroit, I took and passed a civil service test for Parks and Recreation Director. I thought to return to sports — at least until I could find another vacant post in higher education.

Bernice Dambowic

A Lesbian Voice

I am holding a crimson packet close
to my breast
Do I look like prim faculty tied
with a bun?
My pants bag at the seam, sneakers soiled
with time tread on Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"
The rounded gravel is softened
by this tramping poet
An open flap beckons me to a pitched tent
where booming words echo:

I am language

I am human

I am woman

Where is my voice? Peanut butter sticks
to the roof of my mouth
Do I swallow my need to be heard?
Distanced from the crowd, a smiling teacher waits to unbend
my trembling hands, to hear my words
Her melodic voice dimmed by age matches my own
Raising my notes in the billowing breeze, lifting
my pen to catch the sun, I am no longer eating
at the window

Carol Ehrlich

Coming Home

First I was straight, then I became lesbian. Lesbian is better.

It was a long journey to lesbianism for me — I ran into many dead ends along the way. I was born in 1934, the only child of lower-middle-class parents, in a small Missouri town. The area, called “little Dixie,” had been on the Confederate side during the Civil War. Although that conflict had ended 70 years before, it was still fresh in the minds of some. The slave auction block in front of the county courthouse was proudly pointed out to visitors; every year men dressed up in Confederate gray and Union blue and refought the war. Schools and neighborhoods were segregated, and jobs for black adults were scarce. As I recall, black women might find work as maids, and black men (called “boys” by whites) might be hired as janitors or handymen. As far as I know, no other jobs were open to blacks.

Back then, the Democrats were the conservative party, and they completely dominated electoral politics. At the time I graduated from high school, in 1952, I knew one Jew, no blacks (except for one man who mowed lawns), no liberals, no Republicans. And no lesbians or gay men.

Since the state university was located there, I imagine there must have been at least a few Republicans; Jews and liberals on campus — and maybe even some closeted lesbians and gays. But no black students or faculty — integration began, very gradually, a year later, when I was a freshman.

Growing up where and when I did was a confused and confusing experience. There’s a great deal I don’t remember about my young life, but I think I always felt as if I were living underground — sometimes as a guerrilla, but mostly as a fugitive. Messages from the outside, in the form of books, news magazines, and movies, made me aware that there were less stifling environments that I wanted badly to find. Yet I couldn’t make a coherent pattern out of the almost random information

that I took in. One of my strongest memories is the horror I felt, at age 10, upon seeing a newsreel film about the Allies' opening up of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. I was emotionally overwhelmed by the evil that brought about the Holocaust. But I didn't question the evil of slavery; and the romanticized versions of the Civil War that I ingested left me feeling that the wrong side had won. Later, during the cold war period of the '50s, I was sure that world Communism was out to enslave us all.

If my politics were shot through with contradictions, my sexual politics were as well. My close relationships were with girls and with women. I feared men and couldn't face the universal assumption that I (like all other females) would marry one. Yet my early sexual attractions were almost all to males.

It took me many years to form a coherent view of the world and of myself. It took several different environments and many painful experiences before I could begin to come home to who I am.

How and when did I become a lesbian? Although I had occasionally been attracted to women, I didn't come out to myself till 1980, when I was 45, and I didn't act on my knowledge until the next year. By then, I'd been married twice and had an adult daughter.

The path that eventually led to lesbianism began in the late 1960s, when I became involved in the antiwar movement. In the half-dozen years before that, I had moved away from my racism and political conservatism, and when the antiwar movement seemed like a vehicle for overturning a corrupt political order and building a better one, I plunged into it.

It didn't take long for the women's caucus of our local organization to become disgusted with the male-dominated politics we encountered. We discovered radical feminism and a whole new view of the world. This was the most profound shift in consciousness I'd ever had: I thoroughly agreed with the analysis that men as a group oppressed women as a group — that men were colonizers and women the colonized.

Like many radical feminists, I was straight. But under the surface, some even more subversive ideas were burrowing into my mind. In the course of searching out every radical feminist

analysis then in print, I found the writings of a lesbian feminist, Martha Shelley. I was very taken with her perspective that radical feminism had to move one crucial step further. For it was only in lesbian relationships that genuine equality could be found, because women had not been socialized to desire power over others.

Shelley's analysis, in addition to my own surfacing feelings of attraction to women, eventually directed me to lesbianism. Probably only a bookish person like myself could have been so naive as to think that relationships between women would be egalitarian, *just because we're women*. After all, we've all been socialized in the same corrupt society. Discovering how much the reality can differ from the ideal has been one of the most difficult lessons I've had to learn. Just the same, I'd like to thank Martha Shelley, wherever she is, for pointing me in the right direction.

Today I live on the East Coast with my lover and life partner. I am almost 9 years older than she is. We've been together since 1981. We have our ups and downs, of course, but basically we enjoy the same things and have very similar outlooks on life.

As we get older, both of us are out in more and more situations. The only people with whom I've specifically *not* come out of the closet are those few remaining links to my painful and hidden childhood: my mother, the two 70-plus cousins who write to me every Christmas, two childhood friends who keep in touch. All women — but none intimates. I hid from them then; I'm still in hiding. I'm not proud of it, but there it is.

The city where I now live has been my home for almost 25 years. When I acknowledged my lesbianism to myself, almost 15 years ago, I didn't want to be in the closet to anyone, but a lifetime of intense privacy, of keeping many of my secrets even from myself, made my coming out less than universal.

From the beginning, I wanted my daughter, who lives on the other side of the continent, to know. We'd just begun to emerge from several years' estrangement, so I didn't dare guess how she'd take such a radical change in her mother. But she was — and has continued to be — very supportive. At almost 40 she is single, and says she has always been straight. Since we have

lived apart for almost 20 years, there is much I don't know about her. But she is proud of her lesbian mother, and she relates really well to my partner.

As for those I know and come into contact with in my home city, I have fewer and fewer islands of evasion. My co-workers know, as does my boss. My partner and I don't put up signs in our windows, but we make absolutely no attempt to hide who we are from our neighbors. At demonstrations and events such as Pride Day, we don't avoid the TV cameras. When a local group working to disseminate positive images of lesbians and gays asked me to pose for a group picture that would appear on billboards all over the area, I thought about it for a day or two, then said yes.

As I age, I feel I have less to fear and less to hide. As an old lesbian, I am who and what I am — and others can take it or leave it.

Becoming a lesbian was like finding a home I'd never had. I've changed from feeling like a solitary woman in an underground chamber to knowing that I'm a member of a thriving community. My subcommunity is associated with the feminist bookstore, the women's café and the lesbian fiction group. These institutions, particularly the bookstore, are very important to me. The bookstore has been here for over 20 years, and to me seems tremendously important. That's because it's both a repository of lesbian/feminist culture, in a society that tries to deny our culture's existence, and a community center where women can connect with themselves and with each other.

I find my connections in local institutions like the feminist bookstore and the café; in lesbian neighborhood associations and at potlucks; in reading groups and political action groups. I love the women in my community — and as I grow older, the feeling of mutual support and love grows stronger for me, and more essential.

Ida VSW Red

Seasoning

The young dyke says: "You don't look sixty-one — I can't believe you have children older than me." I'm tempted to correct her grammar and then respond as I heard one vital old lesbian do: "Take another look — this is exactly what seventy (or sixty-one or eighty) looks like!" But I know I'm just one of many ways to look and be sixty-one. Because I feel naive and green, I resent the common notion that age and experience necessarily produce wisdom. I don't know how to be old, but I realize that many elements, aspects and states of being always coexist in me.

I am a ripened, grey dandelion head floating down Cripple Creek, allowing myself to tumble over and over, bump into boundaries, release seeds, round Russian River bends, and flow gaily forward.

I am a child's big, red rubber ball bouncing through a field of daisies to a mountain cabin where I rest by the open fire and marvel at the floor-to-ceiling cases of books I've been writing in my sleep.

By day, I read the obituaries, looking for women, scanning their lives, wondering how mine stacks up, trying to take credit for my accomplishments, such as fine grown children; a long association with amateur theater; a librarian and editor's career completed; unfailing interest in poetry, autobiography, reading, writing and performance; a first year of retirement rich with travel, grandchildren, work with Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective and Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders and new and old lovers and friends.

I am an exuberant and curious pigtailed five-year-old on a swinging bridge ... awkward teenager opening Pandora's box ... a young wife posing as a matron in a navy silk sheath ... harried part-time, temporary, para-professional worker ... mother of two, Brownie Scout Leader, Sunday-School Teacher ... re-entry grad student always reading, wondering ... beginning teacher in love with literature, ideas, my students, their writing ... an actor publicly revealing

details observed, feelings hidden, personalities submerged ... a poet screeching to a halt mid-commute to catch the flicker of a lightning-bug phrase ... an antique porch rocker with many coats of paint and lap enough for all my little ones ... a dreamer's open palm stretched out to catch a subtle distinction, a valuable connection.

My work at the University of California Institute for Health and Aging made me painfully aware on a daily basis of the ageism, poverty, chronic illness, and lack of social support faced by old people, especially old women. Like others in the glass house of aging policy research, I maintain a high level of denial, yet my internalized ageism and personal doubts and fears about aging are near the surface. Will I be able to remain financially, emotionally, and physically independent? If not, will support be available and will I accept it with grace? Will I be able to maintain a resilient spirit, be an asset rather than a drain on those around me? Will I have the courage to handle chronic illness or physical decline, the loss of loved ones, rapid changes in the world around me? Will my daughters respect me and will we stay close, share our lives? Will I see my ideas, my ambitions come to maturity?

I am a well-worn Appalachian dulcimer reverberating the strum of blue-ridge mountains, blue-grass fields trimmed in queen anne's lace, fringed chicory, brown-eyed susan, and tough, tangled bitter-sweet bursting open at first frost.

I am a flat, gelatinous, silent eleven-year-old, a pasty-faced chameleon who can only sit and watch since desperately trying to do as others do is a miserable failure and insisting on drawing the paperdolls my own way prompts ridicule — sit and watch, won't play, won't compete, won't try, won't, just won't — a blank tablet to be drawn on with a sharp stick, images that disappear when the shiny grey page is disturbed.

I can't read the pink arts pages. I am plunged into feelings of desperation and defeat by accounts of the accomplishments of actors, directors and authors. I have given family and economic independence priority over intellectual and artistic work. Now I feel too discouraged, too outdated, too scared of memory loss to

attempt a serious actor/writer/scholar's life. Caustic streams of envy, comparison, self-recrimination, and bitterness surge up and drive me to the shut-down, depressed emptiness that masquerades as ordinary life. Even going to the movies, usually a saving grace in which my inner process smooths itself out, is becoming painful. None of these feelings of hurt and loss is enough to jumpstart me into action. Instead, I insist on ordinary life's being enough. I latch onto it with a will, truly believing I deserve to have easy days in which to relax, drop my self-consciousness, and recover from the feeling of having failed my family's expectations and my own.

I am a prickly animal, small, sensitive, low to the ground, hardly a threat until I unexpectedly shoot my piercing quills into some convenient, unsuspecting target.

I am a sea anemone, habitually clinging to my traditional place at all cost until I become too, too dry when I let go, float, give myself over to sea change.

I am a spider, flinging myself into the unknown, confident of finding a mooring for the web I create of myself, believing in survival, true to principle, faithful to community.

One of my first reactions to the early feminist idea of a woman-identified life was that, at forty, I was too old. I had never been independent. That was for modern young women like the first dyke I loved — fifteen years my junior, beginning her adult life in blue jeans. I had a hard time imagining a change of "lifestyle" — a new concept — at my age. While I was on the fence of indecision, a lesbian twelve years my senior forced me to notice her. She was both romantic and cynical, hidden and blatant, tough and soft. An evening in the presence of her vitality and a night caressing her beautifully aged skin convinced me that for lesbians there is no such thing as "too old." So I took the leap into dykedom. Now I am older than she was at that time. I haven't found the structures for equal relationships, lesbian theaters and feminist doctoral programs I long for, but I nevertheless imagine that life is full of possibility at every turn.

I am a huge brown pre-pubescent bear poet named BoBo from Blue Rock Junction, lover of life, playful & serious, tender & fierce, self-published because typesetters could never get the rhythm of the Rs in my GRRRs.

I am a galax leaf — large heart with sharp, ragged edges, evergreen, running wild, migrating toward the sunset where ...

Wet tongue caressing my clit
 fingers rhythmic in my cunt
 she lures me back to feeling
 Teeth sharp on my left nipple
 she shoots me into ecstasy past
 every pleasure/pain principle
 into free-fall from cliff edge
 vaulting over a rainbow of
 star-spraying rockets to
 barrel falls down cascades
 and long beyond the beyond
 : an orgasmic commencement
 to my early retirement.

I am a swashbuckler in chartreuse & fuchsia satin with cardboard boots, fake as the drugstore cowboy, authentic as my first family of Virginia genealogy with our single Spanish Gypsy, French sea explorer, and Native American among the predominantly German and English/Scotch/Irish farmers and merchants.

I am a heavy, inherited matriarchal mantle ... keepsakes cherished ... stories embroidered, braided, patchworked by generations of women: the common woman's fate — AND — love doves on a rainbow dragon kite ... interlocking women's symbol ... lesbian feminism: the seasoning ... a trail discovered from eastern virgin hemlock to pacific shore.

I am a calliope with romantic ballads and old-fashioned roses magically transforming into a computer — both, descendants of a woman's weaving card — binary logic bent to aesthetic need and practical desire.

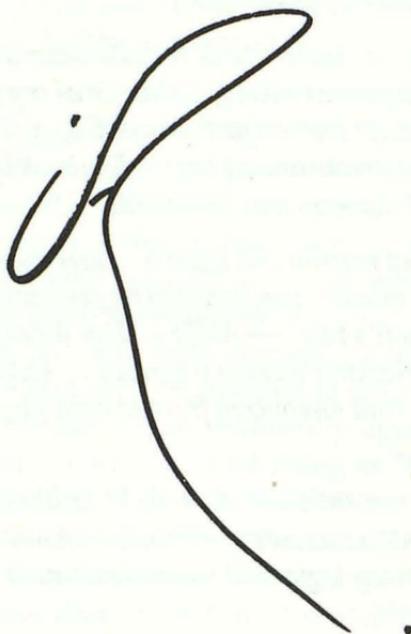
At my birthday party, when I told a friend's five year old my age she responded enthusiastically: "Wow! You'll really be a big girl now!" Age, size, and power seem wonderfully linked in her reality. On optimistic days, I agree, believing I will be able to continue living with lesbians who give our attention, courage, support, love, and inspiration to one another and help each other become our fullest selves, our strongest force for change.

I am a bearded crone simultaneously juggling zits and hot flashes for years on end ... a color never seen ... a biscuit baked with buttermilk and tears.

I am a pile of slimy green overcooked spinach on the floor, crying, whining, complaining, pouting, too sad, too mad, too caught in misery some days to notice that ...

I am an aging woman, at sixty-one innocent and experienced enough to know my ball bounces on, fertile seeds constantly rise, new shoots celebrate my existence, unknown paths await, new selves rush to join old ones in the miracle and mystery of the present moment.

I am &



Helen Howard

Kissing Rosie

Edie! Cut it out! How come you are kissing another little girl right on the mouth?" Rosie and I snuggled on the living room couch. My mother's voice spun out like hot wire. She was pretty mad.

It was only one of my new games. I found the pressure and feel of Rosie's mouth on mine exciting. And she liked it, too. Her small chunky body spread warmth in me. Kissing her was not like the dry pecks on the cheek from aunts and uncles.

"I can't watch you kids every minute, Edie! Pop is busy with customers and you see I have to help him!" Ma's voice rose in a way that made me pay attention. Our grocery store was a busy place. Even I had to help out sometimes.

Rosie wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Her face flushed, her lower lip trembled, her flat chest heaved. If she started to cry, it would make me feel bad. I stood at least half a head taller and made up most of our games. We played trains, pretended to be cowboys and what we thought were Indians, and lately I had made up a few new ones. Good ideas came out of the Saturday afternoon movies — such as the Mommy and Daddy game, the Big Sister game, and the Hospital game in which the Doctor kisses the Nurse for a long time.

"You better go home now," my mother told Rosie. "Your mama will be coming home from work soon." Rosie scurried out of our living room, flew down the stairs through our crowded grocery store, and out into the street.

"Her mama is one of our best customers!" my mother went on. "Where do you get those crazy notions about kissing?"

"They kiss a lot in the movies, Ma."

"That's for grown ups, Edie. Not for little girls!" Some of the steam dribbled out of me. The movie I loved was Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor in *Camille*. They kissed a lot.

The feel of Rosie's soft moist mouth on mine still burned. My head felt light and I could sense the hard knot inside my chest

melting when she pressed her body against me.

Rosie Adelman had become my best friend. Since I was in the sixth grade and she was only in the fifth, I had certain rights. Like making up our games, for instance. We had been playing the Mommy and Daddy game. I was the Daddy. This kind of pleasure felt different from anything else, even pitching a strike-out in our baseball games, or getting 100 on my spelling tests and having Miss Murphy, our teacher, brag to the whole class about it. Rosie often came over after school. Her mother worked at Sears in the dress department. I heard her tell my mother that she took advantage of the good store discount. That's how Rosie owned two closets full of pretty dresses, and lots of shoes and socks.

Rosie had big black eyes with long lashes. Her dark curly hair tumbled across her forehead. I used to think she could be a movie star, a Shirley Temple without the blonde curls. I often wished I was as pretty and cute as Rosie.

The Adelmans lived in a brown stucco house a block away from our grocery store. We lived in four little rooms behind the store, so their house seemed like heaven. Dark mahogany tables, plump sofas, oriental rugs, a Victrola with stacks of records, a real oil painting in the bright blue and green of ocean waves, and yellow waxed flowers in a Chinese vase made me wish I lived in that house, too.

Rosie had her very own bedroom. Her bed was covered with a pretty spread, baby dolls in white starched dresses and pink panties, and two stuffed animals, a bear and a dog. Me? I slept with my younger sister. When I flung my underwear on the floor at night and crawled in, I snuggled against her soft warmth. Chicago winters could be full of ice and snow blowing across Lake Michigan. When the temperature dropped to zero, we huddled close to the potbellied stove in the kitchen. When the stove glowed red hot, the kitchen grew warm and toasty.

In Rosie's house, the radiators blew a lively steam from the furnace. No one had to throw sticky lumps of coal in a stove. Their new refrigerator, stacked with cold meats, fruit and cakes her mother bought in our store, gave me and Rosie a chance to eat all the treats we wanted.

One Sunday afternoon, my mother and I were invited to visit the Adelmans to share a freshly baked apple pie. I found a clean pair of knickers and a blouse and combed my unruly brown hair, straightened my bangs. We knew Mrs. Adelman loved to bake cookies full of walnuts and raisins, cakes with chocolate frosting, strudel, even whole wheat bread. She said mixing and pounding the dough was relaxing. It took her mind off her troubles with her divorce, and left snacks for Rosie after school.

Sun poured into the kitchen that afternoon. White curtains with a red flower design billowed out the window. You could eat off their floor, my mother said. The table was neatly set with plates, napkins, glasses of milk for me and Rosie, and coffee cups for them. A crusty apple pie oozing juice was planted in the middle of the table. It smelled wonderful. The kitchen with the pretty curtains and sunshine was cozy. My mother smiled with pleasure.

Rosie and I behaved ourselves. I drank my milk slowly and did not fill my mouth with chunks of the pie. Mrs. Adelman threw me a pleased look and told my mother she was happy her poor Rosie had such a nice little friend. Would I like another slice of pie? I said "please" and "thank you." This caused Rosie to erupt in giggles and I pinched her leg under the table. She pinched back. Hard. I squealed. Mrs. Adelman frowned and said we could go upstairs and play.

The attic was full of worn furniture, old-fashioned pictures with dark heavy frames, and Rosie's baby buggy.

"What do you want to play?" I asked Rosie.

She shrugged. I tried to turn a big old radio on, but it did not work. Downstairs, in the kitchen, we could hear our mothers laughing. I bet Mrs. Adelman poured some sweet wine into my mother's glass like I had seen her do once before.

Rosie yawned suddenly, then plopped down on a mattress lying against the back wall. "I'm tired."

"Me too." But my heart began to thump. I asked her what kind of game she wanted to play. "The Prince and Princess, or the Doctor and Nurse."

"You choose," I insisted.

"Let's play the Prince and Princess."

I gasped as she stretched out on the mattress and closed her eyes. "O. K." I said. "Fair Princess," I began, touching her forehead with my finger tips. "You have been sleeping a long time. You must get up now. You can come back to my palace with me. I will marry you. You will be Queen of all the land!"

Rosie smiled. She loved being made a queen. When she got all dressed up, her mother would call her "my little queen." I leaned over, stroked her hair and cheek, then placed my lips on hers. Her hands reached for my head, pulling me close. The crisp starchiness of her dress felt cool. She smelled like perfumed soap. I throbbed with a strange flow of pleasure.

The house was quiet. I thought I heard Rosie's mother calling, but it seemed far away. Then I heard footsteps. They must have sneaked up to the attic, because there they were in the doorway making funny noises in their throats. I jerked away from Rosie. All the good feeling drained out like water gurgling down the sink. Rosie let out a short cry. She quickly turned on her side so she would not see her mother.

"What's going on here? You little devil!" Mrs. Adelman yelled at me.

My mother's eyes were blazing. She grabbed my arm so hard I thought she would tear it off. "I warned you!" she shrieked. I was pulled off the mattress, thrown across the room and fell against the brass frame of Rosie's grandmother's picture. The cut on my chin bled. The sight of my blood made Rosie howl.

"Little girls don't kiss each other like that!" Mrs. Adelman's eyes turned into flinty nails, sharp, fierce, hateful.

"I don't know what gets into that child." My mother clearly blamed me.

Mrs. Adelman began to cry. "Can't you control your own child?" she shouted at my mother.

"I do my best!" my mother replied angrily. "You wait on customers all day and see if you can watch your kid!"

It was time for me to leave. I brushed past Mrs. Adelman and my mother, tumbled down the stairs, tore out of the house. My harried father had a burst of afternoon trade and called for me to

wait on two small boys smudging the candy counter glass case with their dirty fingers.

I ran past them into the flat behind the store and slammed the door. What was so terrible? Did I hurt Rosie? Was kissing a sin? We liked our games. We felt close with the hugging and kissing. It was a new and special feeling.

That evening I stayed in bed. I could hear my mother scurrying about the kitchen banging pots and pans. She asked my father to bring in some cold cuts from the meat counter. She did not feel like cooking.

"How dare that woman talk to me like that?" She was real mad. "Such nerve!"

"She'll get over it," my father said wearily. "And what's all the fuss about? Edie likes to imagine things. So what's a little kissing? Who did it hurt? Maybe she'll grow up to be an actress."

"It's not natural!" my mother shouted. "Two little girls!"

"Natural. Schmatural. Big deal! If it was a boy, it would have been better?" my father snorted.

"No wonder her husband left her! She's a mean woman." My mother slammed the ice box door. "Spends a fortune on clothes."



Mrs. Adelman quit shopping for groceries in our store. Things calmed down. One of the other neighborhood kids told me Rosie now played with Sara, her nine-year-old friend from next door. I knew Sara had trunks full of dolls, all dressed in different clothes, like in a dress shop.

One afternoon I walked by Rosie's house. Both of them were sitting on the front stairs. Sara held a big fat baby doll in her arms. It looked soft and cuddly with lots of curly blonde hair, a blue nightgown, and white booties. Rosie was bending over kissing its pink painted mouth. Sara poked her. Rosie sat up real fast when she saw me. A mixed-up look flitted across her face. She stared at me, then stuck her tongue out and turned her back.

Kate Rosenblatt

Peg and Emily*

After supper and the movies, when Natalie has left, Peg and Emily are drifting in the hot tub, which is central to the back yard and available to all the women who share the small community Peg has formed out of her garage, the in-law cottage and her own house. Peg looks at Emily and asks, "Is it getting too hot for you?"

Emily reaches out, finds an arm ... squeezes it and asks, "What? I was somewhere else ... thinking about all the surprises in the past weeks about us being in the hot tub tonight and how different it is from the first time I came over and nearly died of embarrassment when you invited me in." She tugs at a strand of hair behind her left ear ... something Peg has noted that Emily does when she's stressed or uncomfortable. "I was thinking, especially about you 'n me..." She takes a deep breath.

Peg speaks softly. "I'm glad we stayed out here. I didn't want to appear too eager — or make you anxious, but I did want us to be out here by ourselves."

Emily ducks under the water and comes up with Peg's hand on her shoulder. Peg gently kneads Emily's neck and shoulders. She rubs her neck working her fingers up to Emily's lower skull.

Emily smiles and releases a sigh. "I guess we're just going to have to figure out how to say what we want around it all. I wanted to be with you before we turned in, but wasn't sure ... just didn't know what ... and ... mm-um, that's lovely. Do you want me to do your neck?"

"No, it's okay for me to massage you and for you to just enjoy it ... without doing or being anything. In time maybe we'll be able to say — 'I want to make love, do you?' Now, neither of us wants to rush the other and I'm still not sure whether your being a Lesbian will last ..."

* This is a shortened version of the chapter in Kate's novel-in-progress, *Five Old Women*.

Tears gather in Emily's eyes and she snuffles. "I'm just not used to having anyone attend to how I feel." She sniffs again, laughs and says, "I only cry in the happy parts of movies."

"Sh-sh, woman. Just lean back while I pleasure you." Peg continues rubbing Emily's scalp gently. The motion turns slowly to caressing. Her fingers wander around Emily's ears, down either side of her neck, under the chin ... touching ever so gently — skipping from chin to ear to the side of her neck where she rests her palm as her thumb strokes under Emily's chin.

Emily moans slightly as her body rests against Peg. She whispers, "Lady, your hands are corrupting me."

Breathlessly Peg asks, "Are they? Good, then these corrupters will just wander on. Your face has beautiful planes." She gives a light laugh and cups Emily's breast in her hand, saying, "You have adapted to my strange ways in a ve-e-ry short time." She rubs her thumb against the nipple in her hand, crooning ... "Lovely, so very lovely. I think you must have been with women in another time ..."

There's a loud gasp and Emily breathes, "Peg, I love it. But slow down, pl-ea-se. This old woman's body has waited so long and needs to take it slowly to prevent explosion." She lets out another deep breath. "Who ever would have believed the passion stored up in this funny old woman!"

She moves a little apart from Peg, at the same time tentatively letting one foot move onto Peg's crotch. Peg catches it and presses it against her so that Emily can feel her body's accelerating rhythm. Peg caresses the foot and ankle, raises the foot, draws the big toe into her mouth and sucks noisily on it. Letting it loose, she again places it between her thighs and laughs heartily. "Just think ... a couple of weeks ago we were wondering what, if anything, we were going to do about our mutual attraction."

Emily looks up at her. "I guess I was kinda forward, huh?"

"Em, it wasn't a one-way street you know. We talked about it."

"Well, I guess I'm not as shy as I led us both to believe. I sure like this." She draws closer to Peg and hugs her. She places her lips softly on the side of Peg's neck, just below her ear and kisses. Then she slowly licks where she'd kissed and brings her tongue

to Peg's ear, darting it in and out like a dragonfly until Peg pulls Emily's mouth toward her own and their open mouths meet, tongues exploring — inside and out, the pleasure building.

"Whee," breathes Peg as they move slightly apart. "I can't keep this up in here — it must 1000 degrees! Let's move."

"Now's the time to initiate my new bed," invites Emily, holding Peg's hand as she rises.

"Emily Thayer, sometimes your boldness shocks me," Peg grins and takes Emily's hand.

"Peg, it all feels so right. I do believe I've been waiting for this all my life. If I'm being too brazen for you, I can try to be a shy, simpering, southern girl ... but I don't think I'll be half as much fun." She laughs and rumples Peg's hair. "Come on. Let's go." She throws the towels over them and they run dripping and laughing into Emily's house.

As Peg drops her towel, Emily walks up behind her, puts her arms around her, hands under both breasts. Peg eases herself back against Emily's full, warm body, her butt hard against Emily's stomach. Then Emily stirs. Peg turns around and pulls Emily's mouth down toward her own, pushes her tongue deep into Emily's mouth, rubbing her tongue across teeth, the roof of her mouth then out over her lips ... back and forth gently from corner to corner, until Emily pulls back, gasping and laughing.

"Oh, honey ... you get me so excited 'n scared ... I guess by nature I'm truly a low-down hussy."

"Emily, you're beautiful and I wouldn't be surprised if I fall in love with you ... not just lust after your Rubenesque body. Come lead me to your virgin bed ere I die on this spot."



Old Woman
Louise Gilbert

Rosemary Hathaway

Ode to an Old Woman
From an Old Woman

The sparkle in your eye and sidewise grin

Attract me

Old woman I want to know you

Your urge to learn, try new adventures

Matches my own

Old woman I want to share with you

Your wrinkled weather-worn face

Feels sensuous beneath my touch

Old woman I desire you

Your hands, calloused and scarred from years of living

Bring me pleasure

Old woman I am yours

Emma Joy Crone

Notes from Hornby Island, B.C.

My identity and self concept have continually changed during my aging process. The challenges are constant and I admit I thrive on them. For a long time, when younger, the various struggles for survival (financial, work, relationship, marriage, housing, etc.) were overwhelming. Now I look back and see that living life to its full depth gave me gifts galore.

Born in England in 1928 during the depression in an industrial city, my parents provided me with strong working-class ethics of work and poverty consciousness. My father was a waiter and my mother, a boarding housekeeper who became a single mother when she could no longer tolerate my father's gambling and drinking his wages away. I discovered the love of women during my adolescence in wartime England but it was never manifested because of the times in which I was living.

My working life was mostly secretarial but in my 30s I had an opportunity to train as a hospital welfare worker. I was assigned a post in a geriatric hospital and there for the first time experienced the attitudes and oppressive behaviour towards old women. I could fill pages with stories of neglect and disinterest by both relatives and medical staff. This was the beginning of my awareness of the indifference, invisibility and dishonor accorded old women. At the same time I was unaware of lesbianism around me. I feel old lesbians have always been invisible, particularly in the mainstream of life.

My personal freedom was attained when I took my life in both hands at the termination of a child-free and uneventful marriage. After a year's mourning for so-called failure I migrated to the U.S. where my feminism and lesbian self surfaced (in the 1960s) becoming a source of great joy and expansion. I was 40 and did not see that old women were not represented. I was more often than not the token "older woman" surrounded by younger women who thought I was "great for my age."

My lovers have, in the main, been younger than I. It was not until I was 56 that I started to notice ageism, experiencing it not only in mainstream society but in the lesbian community and literature. Today I am with a woman who is 27 years younger than I. We celebrated my 66th birthday with a group of younger women and a middle-aged woman. My lover and I noticed their embarrassment when we sat together on a couch embracing and kissing.



About the same time that I began to notice ageism was also a time of discovering myself as a writer. To find peers I put out a newsletter called *A Web of Crones* from 1985 to 1989 which brought connections and correspondence from all over the world and I still network with women world-wide today. During the period I put *A Web of Crones* out I had Crone gatherings on this island in British Columbia where I now live. I continue to increase my visibility as an old lesbian whenever possible. Recently I read poetry for a video on environmental issues, being interviewed as an "elder" but also making sure it was known that I was a lesbian. A recent interview I did with a newspaper woman caused an article on lesbianism and ageing to appear in a Victoria, B.C. paper. These are my ways of fighting back.

In Canada there is little awareness of old lesbians' needs. Being a survivor when younger was a challenge easily met. Now that I am old I admit to some resentment towards those upper- and middle-class women who appear unaware of past struggles and present anxieties. I will not always be able to live in the country which I came to in my 50s because of ill health. I have no inheritance or family to bolster my finances, no trips to women's festivals to be with lesbian sisters in "safe" places. I have survived on welfare for 15 years and now live on the fixed income of a pension.

One of my main concerns, and one I was brought strongly in touch with during my years as a geriatric worker, is the situation for women of low income who may be shut in because of ill-health and are therefore dependent on the services of a patriar-

chal bureaucracy. Shut-ins is the term used by the social services whose only concern is to keep us tidily in place — fed, housed, cleaned and medicated. What of old lesbians' independence and personal autonomy? What of mental stimulation? What of those without the ability to articulate their needs — assuming that anyone wants to hear the needs of an old lesbian?

Recently I have heard that in Victoria, B.C. two women have begun to share the above concerns with others and are attempting to create an outreach via nursing programs and day care centres for seniors in an attempt to find old lesbians. It is being hard to find women to commit to this venture.

Once again, with ageism, as with the many fights we have endured against the "isms" in our society, we have some work ahead of us. I find it even harder because many do not feel it is an important enough issue. But I am now living the reality of age and I want to be in the forefront of this final battle, even though the body is slowed down and the joints creak. While my mind and voice are strong, while I can still press the keys of this typewriter — I will not be stilled.

Let's celebrate our age, the lesbians we know, the times we live in, our privilege to be able to speak out. And never forget our foremothers who endured in silence.

Miriam Carroll

Imani*

Call her old woman She is Grandmother, you know
She smells hot moist old
She reverberates against walls of inaction and silence
She is skin stretched taut
She is the beat
Call her old woman

She is sinews pulling her tightly
She is wood hewn to carry her sound
Call her a drum old woman drum
She is a tingle of metal held by her old bones
strong counterpoint flavor to the drum
Call her old woman
She can be rattle hissing snake sounds
tin bell thumping along merrily
She is the dancer the weaver the miller the stone
Call her old woman

She is the smudge the smoke the essence of Spirit
She is the altar the candle the gifts She is Love
She is Guardian of The Sacred Space created in good
Faith

Call her old woman Call her IMANI

* At an inspiring multiracial Healing/Spiritual Weekend, I was given the name IMANI, which is the last day of Kwanza, and is in the spirit of faith. It was an appropriate name, as I had already taken the name Faith in the Wiccan tradition. I wrote this poem in joy of my naming.

Pat Pomerleau

Amelia Earhart Didn't Cook

The hardest years in life are those between ten and seventy.

— Helen Hayes

We sat on camp chairs and lay on camp cots. Black iron with the finish chipping off, and we drank iced tea and looked at the night sky. The family talked about the disappearance of Amelia Earhart. What was a woman doing, flying around up there anyway, they said ... What was she doing up there with that man? They weren't married, were they?

One of the realizations that came over me was that Amelia Earhart probably didn't cook. Amelia Earhart wore trousers, cut her hair short and had a man helper. And she wasn't his wife. Amelia didn't belong to anyone and she didn't sit at home with babies. She didn't spend endless suffocating hours talking politely with other wives about recipes and discussing the best and cheapest place to get your hair done.

I didn't think I could fly, maybe couldn't be like Amelia that way, but eventually I did talk Mother-Auntie Boss into letting me buy a pair of blue jeans. We went down to the J.C. Penney store and bought them. They had elastic around the waist. I was pretty sure Amelia didn't wear jeans with elastic around the waist. I was pretty sure Amelia had trousers that had a fly in them. But anyhow, I felt that I was making some progress in my life just by having any kind of blue jeans. Mother-Auntie Boss gave some money to the store clerk and she put the money into a little black box that hung on a piece of wire and then she pulled a handle and the money and the box zipped up along the wire to the wooden balcony in the J.C. Penney store and another woman who sat behind some windows up there took the money out of the little box and it all came zipping back down to the main floor and the clerk reached up at just the right moment and plucked it out of the air, right off the wire. I thought that little box was sort

of like God. There was a sort of holiness about the J.C. Penney store. The cashier and the woman clerk wore black dresses with white collars and cuffs and their hair was done up in back and it was all very neat in the J.C. Penney store.

It was a lot neater, by far, than were my efforts to figure out how to make my life better. It always seemed to me that it was like trying to cut the legs off a pair of pants in order to make them shorts. You kept adjusting the alternate leg to make it even with the other leg, going back and forth from one leg to the other, cutting, trimming, adjusting. Finally, figuratively speaking, all you had left was a zipper and a couple of pockets. That was my life in the bosom of my family. I spent a lot of time hoping, and working, and figuring, and losing.

So I often climbed up into my Grandmother Dick's fig tree and sat there in the leafy silence. It was safe there and a haven of sanity. I thought maybe the little black box that may have contained God, and certainly did hold some spare change, would zip down into that tree one day while I was sitting there, and my life would then be better.

Sometimes the family, when they sat under the fig tree in the back yard in the hot evenings, talked about Eleanor Roosevelt. None of them liked FDR and they didn't like Eleanor either. One or two of the men had voted for FDR way back when he first began. But none of them approved of his wife. Always running off and not minding her own business, they said. What was a man to do with a wife like that? Why didn't FDR CONTROL her, they said. It was just another reason why FDR wasn't a good president. *That Eleanor!*

The family was sure she had influenced FDR to do some of the stupid things they said he had done with agriculture, trying to get the country back on balance. When the local people were upset with Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and they piled up copies of the book and torched them, Grandmother Dick, who read only the headlines in the papers, thought it was another of FDR's crazy programs, inspired by Eleanor. She threw down the paper. "Buck!" she yelled at my father. "Look at this! There will be no raisins this year! They're burning the grapes!" *That Eleanor!*

I knew Eleanor didn't cook. Didn't have to. All those servants! Everybody always said the Roosevelts were like the Royal Family. None of them cooked! I began to have a fantasy of Eleanor sitting in the fig tree with me. Eleanor, with her big teeth and her Hyde Park accent. Eleanor always wore a dress. I couldn't imagine Eleanor in J.C. Penney jeans, or a cowboy hat.

I had dreams of Eleanor ascending the fig tree in a long black skirt, her purse clutched in one hand. A square black purse clutched in one hand. A wide brimmed hat sat on her head at just the proper angle. And she grinned her toothy smile at me as she arrived at the large branch where it forked, about eight feet off the ground. She settled herself in the crotch and said, "Well now, Patsy. Let me tell you, though you may not think so just now, everything will be all right. You needn't think about husbands and babies and trying to figure out when peas should go on the stove if they are to finish at the same time the fish does ..." I would sit there, holding onto a branch, swinging my legs, and trying to cover my skinned knee with just one hand. I was in awe of the Great Lady and I was hoping we wouldn't be caught. My folks wouldn't like it if they knew I was talking with Eleanor Roosevelt.

I began to populate the tree with certain other people.

Amelia Earhart would be found. She would be found safe on some South Sea island. She would come down to that squalid little oil town in the California desert where I sat in Grandmother Dick's fig tree, and she would make a speech. She would fly in there some day. There was an airport there. There was a landing field with a long runway. There was a shed off to one side, and it was usually festooned with tumbleweeds that hung onto the rough boards on the downwind side. There was a windsock that often hung limp.

I thought if I was very lucky when Amelia came to Taft, she would find the old green house on Taylor at the end of the dirt street, by the big wooden oil derrick and she would climb up into the fig tree and take me by the hand and look deeply into my eyes. She would remove her helmet and shake her curly hair and then she would reach over and run her long fingers through my Dutch Boy Bob.

I was in an ecstasy of anticipation. Then she smiled and said, "Come with me." I climbed down from the fig tree and followed Amelia into her Piper Cub airplane with the red and white wings and we flew away. Flew away from Taft.

We lived happily ever after on a large ranch and I had horses and she had her own private airfield. I didn't cook for Amelia either. Food materialized as magically as she herself had materialized in the fig tree.



Afternoon passed into early evening and, in a slight ruffle of wind, shadows of fig leaves shifted over the ground at the foot of the tree. Not enough wind, probably, to lift the windsock out at the airfield at the edge of town. I climbed down from the tree and, taking care not to loosen the scab on my knee, I hobbled over to my own house. Taking care, too, not to jiggle or to knock loose any of the images I carried in my head. The precious images of my friends, Eleanor and Amelia.

Janny MacHarg

Niche Picking

Over a year ago my niece Sherry phoned about the final resting place of her mother's remains. Her mother, my sister Claire, was very ill in a nursing home. The ashes of my mother Gaga are in a book in a niche at the Chapel of the Chimes. Claire despises our other sister Chloe and Chloe's beady-eyed little husband Morty. I also have contempt for them as they hate people of all different religions and races — and homosexuals, too.

The niche my mother occupies is paid for, and there is room for three more urns. My niece does not want her mother sitting next to Chloe and Morty for all eternity. I, as the other sister, have the power to sign people into Gaga's niche. Sherry wanted me to sign my partner Evie and myself into the niche so that Claire, my mother, Evie, and I would take up all the room and keep Chloe and Morty out of there. However, Evie insists on her ashes being scattered, and if she wants that, I want it too.

My brother-in-law Morty died in November 1992 and Chloe died in January 1993. They were living with their daughter in Utah. Utah is a dry state. Chloe and Morty had been consuming a fifth of bourbon a day for the past sixty years. When they were cremated, it took six days each to put out the conflagration. Their daughter Deedee put their ashes on her mantel and planned to bring them to the Chapel of the Chimes. She did not know there was room for four in Gaga's niche. My sister Claire died December 15, 1993.

It has all worked out to perfection so far, thanks to our Higher Power. The Chapel of the Chimes is terraced. Chloe and Morty are in a niche that is knee high. Their son, my darling nephew Michael, killed himself because Chloe and Morty's alcoholic brutalization of him was too much to bear. His niche is slightly up the hill — waist high. And, as fate would have it, my mother and Claire are side by side in the Court of the Everlasting on top of the hill at eye level.

May the gods and goddesses be praised!

Cryptic Note: My niece Sherry told me that her friend Yvette was scattering her husband's ashes when a small piece of him flew back and lodged in her eye. She had to be rushed to the emergency hospital. When I tell Evie, maybe she will change her mind — there is still room for two in Gaga's niche.



Pat Bond as Lorena Hickock
Ruth Mountaingrove

Mab Maher

The Woman Across the Street

Betty thought my fascination with the woman who lived across the street from me was odd. Each morning at 11:00 this woman sat down before her window facing the street, her golden retriever lying along the window bottom on a box covered with a yellow afghan. From time to time the woman dropped her head as if taking a rest from the street action by reading a book lying on a lap pillow. They sat there, largely motionless, until dusk. Even in the afternoons when fog came in over Twin Peaks and the tip of the palm tree before her house blew wildly, they were still there.

Once a day I waved to her from where I sat writing at my desk in the apartment building across the street. Often she would wave one of her dog's paws at me and I'd catch up one of my cats to return the greeting until they anticipated the ritual and fled. I didn't know her name and assumed that she didn't know mine. This couldn't be attributed to anonymity in the city for I knew my San Francisco neighbors on a first-name basis. I just had no need to know her name; what more could I possibly know about her if I found out her first name? What difference would it make if she were Mary or Sally, for I never needed to say her name aloud? As a matter of fact, it occurred to me one day three years into my living across the street from her that knowing her first name would destroy some of the intimacy between us and add in the false premise that we conversed. When I mentioned that thought one day to my friend Betty who saw her from my window, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "Odd. Destroy *intimacy*, you say?"

So I went into a long monologue as to why names are not necessarily vital data about people, saying that many names are canned anyway, early expressions of parents' post-birth joy or regret. Although Betty loved to talk about words, this was not a compelling topic for her so she started searching in my refrigerator for food and mumbled, "I suppose not."

Betty worked as a legal assistant on 24th Street and came to my apartment during her noon breaks and we chatted about problems in our lives. Near my computer I kept a notebook in which I wrote down problem sentences which needed sensuous adjectives and lively adverbs. Betty was a laser I invited to probe them and suggest details; she magically introduced whole sentences to the words she added as if they couldn't live without her insertions. She gave adjectives to nouns, shaping them together with a brilliance neither had alone. She slipped adverbs in beside verbs with such skill they seemed wedded. Betty held in long inhales as she waited for the words she wanted, making me worry that one day one of my sentences would kill her.

I often felt that if the richness of Betty's language could have been shared more in her everyday life she would have received more tenderness from others. I believed Betty was addicted to our noon hours because then she found outlets for her expressions of beauty that her life did not offer her.

She came back now munching and sat down asking, "Well, what is vital data about her? If you are as close to her as you claim, what do you know *factually* about her?" She drew a string of the celery stalk down to the bottom and off.

"Not much," I replied. "And yet perhaps more than ..." I was thinking that I knew more about the woman across the street than I did about Betty, a fact which troubled me. I knew many facts about Betty's life that I had gathered over the months and she knew hundreds about mine. Most of them hung onto scaffolds we could have named "life's problems."

This day Betty wanted to pin me down on what I knew about the woman across the street. I knew some things: her being a white-haired woman about 80, visited often in the mid-afternoon by a nun in habit, a friend to her golden retriever, a reader, generally pleasant, undisturbed by fog and most likely a Catholic (for a priest came to see her), and housebound as far as I could tell.

"So that's it after three years of waving to her?"

"Yes," I said. Then I added, "But I know much more about her. And why do you want to know what I know about her anyway?"

"It amazes me how close to her you feel."

The discussion ended there for Betty shuffled her feet as if wanting to move the topic somewhere else. I wanted to go on at length on how quantitative measurements are often used to determine intimacy, as if adding up all the facts known about a person equals knowing him or her. I wanted to ask her if she felt that all facts about people are observable or if some, unnoticed, can slip in at you through the heart? I wished to question why there was so little real intimacy between us. But Betty was enjoying celery and didn't seem to want that wrecked by any philosophical ruminations.

About a month later the woman disappeared from her window. I thought she had gotten ill and so one afternoon I watched for the nun to come, then approached as her car pulled in to ask if the woman was ill. The nun brusquely replied, "No, Mom's just hanging out in the back room now. She's had a deep loss."

I walked back across the street, wondering why I hadn't concluded before that the nun was her daughter. But who had the woman lost? There was no evidence anyone lived there with her but maybe a sister or son or friend somewhere had died.

It came to me later in the middle of writing about my cats: an awareness that landed like a thud on sad, leaden feet. She lost her dog, her golden retriever. Why had I not known that? For if she were in sorrow for anyone else, she wouldn't have deprived her dog of the window. She loved him far too much to do that.

The next day I saw the daughter and asked if her mother's dog had died and this time, in a congenial tone, she told me the details of the dog's death. Her mother had gone to bed one night with the dog at her feet and had awakened the next morning, stretched out her foot to play with him and felt his body cold and hard. It had shocked her, scared her into retreating into a rear bedroom. Her mother had always before had time when she lost someone to death and she had lost many. This death of her dog was without warning, a shock that sent her into a depression that would not lift.

I knew now that I had a sad fact to blend in with the others that I knew about my neighbor: she was not who I thought she

was. She was capable of depression.

I grew aware then that this relationship I had with the woman was about images. I felt guilty that I had a picture in my mind of who she was, a picture that was permanently framed inside her small window and my mind. Who she really was seemed unimportant to me. I was bouncing an image off her, using her like the back of a handball court against which I cast my hopes about aging. She was stability when I became old; I didn't wish for any other particulars about her because I wanted all the facts about her to fit my image, no more and no less. With the exception of her attachment to the Catholic church and likely her non-lesbian identity, she was who I one day was going to be, so why mess up that serene image with facts which challenged it?

Across the street had become a safe distance to place an image of aging for I couldn't yet build one out of the circumstances of my own life. At 60 years of age, I had hundreds of facts about aging, all carefully selected as one does an insurance policy, knowing the big things that are covered but scanning the fine print. I had become an avid reader of articles on seniors. Few of them proved comforting; most omitted mention of lesbians. I often thought, how many hopeful facts would it take to make an image that would comfort me in old age? 1000, 2000?

At any rate I didn't see the woman. I began to think of old age as barren with losses which send one retreating into the back rooms of what life is left. A short time later I turned my desk to eliminate any view of the woman's house.

As usual Betty came over to help me with my writing but didn't ask about the woman. Then one day she commented, "So now your few facts no longer have a figure to cling to."

I looked out my window, hoping the woman would appear to refute Betty's words.

She chewed on a raw cucumber. "That was a cheap shot, huh? You just have another fact. She's not there for you now."

Tears started down my face and I thought how I loved people who were not there for me, way back to when I was a little girl. Mama in arthritic pain so much of the time, Grandma blind and senile, and Daddy unable to hear me physically or emotionally.

I had grown up in a family whose members were all lost in inward, individual pain. This woman across the street whom I had made into an image was there for me, telling me that old age at least is a time of peace.

I believed the pain I felt would just go away. And to tell the truth, as time went on the image eroded and I wasn't aware that I had relegated it to any back room of my mind. I was sure I had numbed her out, as one can any image of hope.

But I went on writing and Betty continued to fill in the sensual details.

Weeks later I glanced out my window and saw a small tail wagging in one corner of the woman's window. My god, I thought, can this be? The woman must have come back with a new dog. Then the body of a puppy, one leg totally white and the other brown-spotted, leaping up and down off the box, came full view into the window. Soon after came the woman to seat herself there with a cup of beverage on the sill.

Stunned, I sat there, then moved full view into my window to begin waving wildly. She attempted to pick up the puppy's paw to wave, then shook her head in a gesture of it-is-impossible. She bent over laughing and came up waving her own hand.

I waved back for the longest time. I didn't know what to do when I stopped. I paced my room and went through a pile of old writing. Then I decided to call Betty but I got her answering machine. I said into it as steadily as I could, "Hi, Betty. The woman across the street has just come to her front window with a new little puppy." I paused, unsteady, wanting to cry. "I wanted to tell you that soon I'll have more data about her." At that, the machine's curt buzzer sliced my words off. I thought that was just as well for my voice broke as I continued, "I'm going over to find out who she really is. You know, things about her that won't fit into my bare-bones image."

I fantasized Betty somewhere off in her office, startled by my admission of change, which I knew she couldn't even hear. Even so she would still have a new, semi-formulated fact intimate to me to ponder.

Frances Lorraine

A Day in the Life of One Old Dyke

As I leave her mountain home, my daughter hugs me and says, "I feel really grateful I've got a seventy-one year old mom who is young enough to babysit her six year old grandson." Driving home in the early morning light through the Merced River Canyon on a road I know so well, I ponder her remark. She meant it as a compliment, so why do I find it faintly patronizing? I know I am an old woman. I like being old. Perhaps there is a tiny part of me that doesn't accept aging.

Today is my afternoon at Coming Home Hospice. My daughters say that four years as a massage volunteer at the hospice have changed me — I take it they mean for the better. Admittedly, spending an hour in wordless communication with people who know they are dying — gazing into eyes filled with pain and wonder, touching and stroking emaciated bodies — has altered my way of thinking. Living thirty or forty years beyond what some of the young people will ever know makes me more appreciative of whatever years I have left. I want to give something back to them, even if it is just love. Or simply loving touch.

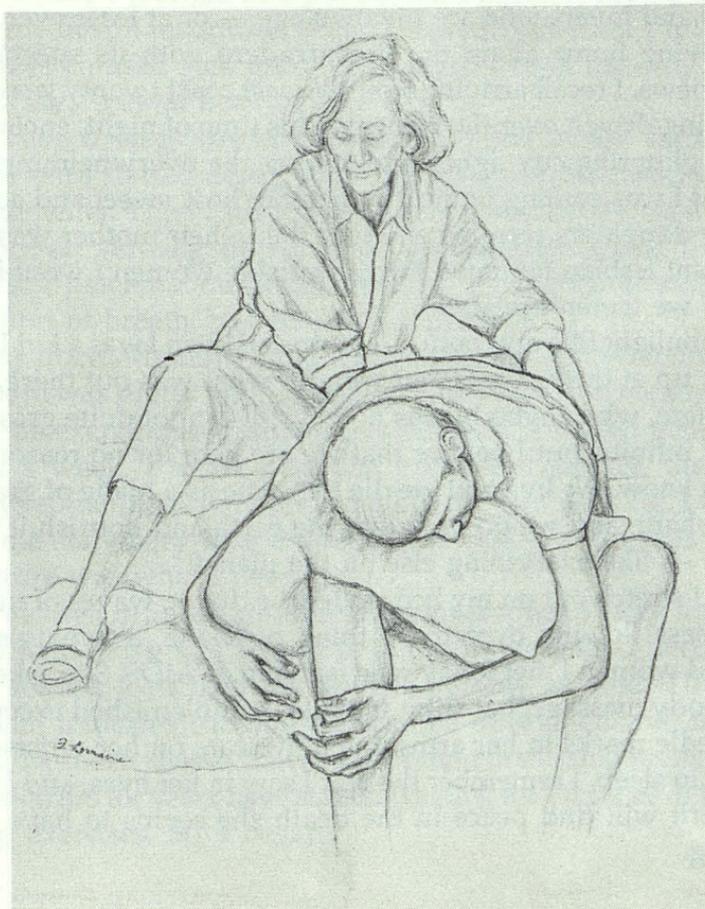
I cross the Bay Bridge at 11:30 a.m. and head for San Francisco's Mission district where I live. Waiting for the light at Valencia and 16th Streets, I watch the denizens of my neighborhood in their usual diversity of costumes and skin colors. My nostrils are titillated by delicious odors of meat smoking on grills and simmering salsa piquante, and I realize I am hungry. At home I greet the cats, change and fix lunch. I like living alone, if you can call living in a small condo with two cats, one of whom reads my mind, living alone.

At 12:35 I leave home and walk the eight blocks to the hospice. Barely in the door, I meet Cynthia. She asks for a massage, and I follow her to her room. Her boyfriend is on his way out and says he will call her. Closing her eyes, she lies down on her bed, her silicone breasts making two stiff peaks on her chest. Cynthia

is in the process of changing her gender but has not yet had the requisite surgery — it seems unlikely that she ever will.

I stroke in silence until suddenly her phone rings. She opens her eyes instantly, grabs the phone and says, "Yes — uh-huh — yes — uh-huh — I love you too," and hangs up. As she lowers her head, she looks at me, her dark eyes swimming behind thick lenses, and says, with a woman-to-woman shrug of the shoulders, "Men!" I smile and nod, amused, but saddened to think of her short life as a man trying to be the woman he believes he is.

I move on to old friends and new patients I haven't met before, and soon it is 5 o'clock, I am exhausted, and I must write down the time spent with each patient before I leave.



Walking home I am in a familiar altered state, floating about an inch above the sidewalk, drained but exhilarated, seeing everything around me in brilliant color, hearing sounds, but in a calm, serene place inside myself. This doesn't happen every time I leave the hospice, maybe one in four, but when it does I am all loose limbs and rippling muscles, feeling totally relaxed and inexplicably elated.

At home, I flop in a chair, put my feet up, and fall asleep for a while. When I wake, I shower, change and head to North Beach for dinner with a friend who cooks à la Française in what is still an Italian neighborhood. We drink a little wine, tell each other stories of our lives, smoke some grass and enjoy her wonderful cooking. Later we take a postprandial stroll with her dog, then she walks me to my car and I leave, reflecting on the pleasures of having friends and lovers who are my own age — or at least over sixty.

Driving home along the Embarcadero with its spectacular night views, I recall arriving from the east coast twenty years ago and being driven over the bridge at this time of night, enchanted by the glittering city lights, and having the overwhelming feeling that I was coming home. I remember how sweet and accepting my daughters were when I told them their mother was now a militant lesbian feminist. Two admirable women I would love even if we weren't related.

Moonlight fills my room as I undress. When I was a kid I used to look up at the heavens and wonder what was out there, why I was here, why anybody was here. I still cannot quite grasp the idea of infinity, but I believe that we are here for no reason that we can know. We live and we die the same as a blade of grass or an elephant, and we go back into the earth and nourish it — or should — like everything else on the planet.

As I stretch out on my bed under the duvet, waves of unconsciousness flowing over me, I think of Diana, a twenty-seven year old woman I met today who is dying of AIDS. She asked for a full body massage, her silky, ivory skin unblemished except for the needle marks in her arms, the ugly scars on her wrists. As I slide into sleep, I remember the fear I saw in her eyes, and I hope her spirit will find peace in the death she seems to have been seeking.

Elizabeth Freeman

Is It Only Genes?

When I talk about how healthy I am, someone always says, "Oh, you inherited good genes." If so, how do you account for my four siblings — a sister dead from breast cancer, a brother dead from diabetes, a sister well but her colon lost to cancer and another sister hardly breathing with emphysema. And what about me? Seventy-four. Never been ill in a hospital. The most serious illness I've had is the flu. Never broken a bone. Sexually more active than ever. Closest to my normal weight I've ever been. While I worked at a paying job I never collected a dollar from my health insurance. When I retired I collected a full year's worth of unused sick leave (180 days). I took off only what I called my "mental health days."

I have been aware of maintaining good health since I was fifty when I started doing yoga and taking calcium and vitamin supplements. Then I hit my seventies. I started taking it easy. I felt myself slowing down. Well, you're getting old, I said to myself. I gained some weight, started having aches and pains, got short of breath, had bouts of depression.

My doctor thought I might have a heart condition; my blood pressure was pretty high. Nope, my heart was fine. He suggested I take an exercise program for three months. I started going three times a week. I knew I needed exercise; however, there was always something more important to do than walking. I walked past the stationary bike a dozen times a day and never saw it. Structure was what I needed.

I've been in an exercise program three times a week for a year and a half. I lost the flab and built up my muscles. I needed not only aerobic exercises, but weight training as well. The latest research indicates that muscles can be developed well into old age. It has been shown that some women in nursing homes using wheel-chairs for years have started walking after a series of weight-lifting exercises. So, I began.

Today I feel ten years younger and am stronger than I have been in my life. I have a lot of energy, sleep better, and haven't been depressed since I started the program. Best of all, I am told I can look forward to many more years of vigorous health, walking, and dancing.

Four years ago I fell in love with a woman six years younger than I. This relationship has been the most wonderful thing to happen to me in my life. We don't live together, but we spend the better part of nearly every day together. I rejoice that I am a lesbian, financially secure, healthy and happy with a strong, supportive lesbian community.

Many young lesbians worry about being in a nursing home among heterosexuals. They talk about establishing an Old Dykes Home. However, when I talk to old dykes about this, they almost unanimously reject the idea. I believe an old lesbian ghetto is no better than the sunbelt communities where one seldom sees a child. Intentional communities, such as those planned in the co-housing movement, include a diverse group of residents. The cooperative apartment I live in was planned with old lesbians in mind. Now it houses three old and four young women.

Luck, genes, food, exercise and sex have contributed to my good health. For me old age has been the best of times.

Joan Miller

Yes, A Happy Heart Attack

After chorus, the night before my heart attack, I drove by my ex's. I didn't know why. My hands wouldn't warm up, even in my armpits. In my journal the last words were, "Am I coming down?"

The next morning the alarm went off at six, time to get up and swim. I didn't feel like it. I thought, "I'm retired — I don't have to," and stayed in bed. But I did have to move the car before eight because Thursday is street-cleaning day on our side.

I parked the car two blocks away, too far from the curb, I saw when I got out. I went back, parked it right, and started to walk home. As I stepped off the curb, I felt heartburn that I couldn't burp away. And then, carrying nothing heavier than the car keys and simply strolling down a slight incline, I got a killer heart attack that pressed on my breastbone like a boulder and pushed into my left arm down to the fingers. I'd read about that.

Worse than the pain was the rising nausea. I barely made it back to the bathroom before exploding at both ends. I collapsed on the couch in a terrible sweat, pants still around my ankles, and fell sideways to rest. But I decided to call Kaiser first.

I pulled up my pants, found the phonebook, squinted at those tiny numbers, and punched them in.

"I think I'm having a heart attack. Can I talk to an advice nurse?"

The operator shouted at me! "If you think you're having a heart attack, call 911! No advice!!" And she hung up!

I did what that wonderful woman said. Then I called 911 back because I'd forgotten to give my name. The sirens started right away, and they were coming toward me, for me, a sparkling banner of sound. I got my Kaiser card. I opened the door. I sat down.

First came the firemen, handsome, tall, silent, and smiling, black giants against my bright morning windows. Then came the paramedics, one unwrapping an oxygen mask while asking,

"On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is the pain?"

"Eight," I guessed. It didn't seem very scientific. The little pile of litter left behind showed me later that they had also used a tourniquet, needles, nitroglycerine.

"We're ready to go." They put me in a small red chair with little wheels, took off my watch, put my purse in my lap, and tilted me back. "No, you don't need a jacket. It's warm out."

I was rolling toward the elevator. "Would you flush the toilet, please?" I asked a fireman.

In the lobby, they slipped me onto a gurney and popped me into the ambulance. "On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is the pain?"

"Six."

"Drive slow," said the big paramedic. He put a strip in my mouth and radioed Kaiser. Another strip and we were there, heads popping out of Emergency to greet us, people all over me as soon as I was inside.

Somebody said, "On a scale of 1 to 10 —"

I don't know what miracles they worked. I learned that heart attack management is superb now if they can get you soon enough and administer some substance that dissolves the clots choking the heart (I think). My pain was easing but my lips and tongue were so dry (a side effect of nitroglycerine) that I was begging for water, even a wet cloth, while they were trying to revive my blood pressure and pulse.

Soon I was in ICU, the Intensive Coronary Unit, facing a greeting group in my single room. "Who's your personal doctor?" asked a gorgeous young woman who I hoped was a dyke.

"I don't have one. I just moved back to The City."

"Well, you do now!" she said, and I felt like a kid chosen for a team — adopted — thrilled. A woman in a white coat from Emergency was still with me, smiling, and my beautiful male nurse with a ponytail was already taking care of me. He put wires all over me, needles in me, a catheter up me, and a hose in my nose, but none of them hurt. A permanent blood pressure cuff squeezed my arm every few minutes, and I slept while a black column of monitors flashed green lines and numbers to the pros. My vacation had begun.

People find it hard to believe I really enjoyed my heart attack, but I have always loved the care and the company in hospitals. This time I learned that a heart attack is not nearly so painful as giving birth, which, on a scale from 1 to 10, I would call 50. And it doesn't last a quarter as long. And my time in Kaiser-SF's critical coronary unit was so healing and interesting and funny and complicated that it was much more pleasure than pain. I wish I could have understood all the medical procedures, but even the small ones fascinated me. Do you know they take your temperature in your ear now, measure the oxygen in your blood with some kind of clothespin on your finger?

And the people you meet! I was going to say there were gorgeous homosexuals but the heterosexuals were way above average too; it was a privilege to be admitted to that company. My night nurse, for instance, had a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and played five instruments, including piano and cello!

I asked her if I could have died.

"Yes," she said, after a slight hesitation. "You saved your own life by calling so fast."

Her words reverberate in my mind. They make me feel free and strong. But she also said men don't — won't — call fast enough, insisting the pain is merely indigestion, and delaying until the damage is fatal.

When I graduated to transitional care, I had a room with a view, a roommate with stories to tell, great food, and the continuing fascinating mix of people who work at Kaiser, people you can really talk to, laugh with. I kept laughing and falling in love all week, a wonderful way to feel at seventy.

In addition, news of the attack brought old friends and new to my side. Calls came from all over, including the East Coast, the East Bay, the North Bay, the Valley. Dottie invited me to submit to *Sinister Wisdom*. Ruth came from GLOE to be my first visitor. Margaret, from the swim team, brought flowers. Clarke and Sarah promised short, rehabilitating walks. And Jeanne told me to write about this whole experience, which has felt not diminishing but actually enriching.

Mary Flick

Unfinished Letters

January 1993

Dear friends and relatives,

Starting on November 22nd, 1992, I've been in and out of the hospital with a series of traumatic episodes and as a result everyone has been concerned and worried about me. Some of you have heard the gruesome details. I shall spare you the worst parts but the fact was that on Sunday Nov. 22, my son Peter and I had just been to church. I was driving and Peter was along as he planned on working on a dent in the new Mazda my partner Ginny and I had just bought. I was stabbed with a horrendous pain in my lower abdomen — couldn't drive — Peter took over and we ended up at Mt. Zion emergency room. I had a perforated intestine, it was decided, and surgery was scheduled for the next day.

Skipping the intensive care episodes, I discovered that I had a colostomy, which could be "reversed" in several months. The good news is that the intestine was not malignant, but a spot was seen on my left lung. It hadn't been on a previous X-ray.

After 13 days in Mt. Zion Hospital, healing nicely we thought, I came home. In a few days I was so short of breath I had to go back into the hospital where it was discovered, after more tests, that I had blood clots in my legs and lungs. So an "umbrella" was placed into my abdomen to keep further clots from my lungs and I was put on blood thinner and kept in hospital for 10 days until it was decided I could again go home.

After a few days home, I awoke one morning with a severe chill and then a high fever. OK — another trip to the doctor, another hospitalization to find that I had an infection in my blood needing an antibiotic for at least a month. So after another 10 days in the hospital I am now home with an IV setup, and a nurse comes daily to give me an IV for an hour.

Next week I will go into the outpatient clinic to start an evaluation and new treatment for the spot on the lung — which a biopsy had confirmed was malignant. ...

February 1994

The middle of February 1993, Ginny and I went on our usual annual retreat to Wildwood with our 19 women friends, Women with Wings. We had a wonderful time although I was pretty tired and couldn't participate in everything.

Further tests had to be done to see if I was strong enough to stand lung surgery and a minor operation was performed to test lymph glands in my chest. The results didn't show malignancy, so on February 26th I underwent surgery and the upper lobe of my left lung was removed. However, further tests of the lymph glands were suspicious and it was decided that radiation should take place on my chest — as an outpatient at the Tumor Center. This took six weeks, five days a week, 30 times I reported to the Center. I withstood the radiation well — didn't become nauseated and didn't lose any weight. That ended on June 1st and I felt wonderful. The back surgery for the lung removal finally healed. It was a slow, painful process, but I felt well enough to plan a trip to see my daughter and her family in Port Townsend, Washington. Ginny and I flew up for the 4th of July weekend and had a wonderful visit. We were taken out on the Sound one day in a new motor boat. We also went to a great "fiddle" concert.

We had planned a vacation in August with Ginny's sister, niece, and cousin from New York. A reservation for two cabins had been made for the last week of August at Big Sur Lodge. Ginny's sister Jerry brought her ten-year-old grandson John along, too. I began to have a worrisome, aching arm and hip so on Sept. 9th I saw the oncologist, who ordered a whole body bone scan. When that showed suspicious areas, an MRI was done, which revealed that the cancer had metastasized. There was a new tumor in my left shoulder and two in my lower back. So two more weeks of radiation were undergone on the two areas. This radiation was stronger, and this time I became nauseated and the pain did not lessen for quite a few weeks. ...

[Mary did not survive to see her work appear in this issue. After years of living valiantly with cancer, she died on February 13, 1994 at age seventy-nine.]

Ann Stokes

Chalice of Green

The dense green downed.
Unable to stand up to wind
that would not secede, cold
brittled right into its trunk.
This hemlock, with needles more
plentiful than memories, fell
uphill among friends.

Walking in woods all my life
I had seen many fallen.
Giant-stepped over them,
Sprawled thighs either side,
Slipped eyes under curled
lichen and brown fungus
roofing secret caves. Yet
in my own small country
of pointed firs, this fall
caught on my marrow.

She who loved trees died
under a mountain ash,
out-walking her prime. At
ninety-three she had taken
a picnic close to maiden hair
rested her head for a maiden
dream put her wedding ring
on her right hand
and slept into death.

This woman, my Mother,
spent her life longing for light; transformed
when she touched, oh brief seconds.
It was she who sat me at three
in the pine needles, to hear
dark silence catch light
through heaven-fed limbs.

Her dream became vision,
lightening my grief down the
hemlock's root through rich
earth into magenta, magnified
and magnificent.
My rushing heart
carries this body, without restraint,
to a chalice of green
where moss thickens, loss deepens.

Greer Greene

Friends of Dorothy

This past year I have attended three memorial services for black sisters or, as they used to say in the old days, “friends of Dorothy” — meaning that the women were lesbians. The services focused on esteeming these women, recognizing their intelligence, creativity, productivity, success, and their capacity to love. The women were recognized also as having had successful relationships, intimate and interpersonal, with other black women and their partners. One woman was out to her family and the world. The other two were not.

During the memorial services, several of us took turns telling herstory accounts about each of the women’s lives, recognizing our personal sense of loss and the greater loss to the community, in that each had died relatively young without having achieved all her goals or having impacted her society or the general community in a manner in which she would have preferred.

Some of their family members attended the special memorial services; each family preferred to have a funeral service in the church of choice in their community. I attended one of the funerals and experienced the entire service as a bad joke. Lots of wailing and crying about the loss for the family in general, very little said about the woman as a viable, loving person with an intimate personal life — a life far above the heavy emphasis the family chose to place on the woman having been a good daughter and a hard worker. No one acknowledged that the woman was also a lesbian in a fifteen-year relationship with a loving companion and friend — a woman, incidentally, not invited to attend the funeral.

I began to think about myself and the many other black lesbians who no doubt will live and die without ever having received special recognition or having been esteemed as persons by their own families. I began to think how I had for many years engaged in a rather collusive relationship with my family and many of my close friends. Many times I would fake an interest

in their prearranged blind dates for me with men. I would often roll my eyes and wink when asked about my sex life or the current man in my life. It was easier for them to associate me with males, real or imagined, in order to suppress real concerns about my never bringing males home for family members to meet. We all played the game, pretending I was like all the other black women in my family and the immediate community.

I did not feel comfortable coming out, and for a long time didn't even know how to come out. In my youth in the black community, an out lesbian was considered to be at the very bottom of the varying levels of low-life. I learned this lesson early when a woman in the community returned home after World War II and began to dress like a man and drive a taxicab. She was the pariah of the community and, even as children, we were warned not to go near her, talk to her or accept any gifts from her. I don't remember much about this woman other than that she was always alone. I never recall seeing her with any other women or men.

I was an extremely parent-identified child and assumed the role of caretaker at an early age. I was assertive, self-directed, and eager to please. No one had to tell me to straighten up and be a "big girl." I taught myself. I began working at age ten at odd jobs such as babysitting and helping to care for older women in the community. Later, I was the first in the family to support myself and get a college education, undergraduate and graduate, and to take a job as a white-collar professional.

I became a financial resource to my family at an early age. The harder I worked, the more money I contributed to the household and/or lent to familial borrowers who gave little thought to repaying me or esteeming me for my successful management of money. I was the one who remembered and gave gifts for special occasions, birthdays, etc., to be remembered myself by the family only at times of financial need. My sense of success became counterfeit in that my value was based on the amount of my financial contribution to the family. This was because of my success and the fact that I was single, not a parent, and not partnered with a male.

By the time I was thirty, my role as family banker had been well-established. Family members knew that if they had a financial crisis, they could come to me for assistance. Emotional blackmail — exclusion from specific family gatherings — was often used to keep me tied to the financial needs of the family. If I did not share my income in certain ways, then I was not included as a viable member of the family. Family members no longer asked me why I wasn't dating or why I engaged in most social activities alone or with other women.

When people outside my family asked why I wasn't married, family members would quite pridefully remind them that I was "too smart" — meaning intelligent — to put up with a black man. Everybody would laugh, including me. When I was not in good financial standing, I would often be the butt of other family jokes about "funny people." Mine was the sad-funny type of laughter because as a youth I was often reprimanded for being "too smart" — meaning independent.

At thirty-five, with four years of successful therapy under my belt, I learned how to say no and began closing all accounts to family members who requested financial assistance. This behavior definitely placed me in a new role. Anticipating rejection on a grand scale, and experiencing some sense of loss, I was totally surprised at the outcome. When I refused to continue to contribute to the financial success of family members, there was no remaining avenue for interaction or exchange. I was shocked to realize the amount of internalized rage caused by my dysfunctional role within the family. When I began to manifest the anger, I also began to feel better about myself.

At about that time, I moved to California and began what I call learning how to love myself, share my closet, and be a lot more open and active in my community. I built significant bridges of friendship with the black and white women in my community. I gave new focus to my work; my self-esteem soared and I was on my way.

I created a family for myself — or, rather, a family of choice formed around me — and I was freed up to the extent that I no longer had to mentally look over my shoulder, wishing and

wondering if I was loved and if I would reconnect with my family of origin in a newly productive manner. From age forty-five to fifty-five, I focused primarily on my life-style and role as a black lesbian in the black/white community.

I found that the black community often induced the same pain and anguish that I experienced in my family. I am strongly aware of the penalties the black community extracts from me. The community views me as a misfit because I am an assertive, self-directed, self-loving, independent woman — traits that would be acceptable in the black community if I weren't a lesbian, traits seen as positive in heterosexual black women but viewed as male when exercised by me.

Those attitudes and ideas about lesbians are expressed in the negative behavior of heterosexual females and males. The mark of oppression lies heavy on my shoulders: homophobia on one side and racism on the other. At age sixty, I am mastering walking the middle line and have tempered my mettle to deal with the oppression on both sides of me.

I hope my story will serve as a source of empowerment to free other lesbians from the burden of the yoke I have borne for so long — free them to make friends, interact with their chosen community, expand themselves and realize that we can create our own families. I hope more black lesbians will or already realize that relationships with relatives can be maintained without having to surrender one's identity or true sense of self.

Vashte Doublex

Ageful Equals Rageful

It's no accident that I am editing a newsletter for old lesbians and other women with the new title *We are VISIBLE*.

Being invisible is one of many rages. First as an immigrant, then as working class, as a woman, as a wife, as a lesbian and now as old.

Sometimes I say to my old friends, "And what do you do with the rage?" and they nod, shrug or laugh at my audacity.

In the '70s, when the women's movement was in full swing and I came out as a lesbian, one of my favorite statements was, "I can be angry at anything you care to speak to me about!" All the pent-up rage of years of sitting on myself in so many aspects, shaping myself into the required image, holding in my stomach and my very being.

Eventually even the anger got stale and, like so many of us, I tired of the struggle and wanted to love and be loved, to save myself and the planet in a less aggressive way. The system eagerly awaited to incorporate me while 12-step and other programs enticed me with promises of peace and serenity.

But it's not working.

I've been sweating for twenty years, more even. And why do I sweat? I am told it's MENopause. I have often talked myself into believing that it is connected with shame about my origins. Once, in my radical days, I researched the depletion of adrenalin due to women's constant fear and anxiety living in a patriarchy where she is constantly subjugated. At one time this gland produced and excreted estrogen, thus naturally replacing the estrogen which no longer came from the ovaries. But the research got lost somewhere in our efforts to take full responsibility for ourselves and quit blaming men. Am I sweating out my rage?

At the grand age of 67 I am still working a 40 hour a week job I'd leave tomorrow if I had enough to live on. The reward for ten

years' work is a pension of \$650 a month — at the age of 70. Guess I didn't plan my finances right, make the right investments, save more, work harder. So it's all my fault, isn't it? Could this be a reason for rage?

My work is with ordinary people, most of them living on what is called "welfare." In Canada, it's called a pension, something a person deserves after working all their lives, received without the humiliation of reducing themselves to abject poverty. With that as a shadowy model, it's small wonder that many of us go into old age with the ogre of poverty as companion. That fear keeps me separate from my companion lover as we both work out our time in different parts of the country. Rage!

I'm angry about the new age salve which attempts to mute out my rage. If only I would meditate more, do affirmations, practice yoga, give up chocolate and coffee, if only I would be a "real" vegetarian, grow my own vegetables, spend less, live in a cabin in the country. It's not that I don't believe in these and try to do and be them. It's that my rage is important too and I want it to be valued in this new age.

It keeps me on my toes around all important feminist issues and I am grateful for it. I don't want it to be a contradiction to compassion and love. For me it is the Yin Yang of staying a healthy happy old lesbian. I use the ocean as my guide. One day she is so peaceful and calm I can see my face in her surface. The next she rages and roars with all the power she holds inside. That is how I am too.

Catherine Nicholson

“The View After 70 Is Breathtaking” *

In *Camino Real*** (the play, not the place)
there's a sound — a man-made sound — alarming
the arrival of the clownish scavengers:

It's time it's time look out look out!

(it's not a whistle, but it's shrill
Two notes which two? C sharp? G sharp?
I'm tonedeaf — No flats, I know no flats!)

In the mountain town where I lived before,
it startled the rock doves from their daily
Quaker meeting on the high wire outside my window
a slow-moving ponderous vehicle lurching up
my solemn hill warning

It's time it's time look out look out!

(it's a horn — yes, a horn, but which one?
oboe? saxophone? No. two notes like breath
an iamb — a dactyl — a trochee? I can't recall
where's the Book? I've lost the Book?)

Now in this southern city where the cicadas drown
all other night sounds, I'm startled awake —
It's coming — where? which street? Up Acacia across
Minerva down Gloria —

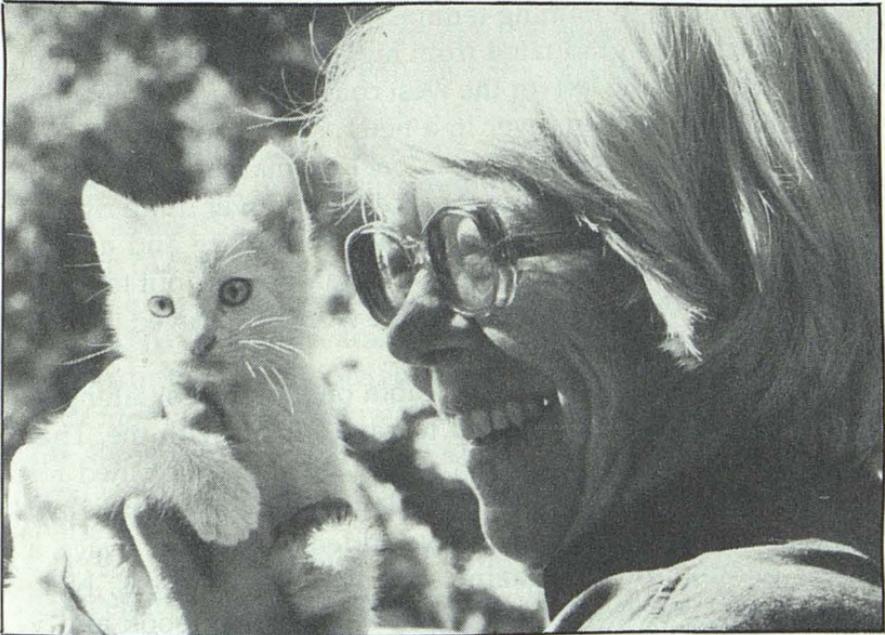
* The title is from William Maxwell's *Billy Dyer and Other Stories* (New York: Knopf, 1992). This is the first piece of an unfinished series of reflections on life in my seventies.

** By Tennessee Williams

It's Time it's Time look Out look Out!

(If I can name it, if I can hear it exactly, if I can snatch
the precise words from my memory, if I can bring my palate
my teeth, my tongue, my lips, my breath, my brain together
at the right moment to tell you all, allofyou whatitis —)
then well,

that's it.



Baba Copper

Writer: *Over the Hill, Reflections on Ageism Between Women*

Elaine Mikels

Ruth Mountaingrove

One Old Lesbian's Words

I did not become a lesbian until I was 48. At the same time, I moved from the east to the west coast where I have spent my lesbian life. What caused me to move 3000 miles? Why, love, of course. Love I had dreamed and fantasized about from the time I was thirty when one day I realized I wanted a woman friend of mine sexually, a woman who loved me but could not permit herself such an indiscretion, but twenty years later was quite upset when I fell in love with a woman who *was* willing to love me back sexually. Was willing to share my life.

Before that my life had gradually been changing from suburban housewife with four children to full-time research assistant with four children to flaming feminist/separatist with two children at college, one graduated from high school, and one still in the fourth grade, who left for the west coast and began a new life with me and my lesbian lover in a heterosexual commune.

The commune's emphasis was on Krishnamurti teachings. Here for the first time I was in the closet. My lover quite rightly realized the homophobic nature of the community and at first kept us firmly closeted. Gradually we began to come out to some of the women. Two years later one of the women betrayed us, and we were expelled from the commune.

Our next home was a 10' x 10' cabin on gay men's (later gay women's) land. My lover wanted to have a child with me. That child was *WomanSpirit*, a quarterly magazine we published for ten years, with the help of hundreds of women. Later when *WomanSpirit* was seven years old we added *The Blatant Image*, a feminist photography magazine. We even had a press, New Woman Press, which we used to publish a poetry book and a songbook of mine. All of these publications are still available. But after five years we were expelled from that land not because of being lesbians but for our feminism. We were uppity women and that was more than those particular gay men could take.

Having been burned twice putting time and energy into someone else's land we were able, through a series of fortunate circumstances, to buy what my partner referred to then as "a rag tag piece of land" in the mountains of Oregon. Work on the land and buildings over sixteen years has gradually transformed it into a valuable holding (according to the tax assessor). This land is "Rootworks," which is owned by both of us equally. A place where women, mostly lesbian, come to visit and sometimes to live.

My life changed again in 1984 when my partner decided thirteen years was long enough for a relationship. The publication of both magazines came to an end along with six years of "Ovulars," week-long summer workshops for lesbian photographers. I left Oregon for California where I have lived ever since, making trips to "Rootworks" where I still have my darkroom, my study, my desk in the office. Where I still share food with my partner when I visit.

My life now centers around the coastal towns of Arcata/Eureka. I went back to college here, graduating in 1990 with a Master of Arts in Photography.

Many lovers later I am now single, 71, an Old Lesbian. I am on the board of our local community television station (ACAT), work as an RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) person in charge of the Ink People's darkroom. Ink People is a local artist studio group. I have produced feminist and lesbian programs for KHSU FM for eight years. Locally I have had many photographic and painting exhibitions, one-woman as well as group shows.

Once in a while I slow down, pace myself, maybe take a day off. I've noticed that it takes longer to recuperate from a flu or heal from an injury, but I do heal. It takes time and teaches me patience.

One of the real pluses of living in Arcata is Humboldt State University where the statewide Over 60's program allows me to take any course the college offers by paying only \$3 per semester.

I live on my social security in a federally-subsidized one-bedroom apartment in what I call the project. We residents are a mix from the very old to the very young.

I am able to purchase occasional large-ticket items like a computer and printer by using my savings. Of course, even a brief medical emergency would use up what's left. My partner and I have talked about putting our land in trust for women. Till then we are at risk of the state seizing the land if we have an accident or illness we can't pay for, but so far, I have been able to stay out of hospitals. I credit homeopathy (my doctor is also an M.D.), a sensible diet and a consciousness of how much energy I have.

I am out selectively in my town. The college knows I'm lesbian, the artist and writing community likewise, and of course the lesbian community, but I don't make a big deal of it at the project.

It is very difficult to move into 60 and then 70 in a society that values youth and in many cases actively hates age. So how is it to be a lesbian at 71? Mostly wonderful. As I approached 70 and then left it behind there were those cultural promptings that said 70 was really old and what was the use of creating more art, writing, music when there was so much out there already. When death seems plainly closer in my seventies than it had been in my forties or fifties.

Do I experience ageism? Well so far in my seventies no one has approached me as a lover though I am just as sexual as I was at sixty. However, AIDS has made me think more than twice about a sexual relationship. The thought of dental dams turns me off. Cuddling has always appealed to me though in my experience, it is difficult for most lesbians for whom cuddling goes with sex. Very difficult to keep separate. I hope that we lesbians will evolve some touching and satisfying ways of being with each other that do not include the risk of death. I have to add, though, that sex has always been problematic for me. First as a teenager with the parental injunction not to get pregnant. Then as a married woman with five births, scared that I might become pregnant again. Now as a lesbian in the 1980s and '90s confronted with the possibility of AIDS. While it's true that lesbians are the lowest reported risk group, it is also true that we are the invisible group. When I went for an AIDS test, my result was not recorded.

There was no place on the chart for that information. I think under-reporting has given us a false sense of security.

I see ageism in my life at the DMV where it is assumed that my reaction times are slower when actually it is my eyes that have been my handicap since I was born nearsighted. I hear ageism at the clinic or the doctor's office when I am told by the nurse that she hopes to be as spry as I am when she's my age. When the doctor says whatever problem of mine he's referring to is normal for my age. Whatever normal is.

But to get back to lovers, let's not forget that Buffy Dunker came out as a lesbian at 72 when she fell in love with a pitcher on a woman's softball team.

As I get older I find I no longer want to live with anyone on a 24-hour basis. I enjoy my independence too much for that. But I pay for it in this coupled society (heterosexual and lesbian) because it means I am single at the movies, art receptions, coffee houses or parties unless I am lucky and can invite or am invited by someone.

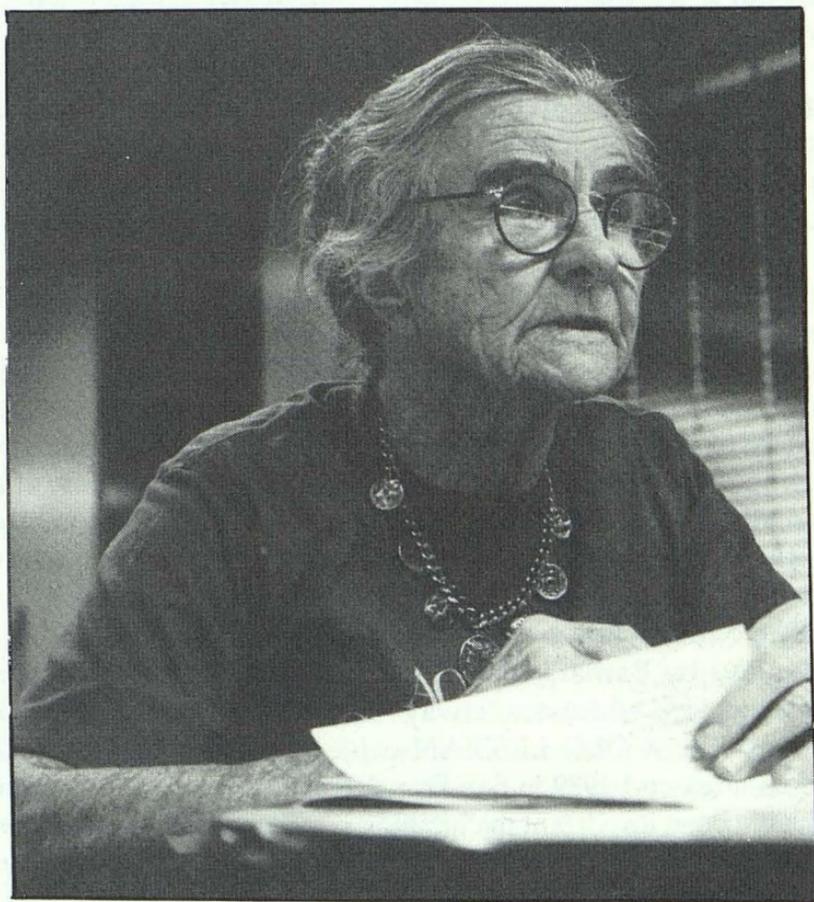
Aging and the limited income of social security mean that even though I have no trouble getting around, I do not have the money to do much of it. Which brings us to class, also a problem of aging. Lesbians who have pensions to add to their social security, or other financial resources, have more options for travel, housing, entertainment. But rather than being divided by this, I hope all of us old lesbians, from poor to upper class, will join together to change society's ageist attitudes, particularly the ageism of young and middle-aged lesbians.

The ovular book on lesbian and feminist ageism is *Look Me In The Eye* by Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich. Barbara's many keynote addresses, always incisive and to the point, and the West Coast OLD LESBIAN conferences, in 1987 in the Los Angeles area and 1989 in San Francisco, have made ageism visible and have been important in changing our own and younger lesbian attitudes. With the formation of OLOC, "Old Lesbians Organizing for Change," there is work going on on a national basis.

I attended both OLD LESBIAN conferences/celebrations. Took photographs, and wrote articles for *Off Our Backs* on the

1987 conference. Took some photographs and sat in on the beginning of OLOC in 1989.

I live in a rural area with few old lesbians. My best friend, 61, just moved away. Other old lesbians are not political. I am left feeling much less supported in any fight against ageism. But we must not accept ageist attitudes as such. We have a right to be treated as who we are, old lesbians in our sixties, seventies, eighties and however long we live!



Buffy Dunker, 81
Ruth Mountaingrove

Bernice Ybarra Miller

A New Love

I've found a new love now
A very jealous, possessive lover
Who steals time away from other pursuits
Who invades my thoughts by day
And robs me of sleep at night
Ideas, and thoughts and stories are my lovers
That long to be put to paper,
That must be told. They cannot wait.
They tumble like a brook down a bank
So impatient, they can scarcely wait to be put on paper
Before they fade away — never to be recaptured.
My lover is a compulsion to write.

Elaine Mikels

In the Prime of My Old Age

At seventy-two I am going through another midlife crisis. It has taken me this long to feel my oldness and to face the possibility that I could be physically, emotionally and financially dependent on others and that some day I shall die. In my autobiography, *Just Lucky I Guess*, it was evident that I saw myself as ageless and lived in a way that eternally made me seem so young. Losing some of my hearing ability and finding that my memory is not sharp were the first signs for me that indeed I was getting old and that I had better see myself in a more realistic way. This realization didn't mean that I would have to stop living an active life but that I would have to work harder keeping myself fit and accept whatever physical or social limitations might confront me. I was depressed for several weeks until I saw that I still had many years ahead of me and that they could be joyous ones if I played it right.

In the last five years my life has changed radically. One of the biggest accomplishments I've made is living alone by choice where I am no longer dependent on a lover for love and validation. With a lover I always fell into a dependent mode. I know I have felt strongest when I lived alone, traveled on a shoestring in foreign countries or started my own social or political project or organization. In lover relationships I never cultivated friendships and I never learned how to make friends. The old fear of rejection constantly hovered over my psyche when I would reach out to others and try to connect with them in a deeper way. My being single now doesn't mean that I hold to a non-couple ideology. It only means I realize how dysfunctional I was in a primary relationship. I am now challenged to become healthy before getting involved with a lover again. Living alone, however, has been no easy task. It has been extra hard for me since my last relationship was an intense and joyous one, and painful for me when we broke up.

To pull myself together, I became involved in the activities that interested me in the past. I found that it wasn't easy. I just didn't have the physical stamina to go to four or five meetings a week, take those long hikes or bike rides, or drive 600 miles a day when I took trips across the country. Traveling on a shoestring in foreign countries is something I still do though I no longer rough it by sleeping at youth hostels, campgrounds or under bridges. I like hot water and a private bath and know I'm limited to traveling during the off-season and finding out of the way places.

In the last two years I have spent many hours in a caregiving role with my sister who is suffering with Alzheimer's. My sister's illness demands the best of me. I have to learn to be patient, gentle and caring, and not to take things personally or feel manipulated when she constantly changes her mind, has mood swings or makes outrageous demands on me for my time and energy. My greatest adjustment was seeing my sister — a child genius, career attorney, activist and super-mom whom I had always looked up to for strength — deteriorate before my eyes. In the past, I've protected myself from being involved with the illness of family and friends by living far away from them and not keeping in touch.

And now I am facing my own illness, leukemia in its early stage. I'm determined to cure myself. I have believed all my life in the patriarchal medical profession and was skeptical of natural healing methods. Faced suddenly with my own demise, I had to change my point of view. I've listened to those who had this disease and became open to alternative approaches. I was told to avoid stress. I consciously did the things that made me feel good about myself and helped me stay centered. This meant I had to learn to be cool and not get upset with my sister's behavior. I also took stock of what gave me joy. I immediately went to the animal shelter and brought home a cocker spaniel, which has always been a favorite breed of mine. Now with Hillary's company, I am taking long hikes in the Santa Fe foothills as the days start getting warmer.

During the winter I took advantage of being a "senior" by getting free installation of cable television. I took the conscious step of dropping out of groups that were no longer stimulating,

and I stopped seeing people whom I felt didn't care for me or weren't accepting of my politics or lifestyle. I enjoyed the lesbian discussion group I started where we did a lot of socializing and networking, but later found that I needed to be with people whose social/political concerns were similar to mine. I found them when we worked for the passage of a civil rights law that would include sexual orientation, but after it failed we formed the Human Rights Alliance to get it passed at the next legislative hearing.

One of the most important and stimulating experiences I've had in the past five years is knowing and working with old lesbians on the steering committee in OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. It has brought my two worlds together: my strong identity as a lesbian and my social/political activism. My only regret is that I am unable to find lesbians my age in Santa Fe who have a perspective similar to that of OLOC members.

Since I am much more in touch with what I like to do, I no longer feel the need to conform or push my ideas on others. My friends tell me that I am mellowing out in my old age, but I still refuse to compromise my political ideals. Instead, I have become less strident in my approach and avoid taking myself so seriously. I use humor rather than heavy rhetoric to influence others.

What excites me now is how the mass media is embracing lesbianism and making it more respectable to middle America and seeing many laws being passed to protect our rights. This achievement is in sharp contrast to the '40s and '50s when I was oppressed, thought of as sick and perverted and lost my job for being a homosexual. I am grateful that as a lesbian I no longer have to live a double kind of life, although many other lesbians my age in Santa Fe and elsewhere feel the need to remain in the closet.

Financial insecurity for many lesbians in my age bracket is a big worry. Living on my social security, which is considered by the federal government as being below the poverty line, required that I utilize all the entitlement programs I qualified for. I thought twice before getting a job because medical coverage and rent in Santa Fe would require an income far beyond my reach. So I've had to radically change my life-style and take advantage of S.S.I., which brings my income up to the poverty line. I receive a small amount of food stamps, Medicare and

Medicaid, and subsidized private housing. My income did not include many of the luxuries I was used to: new clothes, expensive food items (like meat), eating at restaurants and purchasing books, newspapers or magazines. I've learned to borrow reading matter and pick up a newspaper in a cafe and volunteer to help at lesbian events, or usher at concerts and the theater to cover admission costs.

By living frugally, I can squirrel away enough money to go snorkeling every two years, which for me is a must. My daily expenses on such a trip were only a little more than what I spend at home, so the air fare was the only big expenditure. I now travel to promote my book, and its sales luckily cover my expenses. I traded in my car for a mini motorhome and have joined RVing women. It's a delight to be meeting and talking with lesbians and sharing our experiences. I avoid large cities, even though it would help my sales, for I can't deal with freeways and large populations. I've become a country dyke. My last twenty-five years have been spent farming in New Mexico, living in the woods of Oregon or spacing out on the coast of Maine.

I now see myself more as a writer. Writing is a tough challenge for me, but it is a wonderful outlet for my creative energy. It falls into the same category of other things I have tackled in my life; starting a halfway house for young mentally ill adults without knowing what I was doing, and years later developing an organic farm in northern New Mexico, raising goats, chickens, ducks and growing vegetables as well as building my own adobe house. I learned by doing and listening to the advice of others. I've never been afraid to try something new, whether it was traveling in an offbeat manner, or starting a project when I was a social worker or a peace activist. I'm convinced that even today in my seventies, this part of my personality is still intact. My friends were surprised when I decided to publish my book since I didn't know the first thing about doing it. But after receiving the tenth letter from a women's publishing company, I said to myself, "I'm tired of getting rejection slips. To hell with it, I'll publish it myself." And I did. Now I am engrossed in writing *A Lesbian Journal at Seventy-two* which covers the tumultuous yet creative period of my life from 1988 to 1993.

Rosemary Hathaway

Anniversary

It has been 15 years. That is 780 weeks, 5460 days, or 181,000 hours. Reduced to numbers it is overwhelming, inconceivable, frightening, but those years, those weeks, those days, those hours have been a gift — the lifeblood of my being.

The excitement of exploration is gone — we have explored each other again and again. The newness of experience is gone — we know each other well. These things are not a loss — they are lessons well learned.

Oh!! It has not all been good or passionate or rewarding. There have been times of anger, regret, wanting to leave. There have been times of no desire, no touching, no intimacy. These times passed and the sharing, caring loving returned.

We know what delights, we care what delights. We know what offends, we care what offends. The erotica of us is not the same — there is no longer the unknown. There is safety and pleasure in the knowing. The unexpected does not wield its edge — the expected is wanted and desired. The excitement of discovery is replaced by the excitement of long loving and everlasting desire.

I still warm at the unevenness of your walk, the melody of your laughter, the fire breath you exude when you are crossed. I still am in wonder at the softness of your breasts, the curve of your back as it reaches for your buttocks, the sweet smell of your juices.

Carmen de Monteflores

Of Time, Trees, Apples and a River

Five years ago I planted an apple tree in the yard in honor of my sixth child. I was fifty-five then and she was just six months old. Last Fall I counted thirty-six apples on the tree, not counting the ones we shared with squirrels and raccoons. I am reminded of that harvest tonight as I lie awake in the middle of the night, which I often do now, hearing a faint crackling and seeing the glow still coming from the log in the fire. My little Ester, who calls me "mama," loves for me to make a fire. It makes us all — Ester, her "mommy" Laurie, who birthed her, and I — feel as if we are on vacation. But this fire is special to me in another way: the slow-burning wood came from the ninety-year-old acacia near our back fence.

A big tree with dense foliage, it shaded Ester's playground and made a deep, soft layer of leaves for the children to scatter and fall on. The acacia had also been the tree from which Andrea, my youngest child until Ester came along twenty-three years later, hung a heavy rope and would swing from the top of the neighbor's shed to the grass in a big arc of laughter and delight. (I found the rope recently and Andrea hung it up again, this time from the date tree, for Ester to climb.) It was also the tree on which our two yard squirrels chased each other and spied on us and where finches, chickadees, robins, jays, mourning doves and maybe an occasional cedar waxwing and woodpecker left their songs, their nests and sometimes a precious feather.

Last Spring, a neighbor, with whom I otherwise had poor relations, noticed that the big branch from which the rope had once hung had a "stress crack." It was fortunate he became aware of it because it was not visible from our yard and because this branch, which was half as thick as the massive trunk of the acacia, stretched directly over Ester's playground. At first I doubted our neighbor's motives, but when we called the tree service and found out what "stress crack" meant, we became as alarmed as he was.

The branch had to be cut. But, this wasn't all. In the process of examining the tree, the arborist discovered large fungi attached to the base of the trunk that indicated "crown root rot," a slow decomposing of the core, which would eventually destroy the tree. He recommended cutting it as soon as possible. A strong wind, he said, could bring the huge branch crashing down on the swing set and on another neighbor's property.

A few weeks before Ester was born we had lost a large, although not as venerable, Monterey pine that shaded the patio. The roots were too shallow and it was virtually leaning on yet another neighbor's cottage. And last year our pepper tree in front of the house also lost all its branches under the weight of encroaching ivy.

I love trees, although I confess to some neglect of the pepper tree. (Was it graduate school? The younger children leaving home? Trying to survive years of profound change: a divorce after seventeen years of heterosexual marriage, coming out, going back to school, setting up a professional practice, the breakup of a ten-year lesbian relationship, a skiing accident and the major knee surgery that followed?) The news was shocking. We couldn't believe it. Our tree was diagnosed with a terminal illness and was going to die shortly. Within a few days the arborists tied ropes to the large branch to prevent it from falling down in a strong wind. It was painful to see it strung up with lines, like a dying patient waiting out its final hours.

On the last afternoon before it was going to be cut, Ester and I gathered all the different kinds of flowers from the yard and spread them at the base of the tree. I hugged it and spoke to it. Spoke for all the creatures who couldn't say words and who perhaps couldn't anticipate what was going to happen. (Such arrogance on my part! Maybe their voices and rituals sustained and comforted it better than I could.) I imagined the sky without its leaves, the ground without its shade, the wind without its branches to dance with, the birds without shelter for their songs and the squirrels without their playground.

It took three and a half days to fell the tree. The arborists were intrepid and precise, proud of themselves and their skill in taking down this enormous life, their dark silhouettes against

the bright light. We suffered this death as all catastrophes are borne, holding to one another, Laurie, my life companion, Ester and I. The arborists were kind and respectful of our feelings, but we, and the other creatures of the yard, scattered at the sound of the saw and the sight of the branches falling, crawled under rocks, ran to other gardens or inside the house. None of us were able, for weeks, to look at the empty space left in the sky, or to listen to the silence, or comprehend what the pile of wood meant. Some pieces were too heavy to move, their hearts and years exposed cruelly to the sun, transforming too quickly into logs, to be used, climbed on, stacked, sat on, chopped, and some day, burned.



There is yet another tree in my life. It is a *flamboyant*, flamboyant-tree, *Delonix regia*, also called "fire tree" in Central America and "flame tree" or "royal poinciana" in the U.S. As a child growing up in Puerto Rico, I used to climb it and play with the flowers and buds in my games. Recently it has returned to me in a different form.

This year my daughter Maria and I decided to create our own production company to produce my second play and her performance piece. Maria is thirty and I have just turned sixty. For both of us it has seemed like a very significant year. After some deliberation we agreed on the name *Rio Loiza Productions*. We promptly designed stationery, rented a P.O. box and voice mail, and went about finding out how to create a business.

Rio Loiza means Loiza River in Spanish. Loiza is the area in Puerto Rico where my mother was raised, on the northeast coast of the island. As far as I know, there is no Loiza River, although there is a Rio Grande de Loiza, and a Rio Herrerra near the house where *mami*, my mother, grew up.

I have never talked much about my history to the children because I was for many years an assimilated Puerto Rican. I began to tap into my history about a decade ago when I started writing stories about *abuelita*, my grandmother Provi, which later became the core of my novel, *Cantando Bajito / Singing Softly*. But

at the time of that writing, my background was not yet part of the dialogue and ritual of my relationship with my children, or even my relationship with myself. It was, in fact, the writing itself that necessitated a re-vision of my origins.

Maria and I found out in the past year that Loiza was the name of a *cacica*, a native woman chief, who lived and ruled in the area of the Rio Grande de Loiza, an area in Puerto Rico where "some of the most powerful spirits and gods of the island lived" (Steiner, p. 24) and where later there was a strong African influence as well. We also found out that the indigenous people, the Taino Indians, had a matrilineal organization. "The family name, the ownership of the land and the tribal leadership were inherited through the women." (Steiner, p. 33.) *Rio Loiza* then became for us the source of the stream which connected the *cacica*, my ancestors, *abuelita* and her forebears, *mami* (also named Carmen), myself and Maria. As we sat at the kitchen table, we decided that this matrix of history, meaning and relatedness would serve as the placenta for Maria's and my creative work.

At the same time as both of us gathered information on the history and culture of Puerto Rico, I also began to make sketches of the various scenes in an effort to make concrete for others what for me was a very visual play. I had done hardly any drawing or painting for many years. From childhood to age 36 I had been a painter and art was a huge part of my life. When I stopped painting I felt an immense loss. I have yet to fully understand the reasons underlying this event.

After the first few sketches one of the images that emerged was a brilliant *flamboyan*, which has become an even more central part of the play than I originally anticipated. More than a symbol, it is a presence through whose green veins a germinating force runs.

My collaboration with Maria is about relatedness: being in relation to each other as well as relating a story and experiencing the connectedness that comes from telling, especially telling who we are.

*Stan Steiner, *Islands: The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans*, (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974).



I watched the tree all summer. Counted the fruit in its branches, tied the ones that were too heavy. Made sure there was no trail of ants on its trunk. Grieved for the fruit blown to the ground by wind and rain. Sat in its shadow planting flowers and pulling weeds. Watered its roots, its ground.

I watched an apple every morning. Getting big, its green skin like the belly of a pregnant woman. I smelled it, pressed it when it was larger than my palm. Looked at the calendar, as if it could tell me when it was time. Searched around, afraid it was going to fall or be stolen by squirrels, birds, worms, a playful cat.

Today I pulled it off the branch. Felt the weight of all those months in my hand. Held it against my cheek and took a bite.

This tree I dug into the earth to plant gives me what it bears from its love of sun, its joy of rain and wind. It feeds my blood, my pleasure, my hunger for union. Blesses my limbs; teaches me to die.

I want to be like a ripe apple. Learn to be food for other lives.



Tree Trunk
Carmen de Monteflores

Shevy Healey

Traveling with Ruth and Shevy

In July of 1992, my partner Ruth and I and our 16 pound cat started off "to see the country." We decided to give ourselves one year, surely time enough to indulge our wanderlust: We underestimated. The year has come and gone and we are still on the road.

With absolutely no experience, we began our journey in a 26' fifth wheel, which hitches onto a three-quarter ton truck. We have had to learn all about hitching and unhitching, connecting, maneuvering and backing; most of all, backing! We can now marvel at our courage, our foolhardiness, our sheer and blessed ignorance.

We are both on the Steering Committee of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC)¹, a national organization of lesbians over 60 determined to confront ageism. From the start, Ruth and I had the blessings of the OLOC Steering Committee to be spokespersons for OLOC and to meet with as many old lesbians as we could find. This has added a special richness and depth to our travels. Our OLOC contacts have enabled us to meet and talk with countless numbers of lesbians about our lives, the state of lesbians, of old lesbians and of the world itself. We have visited with a variety of lesbians, from life long to just coming out at 70, from having thirteen children and grand- and great-grand-children to never having any, from having severe disabilities to being jocks. We have made many friends, and for someone who doesn't like to read short stories because endings come too quickly, one of the wrenches of our travels is having to say so many goodbyes.

Ruth and I have been the honored guests of some twenty-three lesbian gatherings in fourteen states in which I facilitated

¹To be a Member or a Supporter of OLOC, or to get some of its educational material, contact OLOC at: PO Box 980422, Houston, TX 77098.

workshops on ageism. These groups have been organized by old lesbians in various parts of the country, gathering together anywhere from five to thirty-five old lesbians to begin an OLOC group, or to simply talk about ageism.

OLOC has only been in existence less than five years. It was, after all, the Number 10 Summer 1979 issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, which first published Barbara Macdonald's "Do You Remember Me?"² and Baba Copper's "Notes from the Fifty-Ninth Year."³ These articles marked the beginnings of the consideration of ageism in the lesbian and feminist communities, leading to the First and Second West Coast Conferences by and for Old Lesbians and the establishment of OLOC in October, 1989.

As one of the founders and organizers of the First West Coast Conference (1987), I participated in hammering out the policies which today are the foundation for OLOC. It was a wrenching, intense and expanding experience. I will never forget either the process or the lessons learned there. The uncompromising nature of our struggle was charted from the start by Barbara Macdonald who struggled with us to break new ground and take firm stands in confronting ageism. She held the line, both on the issue of reclaiming the word "old" and in setting an age limit of 60, for those two issues most clearly define the parameters of the confrontation with ageism. We finally agreed that lesbians under sixty could attend our conference only if they were in special relationship to lesbians over sixty. They were eligible to attend only "under sixty" workshops, thus still enabling old lesbians to meet together without the often inhibiting presence of younger lesbians. There was never any intent to minimize the problems of mid-life women, simply to focus at long last on the issues of old lesbians.

That step was a real first. We were somewhat nervous about what response to expect to our conference call. We felt as if we

² This article is now included in *Look Me in the Eye, Old Women Aging and Ageism*, by Barbara Macdonald with Cynthia Rich, Spinsters, Ink, S.F., CA, 1983, 1991.

³ This article is now included in *Over the Hill, Reflections on Ageism Between Women*, by Baba Copper, The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019, 1988.

were throwing this big party and no one might show up. It is now history that there were over 200 participants in each of the First and the Second West Coast conferences. But the struggle was difficult and left some scarring and some casualties.

Without question, Barbara Macdonald provided then and continues to provide the theoretical base and inspirational impetus for the subsequent movement against ageism, the formation of OLOC, and its growing place in the lesbian and women's movements.

It is not very surprising, then, that in our travels Ruth and I find the same basic political struggles occurring today whenever OLOCs first get together. It's still a tossup as to which is the most dreaded word, the "O" word or the "L" word. We have heard more suggestions to substitute both the words "Old" and "Lesbian" in *Old Lesbians Organizing for Change* than can be imagined, from Amazing Amazons to Senior Sapphos — all designed, of course, to make both "Old" and "Lesbian" more palatable to those of faint heart.

Actually, it isn't even a tossup. Our experience has been that for the most part it is easier to talk about being a Lesbian and all the issues around coming out. This has been on the minds of old lesbians for years. But talk about being Old, that's new. Old lesbians, as all old women, are so used to denying their aging that this denial as well as revulsion of aging comes up often in the ageism workshops we've been part of.

With the proliferation of "Over 40/Over 50" groups, the single largest issue again seems to be whether to allow lesbians under 60 to be part of the local group. For those who do opt to allow lesbians under 60 in their group, it is clear they cannot be an OLOC group, even though they may use OLOC materials. I can understand the discomfort, often even fear and anger, of holding the line at 60 as the groups' age cutoff. After all, my first reaction at our West Coast planning meetings was, "What's the big deal about 'over 60'? We can't possibly refuse admission to a lesbian in her fifties interested enough to want to come." Well, we could and we did then, and we have been doing it ever since. And in doing this, we have elevated the problems of those of us over 60

to the realm of important political consideration, as well as making sixty an age to celebrate. Learning to say "no" to younger women and learning to call ourselves "old" — these are our first lessons in empowerment for they teach us to value who we are and the uniqueness of our contributions.

In small towns and rural areas where there are but few lesbians, this policy presents a special challenge. In some instances, the solution has been for all age groups to meet together for a general presentation and social time, then to separate into over and under 60 small discussion groups. In one such group, the over 60 lesbians were relieved not to have to participate once more in a discussion of menopause, for them an old story of no particular interest.

In another over 60 group, one old lesbian was able to acknowledge for the first time some of the ways in which her age created difficulties with her considerably younger lover, and how much anxiety she had about the mere mention of age. After our discussion, another old lesbian was able to acknowledge that, yes, she was ageist when she "preferred" to be with younger lesbians and to shun her own age group. Since she believed she didn't "look her age," she didn't want to invite the social ostracism she feared.

I have heard a lesbian in her thirties talk about her fear that growing old means being so undesirable that "no one will have me." Another lesbian in her twenties, while professing her love for older bodies (her hobby was photographing old women), talked in the next breath about her careful examination of her own body on a daily basis to be sure her stomach was still flat and her face unlined. A lesbian in her fifties was able to recognize her own ageism as she told of pressuring her mother to dye her hair because she didn't want her to "get old."

At one meeting I was questioned at great length by an old lesbian about what kind of life I had lived when I first became active in OLOC. I wasn't sure what she was driving at but answered as best I could about my work, my interests, etc. She asked over and over again whether I had been happy. Finally she explained her questioning by telling me that her life was so good now after sixty that she was sure mine had to have been very bad

to make me want to talk about such a "down" subject as aging. After a few minutes of dialogue she said to me, "You mean you're involved in OLOC for enrichment reasons?" "Sure," I said, "mine and yours."

It is painful to hear an old lesbian speak about how she hates the word "old," how it revolts and disgusts her, and how she will never grow old because she is "young at heart," and besides, she eats well and exercises every day.

My experience is that when I bypass the term "ageism" and simply open up honest talk about what the lives of old lesbians are like, every single one of them has a story to tell of slights by younger lesbians, of feeling invisible at socials, in the bars, in the market, at professional meetings, of worrying that she will be seen as just a complaining old woman if she talks about some of her health concerns, of resentments against doctors who patronize her, fear of teenagers who ridicule her and on and on. The list is very long.

We found that the vast majority of the old lesbians we meet are non-political and non-feminist, or more accurately, apolitical and what I would call "a-feminist." Yet, in every aspect of their lives, they are a challenge to the patriarchy. Although steeped in the culture of patriarchy, they are, in fact, very different from most heterosexual women. For one, to the extent that they have never had to depend on a man's paycheck, they are independent in a most basic way that heterosexual women are not. Many of the lesbians we have met have worked most of their lives in non-traditional occupations, from construction worker to cab driver, police chief to union organizer, professor to doctor (we had a fine meeting with Dyke Docs), fisherwoman to landscaper, and all occupations in between. These old lesbians have, without conscious political choice, been pioneers in the struggle to broaden job possibilities for all women. Some life-long lesbians, whose work life was uninterrupted by child rearing, have been able to rise to the top of their professions (we met a Lt. Colonel!).

Most important of all, these old lesbians have never, and do not now, look to men to meet their important needs, either financial or emotional support or sexual gratification. In actuality,

men are largely irrelevant to their basic personal functioning. So, no matter whether they *consider* themselves feminist or not, and most that we've met do not, by their very existence these old lesbians are on the cutting edge of feminist struggles.

The overriding common denominator in all the groups we've been to has been the universal seeking, really craving, of community. Old lesbians welcome a place to talk about their concerns with people who understand and respect them. While on the one hand they experience all the ridicule and injustices of ageism, they have never felt so free, particularly when health is not a problem. Some who have been in the closet all of their lives, particularly those who have retired from repressive homophobic institutions such as the armed forces or the educational and medical systems, now want out, at least in so far as being with other lesbians. We talked with one old lesbian who had been in the closet all of her working life, having held a job as a very high-powered administrator. Now in her retirement, she wanted nothing more than to finally "join" the lesbian community. She maintained this resolve in the face of her life partner's refusal to join with her. She continued to maintain this resolve even after her life partner of thirty-seven years left her altogether, ostensibly because now, sadly, she questioned whether she really had been a lesbian after all.

As OLOC's traveling emissaries, we get to eat at some terrific potlucks, have some great laughs, and meet some outstanding lesbians. We say, at least a few times a week, "Thank you, Goddess" — that we are lesbians, that we are old lesbians, and that we are involved in OLOC, for that connection gives our life special meaning and impact. Our ongoing examination of our own aging helps us to sort out the real processes of aging, which are interesting and expanding, from the spurious expectations fostered by ageism.

Neither one of us ever dreamed, even in our wildest imaginings, that in our seventies life would be so rich.

Sally Miller Gearhart

Wondercrone: Her Humble Origins

Mother, you're not going to California alone, not at your age."

"What age do you want me to go at? I'll be seventy-three when I leave, seventy-three when I get there. I'm going on the five o'clock Greyhound bus."

"You can't. You've got a doctor's appointment tomorrow to hear about your tests, and..."

"I know what the tests say. They say I got the Big C galloping all over this sweet body. They say I go back in again for all the chemo and that even if I do their blessed treatment I'm on the way out. They say I ought to rest until the angels come for me. I don't give a hang what the tests say. I feel fine. I'm going."

"What happened to you this morning? You weren't like this yesterday..."

"Right. Yesterday I was about to look up and be dismissed. Yesterday I was feeling rotten. Today I don't feel rotten. Today I'm going to California.

"Mother, we don't know anybody in California since Jack and Kathy left... Mother, stop! Mother! What are you looking for? Mother!"

Angela was heaving boxes out of the storage closet with a vigor that would shame her hefty grandchildren. "My backpack."

Lisa fairly screamed. "What are you going to do with your backpack?"

"Not the big one, honey. Just the middle-sized one. I'm not going to take the snowshoes."

"Snowshoes!"

"Well, they might come in handy...but no. No snowshoes." She climbed over the boxes and looked squarely at her daughter. "Child, I know you don't understand. I don't understand. Maybe I can explain when I get back. If I get back."

"If you get back!"

"Well, I may not."

"May not?"

"Firstborn, if you don't hush that echo I'll screw my ears closed. Now, will you be taking me down to the station or do I call a taxicab?" Without waiting for an answer, Angela swung past her daughter and into the old solarium that had been converted into her bedroom. She began tucking sock-pepper, denturepaste, and other necessities into the pockets of her pack, only half paying attention to the voice that followed her. She was sweeping the bureau top's pills and medicines into the wastebasket when she heard Lisa's bargain.

"... only if you'll call me every night along the way."

Angela shoved her cache of silver dollars into the front zippered pocket. She trotted over to where Lisa leaned against the doorframe. She raised her eyes barely an inch to meet those of the other woman. "I knew you'd give me no trouble, daughter. You always were the one with the horse sense."

"You mean I've always let you have your way." Lisa was holding desperation at close bay.

"I mean that twenty years ago you let me double you on my Harley. Ten years ago you shut Arnold up when he palavered about a nursing home. Last Sunday you announced to my grandchildren that I was not to be coddled. And now you're going to drive me to the bus. You got horse sense." Angela kissed her daughter's pale cheek. "Let's go."

Then she stopped. "Wait!" Back to under her bed. She pulled out a dilapidated dress box held together with bungies. Inside she found the shoes. "I knew I'd have a use for them." With a flourish that almost landed her on the floor, she kicked off her footwarmers. "British Walkers," she said. "Got them in 1941. The man said they'd last the duration." She slipped the heavy pumps over her stockinged feet, gave her polyester pants a smoothing, and slid into her scarf and long camel's hair coat. "Wish I'd kept my sweats," she muttered. Then to Lisa, "Reckon Arnold'd lend me his old Forty-Niners jacket?"

"You'd be lost in it. Here. You dropped your glasses."

Angela took the glasses and pressed them into the familiar

crevices over her ears and nose. She peered through them and then flung them onto the bed. "See better without them."

"But..."

"Sh-h-h. Don't say it. Don't ask. I don't know why. I just know I could spit in a fly's eye at fifty paces. I don't need them." She reached into the drawer for her wool watchcap, pulled it over her curls, and smiled brightly at her daughter. "You tell those Memphis doctors I haven't felt so good since your daddy and I went skydiving at Playland. Now let's go."

Angela hadn't told her family — not even Lisa — that she had no intention of riding the bus beyond Memphis. Nobody else had to know that instead she'd be going straight to the big middle of the city to the once-romantic roofgarden of the old Lafayette Hotel.

She stood there now at the last flight of the narrow back stairs that led to the roof. She was alone at last. She paused at the fire door, reminded for an instant of her debility during these last years. That heavy door was an obstacle she could no longer negotiate. Then with a mighty smile she pushed lightly with her fingertip on the door's release bar. The door swung wide and she stepped into the night air.

There were times, she remembered, when you could smell the river from here. With only an inner nod to some ancient memories, she began a careful exploration of the old rooftop. As she stepped away from the fire door she disturbed occasional shards of broken tile and thin chips of cement.

She rounded a cumbersome cooling plant and gasped. The city below her was giving off a special high luster in the cold city night air and she gazed at the pattern of sparkle and dark that identified pockets of New Memphis development against the black of deserted office buildings. To her left and above her swung the interlacing lights of the lately completed southern arm of the elevated roller-road.

Angela shivered in anticipation of what she was about to dare. Another crazy impossible thing. But this time she was a different person, really a different person. And her confidence

reading went clean off the scale. She chuckled. Ever since that spider, she mused, taking off her watchcap so the wind could exercise her hair.



"Don't do it," said the grandmomma longlegs.

Angela looked eyeball-to-eyeball with the nutty brown half-marble that stood between her and her hidden sleeping pill stash.

"Shut up," she growled. "It's my death. I'm going to die it."

"It's too early," said the spider.

"Look," Angela said, "this is none of your business. I promised myself that if I felt this rotten with one more dawn I'd check out on my own. Well, it's dawn. And I feel rotten. Now get out of my way. I gotta give this stuff time to work."

"Take your hand out of that mattress. I have to talk to you."

Angela McBurney Anderson — union steward, witness for peace, dolphin liberator, ex-WAAC captain, MYF Worship and Evangelism chair, and center forward queen of the half-court for Galax High's class of thirty-seven — froze in cowardly obedience. She knew a life-changing moment when it hit her in the face.

The spider pranced from the bedside table onto the flimsy pink bedjacket she'd taken to sleeping in. It stopped beside the pearl button. "Lie down. You're about to be tapped."

"Tapped?" Angela fell back onto her pillow.

"Tapped." The spider carefully stretched each long, angled leg before continuing. "Charged. Chosen. Commissioned. Destined. Grabbed. Instilled. Ordained. Sent. Zapped. Transformed."

"Why me?"

"Surely you can be more creative than that."

"Why me?" Angela persisted.

"Because you're female, old, Scotch-Irish, intelligent, capable and you live on the Mississippi. You're the Crone. There's another female like you, only a generation younger, being tapped right now on the Nile. She's the Mother. And one who's two

generations younger than you being tapped on the Yangtze. She's the Maiden."

"Is that all?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what have you got against the Ganges and the Amazon and the Danube, to name just a few."

"That will come later. We only need the triple aspects right now." The spider executed an eight-legged flex. "Are you ready for me to spin a little haze across your countenance?"

"What for?"

"So I can tell you about your new powers and where you're to go and what you're to do."

"Will it hurt?"

"You'll love it."

An incredibly noble and high resolve overtook Angela. And a lot of curiosity and excitement, too. She relaxed her arms by her side and closed her eyes. "Go for it, Arachne. What have I got to lose?"

She awoke at midday, hale and hearty. It took her only a few hours to prepare for departure. She decided she never wanted to wash her face again or at least not for a long time, so soft was the memory that lingered there.



Angela hitched her backpack to its most comfortable position and tied it secure around her waist. She moved to the edge of the roof and sat on the tar-covered ledge. She looked down on a thousand roofs. The wind pulled on her torso. She smiled. Then, without even a smidgin of pain in her hip, she swung her legs up unto the parapet.

Slowly she shifted to all fours. Very slowly. She decided not to look down again. No sense being too full of herself. Then she stood erect, facing now into a stronger wind. She was cold only around her ankles where her polyester pants fell short of the tops of her British Walkers.

Then, with a laugh that had in it only a hint of a cackle, she

raised her arms above her head, bent her knees, and leapt out into space.

She sank only a few feet before an upward draft lifted her out toward the Mighty Mississippi, up and out against a grey night sky. No human ear heard her leave, no eye saw her soar; though as she sped through thickening clouds her cry of exhilaration startled some pigeons who were returning from overtime free-way reconnaissance. With her heightened hearing and new abilities in obscure languages she picked up the pigeons' consultation with one another. "Is it a bird?" they asked. "Is it a plane?" Then she sang out her line on cue: "No! It's Wondercrone!"

She called up in her memory the holy place that was her destination: a solitary snow-covered mountain rising out of autumnal mists and at this moment catching the last rays of light as the California sun fell oceanward.

In her head she heard the cry of the Valkyries and the strains of a mighty Valhallan chorus. In her heart she heard a stranger symphony, far more ancient, far more distant, like no melody or rhythm she had ever imagined. It was this music that warmed her as she flew west and northward over unsuspecting rivers and plains.

Guest Editors' Process Notes

Dotty Fowler: From our group process I learned more skills of editing and how important it is to love and support writers. Beyond that the experience translated into a long series of unanswered questions. Most of the submissions were excellent and I especially appreciated the writings of old lesbians of color — three submissions out of the thirty-five received or just under 10%. I began to speculate on the connections between race, class and age and writing for an identifiably lesbian publication. Who writes for *Sinister Wisdom* and who reads *SW*? And what effect did the fact that the editorial group was composed of mostly professionally trained women have on the outcome? Was there white bonding among us in spite of the presence of two African American women? And class bonding? What does consensus mean? And when do we begin to listen to somebody else besides each other? I hope this issue of *SW* will bring the reader pleasure and to a place of beginning.

Ida VSW Red: Editing with eight other lesbians highlights some inner conflicts I am experiencing as I age: academic literary standards vs. hunger for the variety of lesbian experiences and modes of expression; commitment to group process vs. product as a priority; emphasis on peer equality vs. utilizing specialized skills; strong opinions vs. consensual process; doing a job "right" vs. getting the job done in the time I'm willing to give. Like art, the editorial process challenges me to face my contradictions. I greatly admire the efforts of my sister volunteers in the struggle to give birth to *SW* #53.

Jeanne Adleman: In July 1993 I signed on to help edit this issue because I thought I had something to contribute and could do it with love. As we have worked with — or sometimes against — each other, I developed a system for my behavior at meetings: state my opinion; listen to everyone else's; be happy when others' are better than mine *or* speak up briefly for what I want and, if others do not agree, *let it go*. I am not the only one who has tried

to satisfy the entire group and failed, no matter how hard she/I tried. After months of stressful effort, I hope the satisfactions too often missing in the process will flow from the issue in print.

Joyce Pierson: Being a volunteer guest editor for *SW* #53 has been exciting and hard work. I have learned a lot about writing and editing, my emerging old lesbian identity; learning anew the realities of the personal is political and the importance of lesbian voices. At sixty, I continue to be amazed at how hard it is to work collectively and feel satisfied with so-called feminist process. It seemed to me that as a group we became so task-oriented, we forgot to pay attention to our group process and we suffered the consequences as the workload increased toward the end of the production. I also want to celebrate the work we did and our commitment and passion for old lesbian voices that are reflected in the pages of this issue.

Kate Rosenblatt: The process of editing was very difficult for some of us. Personally, I was naive and did not know enough to insist on writing standards for the works we received. Time pressures affected our decision-making process and I relied on the knowledge of others who had more editing experience. I often gave over my own intuitive feelings to what seemed like the voices of knowledge. Questions arose — some were never answered. There were questions of value, i.e., what is oppressive language? Who is allowed to say what? We did not always agree about what is ageist. I wish we had had a year to put the issue together.

Marge Green: I was happy to be included in this group of old lesbians for this issue. It was really exciting contacting lesbian writers whose work I have read and getting reacquainted with some whom I have not seen for years. However, I was just getting into reading the submissions, talking and sharing my experience with others when I had a heart attack and had to have emergency by-pass surgery! This took me out of the process. I felt lost, rushed and not on track with what was going on when I returned. Despite all this major trauma, I liked being a part of the group and the extended lesbian community.

Mickey Spencer: There are inherent contradictions in producing special issues of feminist journals, having to do with how much control the host editors exercise over the production of the special issue. Yet the editors of host journals, whose numbers by definition do not include enough women with these special experiences, now need to find members of these groups who have the time, energy and political awareness to do the job!

Once the special editors are chosen, by whatever means, they/we need processes for working together to get the issue out within the host magazine's constraints of time, space and form. Ideally the processes would enhance rather than diminish the impact of the guest editors' special experiences. One problem is whether there is enough time and expertise for the guest editors to develop these processes or whether they must be provided in some way by the host editors or others. Among the processes special editors need in order to get on with their/our work is one I am especially concerned with: access for women with disabilities so that our points of view can be represented in any special issue. Access must be established from the onset in order for disabled members of the group to participate fully.

I have no solutions to these contradictions: I don't know how or by whom the special editors should be chosen; who is responsible for disability access; which feminist processes work best for which circumstances, or who should choose them. I hope a lively discussion of these questions will lead to more effective special issues, produced with more joy than pain. I hope that, eventually, special issues will no longer be necessary because all groups will be adequately represented in our feminist journals as a matter of course.

Rosemary Hathaway: I joined the committee for this issue first and foremost because I wanted OLD Lesbians/Dykes to be read and listened to — we are much ignored in our own community. Secondly I wanted working class voices on the committee. I commend and am grateful to my sisters for all their dedicated work. I wish we would have had time for more discussion, planning, working through differences — alas we did not do that or make the time. The spectrum of experiences reflected in the

issue is not as broad as I had conceived and hoped for. It is, however, a small cross-section of old dykes speaking out. Listen to them.

Vera Martin: When asked to join the group of guest editors for this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, I agreed with great reluctance. I felt coming in that I had no credentials for such an assignment other than that I am an avid reader and very selective about what I read. I am a person of color and added to the diversity of the group. During this process I was struck with what, in my opinion, appeared to be an extreme effort to make sure each contributors' submissions were politically correct. Many times I found this very stressful and, to be honest, a bit overboard. I made the best contribution to the process I could by being as honest as possible with my suggestions and comments. Never forgetting that I have absolutely no talent as a writer or an editor, I very often felt my presence served no purpose. I learned more about feminism, more specifically radical feminism, than I ever felt I needed to know. I hope the readers of this issue find the submissions easy and insightful as I did. I have no plans to undertake such a task as this ever again. I learned a great deal and feel honored to have been asked.

We lovingly remember and honor
Old Lesbians who died during
the year we worked on this issue,
and also honor their survivors.



Old Dykes Gather

Art used on the poster for the West Coast Celebration II and
Conference of Old Lesbians in San Francisco, California, 1989

Frances Lorraine

Time Honored Traditions

GINNY
BORN 1936
ENTERED
CONVENT
1959
LEFT
CONVENT
1962
JOINED
MERCHANT
MARINES
1980



MARY
BORN 1915
MARRIED 1935
DAUGHTER-
BORN 1947
SON-
BORN 1951
HUSBAND
DIED 1965
RETIRED 1980
GRANDSON
BORN 1982

1985

Lesbian Lovers

GLAAD

Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has launched a print advertising campaign featuring an old lesbian couple. The ads, scheduled to run in local and national publications, will challenge the defamation by omission that many older lesbians and gay men experience. To receive more information, call GLAAD at 415-861-4588.

 Contributors' Notes

Ann Stokes (1931) — Author of *A Studio of One's Own*, Naiad Press, 1985. Have been a lesbian forever, a feminist since the women's movement took off in the early '70s.

Bernice Dambowic (1929) — My poetry is my first attempt to express my personal thoughts as an older lesbian, mother and woman. My work with people who are differently abled has and will continue to affect how I see the world.

Bernice Ybarra Miller (1922) is coming out as a writer, poet and lesbian publicly in this special SW issue. A life-long lesbian, Bernie has a history of combatting lesbian oppression. Her mother's family came to California in the 1700s and were cattle ranchers long before California statehood.

Cam Jancek (1933) is a 61-year-old lesbian and a new Nancy Drew freak. She lives on the east side of the San Francisco Bay Area with her lover Marge.

Carmen de Monteflores (1933) — Born in Puerto Rico. Grew up climbing trees and flying kites. Moved to the U.S. at 16 and became assimilated until I came out as lesbian at 40. I'm still reclaiming my various identities.

Carol Ehrlich (1934) — I was born in Columbia, Missouri of white, lower middle-class parents. Since 1971, I have lived in Baltimore, Maryland. I support myself as a copy editor and am a lesbian feminist activist.

Catherine Nicholson (1922) is a white lesbian. In 1976, she and Harriet Desmoines founded *Sinister Wisdom* in Charlotte, North Carolina and were its editors and publishers until 1981. She now lives in Durham, NC.

Del Martin (1921) & **Phyllis Lyon** (1924) serve on the Advisory Board of Gay Lesbian Outreach to Elders (GLOE) and are members of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC). Del also serves on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors' Senior Services Planning Task Force. They are co-authors of *Lesbian/Woman*, which is in its 20th anniversary edition.

Dotty Fowler (1927) is a white middle-class lesbian activist of English/Dutch origins who thinks of writing poetry as an international political conspiracy.

Elaine Mikels (1921) — Jewish, reform, upper middle-class. Lived in Hollywood and Beverly Hills. Father was a doctor.

Elizabeth Freeman (1919) — In my old age I have participated in creating safe living space for old and young women, published (Crones' Own Press) four books written by older women, a founding member of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) and part of a wonderful, supportive Lesbian and Gay community. Prior to coming to Durham, North Carolina, I lived in Wolf Creek, Oregon. I have a wonderful lover (aged 69).

Emma Joy Crone (1928) lives in a rented studio on Hornby Island, B.C., Canada. She writes to increase the visibility of old lesbians, enjoys her garden, walking; is a pagan, anarchist feminist lesbian.

Frances Lorraine (1922) is an old dyke artist, writer, and day-dreamer who enjoys living in San Francisco and loves life but never takes it too seriously.

Grear Greene (1934) is a black professional, employed in the Bay Area for the past twenty-five years. Born and raised in the Midwest, her life experiences cover a variety of work and education in the mental health profession.

Helen Howard (1920s) — Jewish - white - professional. I am a lifelong writer who has from time to time burst into print, both in fiction and in professional writing. I am presently planning - thinking - imaging a lesbian novel.

Ida VSW Red (1933) writes and performs with Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective in San Francisco, is retired but still works, is published in several lesbian anthologies, and longs to portray strong women on stage.

Janny MacHarg (1923 — along with prohibition) is a political songwriter and activist for peace, labor movement, women's, gay & civil rights who is "proud to be old and a survivor" and believes "ordinary people with guts will prevail."

Jeanne Adleman (1919) is a life-long social/political activist who came out at the age of 60. Of working-class background, she is a counselor, writer and coeditor of *Racism in the Lives of Women*, a book due out this Fall.

Joan Corbin (1921) — I'm a 72-year-old middle-class white Lesbian artist-writer born in Michigan, living in California since 1946, with partner of 35 years.

Joan Miller (1923) is a retired editor living in San Francisco. She recently refused to testify against a man the police caught breaking into her car, because conviction would have meant prison for life for a nonviolent crime. She is forming a group, Citizens Against Three Strikes (for nonviolent offenders) c/o Box 30, 370 Turk Street, S.F. 94102.

Joyce Pierson (1933), feminist and lover of children and books came out at age 49. Now at age 60 she is an active member of the Bay Area lesbian community and wants to be a writer when she grows up.

Kate Rosenblatt (1922) is a 71-year-old white, middle-class dyke, playwright and novelist, active in Old Lesbian affairs in the Bay Area who loves to snorkel in the warm waters of almost any ocean.

Louise Gilbert (1922) — Life-long feminist, studied art from age 7 in well-known schools and with renowned artists. Born middle-class, worked in factories as union member. Activist in old left communist party and civil rights, peace, & women's movements. Professional graphic artist, assistant muralist to Anton Refregier on Rincon Annex mural in San Francisco.

Mab Maher (1933) is a writer living in southern Oregon and a member of the Oregon Women Writers Group, which meets up and down I-5. She has published many stories and essays.

Marge Green (1933) is an African American Lesbian who has been in the nursing profession for over 40 years and is currently finishing an internship in psychotherapy. She loves reading about lesbians and being involved in OLOC. She and her partner of 11 years live on the east side of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Marjory Nelson (1928) is a fat, feminist, radical old dyke, a proud grandmother, who writes, paints, gardens & loves the women's community, friends & her practice of therapy in San Francisco.

Mary Flick (1915-1994) wrote and performed with Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective and Options for Women Over Forty and was for many years an activist with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and other feminist and lesbian groups. She wrote, "The strange thing about getting old, it seems to me, is that only my body ages, not my spirit, my personality, my soul, my inner self."

Mickey Spencer (1927) — I am an old, white, Jewish, middle-class, fat lesbian feminist; disabilities prevented me from attending *Sinister Wisdom* editorial meetings. I came out as a lesbian in the 1970s. Before that I was married for 15 years and I have two adult sons. I was co-editor of *Broomstick*, a national anti-agist journal, from 1978 until it stopped publication in December 1993.

Artist's statement (front cover): I have been an artist all my adult life. A few years ago, increasing disabilities (arthritis and sensitivity to chemicals) made it necessary for me to give up both sculpture and acrylic painting. I therefore learned to work in water color. I also invented another medium which is chemically safe, using tools of my other occupation as a magazine publisher: I wax the back of colored paper, cut it with an X-acto knife and "paint" it on a backing. After burnishing the completed "paper painting," I secure it behind Plexiglas.

Rather than being a compromise, I was delighted to find that these changes in media stimulated my creativity and opened up a whole new way of working.

Miriam Carroll (1930) delights in her Atlanta home, shared with her spouse and traditional dog and cat. She finds it impossible to condense her life into 35 words.

Monika Kehoe, Ph.D. (1909) — Author of *Lesbians Over Sixty Speak for Themselves*, a national survey published in 1989, is Research Associate in the Center for Education and Research in Sexuality at San Francisco State University and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Homosexuality*.

Pat Pomerleau (1931), 3/4 French and 1/4 Cree on Paternal side & undisclosed, closeted, White and Red on Maternal side, lives in Santa Rosa, California with a bilingual dog named Sparkito. He is teaching her Spanish. When offered a milk bone, she will sit up, shake hands, and say: "¡HOLA!"

Rosemary Hathaway (1929) — I am a Caucasian, Working-class Sagittarian Lesbian Feminist believing in women and our ability to enhance and enrich the world.

Ruth Mountaingrove (1923) is primarily German of grandparents who were farmers and entrepreneurs. She is working class. Her father was a postal carrier for the U.S. government. She worked her way through college.

Sally Miller Gearhart (1931) is a white, southern, barely middle-class writer-activist-professor living in Mendocino County on a mountain of contradictions. She authored *The Wanderground*, appeared in *The Times of Harvey Milk*, sings barbershop harmony, and accompanies a large pit bull on long walks.

Shevy Healey (1922), foreign-born Jewish activist is proud to be a founder of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC). She and her partner Ruth Silver have been traveling throughout the U.S. meeting and greeting old lesbians.

Vashte Doublex (1927) — Born in Montreal, lived many years in England including through WW II and now in Mendocino, California. Her origins are white working class, she works full time as a social worker and is editor of *We are VISIBLE*, a newsletter for ageful lesbians and other women. She is a published writer and plans to continue to make her presence visible.

Vera Martin (1923) — I have multicultural parents and I self-identify as an African American. I retired from a Southern California local government agency after forty years of service. I am a member of the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, and on its Board of Governors. I am a charter member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), currently serving as the national coordinator.

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. 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*

The Me in the Mirror — autobiography of a disability-rights lesbian activist — self-aware, funny, outraged, engaging — by Connie Panzarino. 1994, \$12.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

Reverberations: across the shimmering CASCADAS — philosophy creates poetry creates a tough glistening spirit speaking practically of lesbian mystery in more than one language at once, by Jeffner Allen. 1994, SUNY Press, State Univ. Plaza, Albany, NY 12246.

Dyke Ideas: Process, Politics, Daily Life — a non-coercive series of essays in lesbian philosophy (no "shoulds" here), by Joyce Trebilcot. 1994, SUNY Press.

Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement & Resistance — an unusual feminist text on women in prison, dedicated (in part) to "all the unruly women, men and children whose resistances to social injustices are the hope of the world," by SW contributor Karlene Faith. 1993, \$21.95, Press Gang, 101-225 East 17th Ave., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5V 1A6.

Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature — challenging, funny, outrageous, cool, deliberate and collected — essays, autobiographical narratives and performance pieces by *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Trash* author Dorothy Allison. 1994, \$13.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Staying the Distance — a grown-up lesbian cowgirl western, by Franci McMahon. 1994, \$9.95, Firebrand.

Normal Sex — prose poems as deep stories of gender development & emotional awareness, by Linda Smukler. 1994, \$8.95, Firebrand.

What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics — at once comforting and demanding, full of wonderful quotes from a hundred sources, by Adrienne Rich. 1993, \$20 (cloth), W.W. Norton.

Everywhere House — a lesbian mystery set in '70s Seattle with a refreshingly thoughtful, political background, by Jane Meyerding. 1994, \$9.95, New Victoria, POB 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

The Kali Connection — a drug murder mystery and an "Eastern cult" lead reporter Lynn Evans to Nepal, by Claudia McKay. 1994, \$9.95, New Victoria.

The Island of Floating Women — a collection of stories, many with Jewish and lesbian themes, by Batya Weinbaum. 1993, \$9.85, Clothespin Fever, 655 4th Ave., Ste. 34, San Diego, CA 92101.

New Poems — on lesbian themes by Elizabeth Hall. 1993, \$7.95, Clothespin Fever.

The Lessons — lesbian detective Elizabeth "Tenacity" Mendoza tracks a serial killer of dykes, by Melanie McAllester. 1994, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink, POB 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403-5170.

Listening In: Dialogues with the Wiser Self — a feminist distillation of both common sense and inspired spirituality, the first book from a new women's press, by Ellen Meredith. 1993, \$14.95, Horse Mountain Press, POB 446, Haydenville, MA 01039-0446.

Intolerance: The Parameters of Oppression — analysis of how oppression is related to six parameters: race, class, gender, sexual preference, age, and mental and physical health, by Lise Noël (translated from the French). 1994, \$19.95, McGill-Queen's University Press, 3430 McTavish St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1X9.

Flashpoint — a novel of politics, consciousness, gay rights and the LPGA, by Katherine V. Forrest. 1994, \$22.95 (cloth), Naiad Press, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Wednesday Nights — stepping out on her lover, Lyla Bradshaw is accused of murdering rapists and has to decide whether or not to use her alibi, by Camarin Grae. 1994, \$10.95, Naiad.

Edited Out — an old coverup unearthed by newspaper copy editor Carmen Ramirez turns nasty in Oklahoma, by Lisa Had-dock. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Smokey O — romance and rivalry in the new Women's Baseball League, by Celia Cohen. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Kathleen O'Donald — immigrant Irish and English lesbians engage in interesting political and personal struggles in the NY garment industry c. 1909, by Penny Hayes. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Staying Home — lesbian artists deal with getting pregnant in a timely book about the dyke baby boom, by Elisabeth Nonas. 1994, \$10.95, Naiad.

Crosswords — the 2nd Victoria Cross mystery, set in London, by Penny Summer. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Certain Smiles — erotic short story collection, by Dorothy Tell. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Sweet Cherry Wine — sex, suspense, rock 'n' roll and detox combine in this thriller, by Carol Schmidt. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Worlds of Women: Sapphic Science Fiction Erotica — five stories by lesbians and bisexuals, edited by Cecilia Tan. 1993, \$5.95, Circlet Press, POB 15143, Boston, MA 02215.

Becoming Visible: A reader in gay and lesbian history for high school and college students — with excerpts from gay & lesbian materials and a question guide for students, by Kevin Jennings, editor. 1994, \$9.95, Alyson, 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118.

Have You Ever? 391 questions to help you know yourself and others — is, exactly, pages of large-type questions, by Anna Van Evera. 1994, \$6.95, Alyson.

Butch II — Mike the Dyke, back from Chile, engages in a fight for social justice while looking for "Ms. Right," by Jan Rayn. 1994, \$8.95, Lace Publications (an imprint of Alyson).

All That She Can Be: Helping Your Daughter Maintain Her Self-Esteem — straight advice that might be useful for dyke moms to skim, by Dr. Carol J. Eagle and Carol Colman. 1993, \$11, Simon & Schuster.

Violence Against S/M Women Within the Lesbian Community — published survey with essay material, by Jad Keres. 1994, FT Survey, POB 30145, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

Fat and Furious: Women and Food Obsession — appears to recycle the old "it's your swallowed rage at your mother" approach with 12-step solutions & no political analysis, by Judi Hollis, Ph.D. 1994, \$22 (cloth), Ballantine, 201 E. 50th St., NY, NY 10022.

Patience & Sarah — a reprint of the very tender 1969 lesbian classic, by Isabel Miller. 1994, \$10, Ballantine/Fawcett.

Announcements and Classified Ads

PUBLICATIONS

ESTO NO TIENE NOMBRE, revista de lesbianas latinas en miami, is a 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/yr (4 issues). Single issue \$3.50. New address: MAIZE, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

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, sample \$2: Women Express, POB 6009 JFK, Boston, MA 02114.

WANT THE WOMYN'S COMMUNITY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS? Get What You Want! Join *SisterNet* & find work, play, "stuff," friendship (or more), teachers, prof. contacts, businesses & goddesses like yourself to share with. Womyn-only and bimonthly. Send large SASE w/2 stamps to: *SisterNet*, 977 Seminole Trail #274(SW), Ch'ville, VA 22901 for info & special offer for new members.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

FAT LESBIANS — Fat-positive writings and art by fat dykes sought for a big, fat anthology. Deadline: Nov. 1, 1994. Send bio with work to: Mev Miller, POB 300151, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

BLUE COLLAR, WORKING CLASS AND POOR LESBIANS' identity anthology: who decides who's a lesbian? What a real lesbian looks, acts, sounds like? What we call ourselves? For info, send SASE to: POB 8939, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

DYKE REVIEW MAGAZINE — "We don't judge it, we just publish it." Looking for features writers from your area as well as all publishable forms of dyke expression. Call 415-621-3769 or write: 584 Castro St., Ste 456, SF, CA 94114.

LESBIANS OFF THE RAG! A MENOPAUSAL ANTHOLOGY — Narratives sought from all cultures, classes, ethnicities, abilities and ages, inc. fictional, lesbians who found menopause positive, found ways to alleviate unwanted symptoms and/or never had children. Send to Lee Lynch and Akia Woods, c/o New Victoria Publishers, Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

LESBIAN LAND CULTURE ANTHOLOGY — Seeking work that reflects the innovations and adaptations we make to live sustainably with the land and each other. SASE for guidelines. Word Weavers, POB 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408. Eds: Nett Hart and Jean Mountaingrove. Deadline: October 1, 1994.

YOUNG WOMEN HEALING FROM ABUSE — send all forms of publishable expression for a new anthology to the Birch Heather Project, POB 11244, Portland, OR 97211.

WOMEN AND THERAPY special issue on therapy and class. 1 page abstract (proposal) w/ bio and phone number by Oct. 1, 1994 to Marcia Hill, 25 Court St., Montpelier, VT 05602.

LESBIAN CONTRADICTION seeks non-fiction from women who've experienced the Far Right around lesbian/gay & women's issues. Ongoing column. LesCon, 584 Castro St. Ste. 356, SF, CA 94114.

MULTICULTURAL LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS anthology. First-person, cassettes, interviews O.K. Topics: racism in 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.

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! For guidelines, info: SASE to Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, running deadline.

LESBIAN SEX ANTHOLOGY being edited by a Black bisexual feminist and a Jewish lesbian seeks passionate poems and stories. Deadline: Aug. 31, 1994. Send work or queries w/SASE to: Women's Press, #233-517 College St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 4A2.

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.

THE SAGE WITHIN —The Spiritual Lives of Everyday Women seeks prose on how women incorporate spirituality into daily life. All faiths, paths, backgrounds. Query with SASE to: Hummingbird Press (was Stoner Press), POB 8116, Santa Rosa, CA 95407.

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.

SHORT FICTION BY WOMEN, new guidelines available — SASE to: Rachel Whalen, ed., Box 1276, Stuyvesant Sta., NY, NY 10009.

LESBIAN EROTIC short fiction for third Alyson anthology. Deadline: Sept. 15, 1994. SASE to: Lucy Jane Bledsoe, POB 10211, Berkeley, CA 94709-5211.

WOMAN OF POWER issue #25: "Overcoming Prejudice; Celebrating Difference; Cultivating Diversity." Deadline: Oct. 1, 1994. SASE for guidelines: POB 2785, Orleans, MA 02653.

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/RETREATS

FAT WOMEN ARISE AND CELEBRATE OUR BEAUTY at the Fall Fat Women's Gathering co-sponsored by NAAFA Feminist Caucus, Fat Lip Reader's Theatre, Making Waves and *Radiance* Magazine. Oakland, CA, Sept. 30-Oct. 2. For info: Judy Freespirit, 407 Orange St. #101, Oakland, CA 94610 (510) 836-1153 or e-mail 0005348398@mcimail.com.

LESBIAN NATURAL RESOURCES (LNR) is a new organization dedicated to developing rural lesbian community, providing grants & assistance with land purchase, establishing land trusts, tax exemption & land skills. Emphasis on making this resource available to lesbians of color. For more info, write: POB 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0742.

LESBIAN SEPARATIST ANNUAL GATHERING for female-born, nonsadomasochist Lesbian Separatists from around the world, Oct. 7-10, Santa Cruz, CA. For info & pre-registration: The Annual Gathering, POB 21475, Oakland, CA 94620; specify print, braille or cassette.

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

WOMEN, WAR AND PEACE: THE VISION AND THE STRATEGIES — international conference of Women in Black and women's peace movements. Jerusalem, Dec. 20-31, 1994. Activists and scholars invited. Contact Erella Shadmi, 4/11 Dresner St., Jerusalem, Israel 93814. Tel: (2) 718-597; Fax: (2) 259-626.

4TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S STUDIES CONFERENCE at S. Conn. State Univ., "Women's Voices/Women's Powers: Theory, Action, Transformation" is Sept 20-Oct. 2, 1994, as well as a WOMEN'S FAIR. Women's Studies Program, SCSU, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515 for more info.

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 8th International Conf., Jan. 5-8, 1995, SF, CA. Panel and paper proposals due by Sept. 1 to: Director, Women's Studies Program, Univ. of Texas at El Paso, 500 W. University, El Paso, TX 79968.

COTTAGES AT HEDGEBROOK — A Retreat for Women Writers grants cottages and meals for writers for a stay of up to three months. Application deadlines: April 1 and Oct. 1. For applications: 2197 E. Millman Rd., Langley, WA 98260.

NORCROFT — A writing retreat for women provides space and food for up to four weeks between May & October. Write for 1995 applications: POB 300105, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION CENTRE AND ARCHIVES OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (IIAV) has moved to: Gerardus Majellakerk, Obiplein 4, 1094 RB Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Fax #: +31 20-6655812, Phone: +31 20-6650820.

(AD)VENTURES

YELLOW BIRCH FARM. Small cottage on working farm in Downeast Maine. Beautiful, remote, unspoiled Cobscook Bay. B&B or weekly rental. Brochure, (207) 726-5807.

LESBIAN ART RETREAT on beautiful Oregon Coast. Toxic-free, safe, creative environment in a rural setting. \$175/week inc. meals with other working artists, separate living and studio spaces. Private instruction avail. RIVERLAND, POB 156, Beaver OR 97108, (503) 398-5223.

SALLIE & EILEEN'S PLACE, vacation cabins for women, in the woods. Mendocino, CA (707) 937-2028.

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WHIPTAIL WOMYN'S COLLECTIVE provides 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, SF, CA 94110.

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 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 S.F. 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.

AD RATES

Deadline to reserve space in:

#54, Lesbians & Religion: **September 7, 1994** (Pub: Dec. '94).

#55, Open theme: **January 6, 1995** (Pub: April 1, '95).

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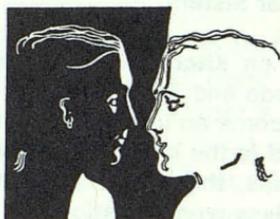
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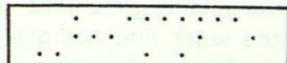
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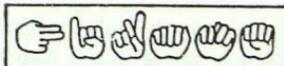
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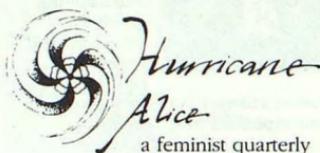
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- #52 **Allies** includes 10 interviews by Jamie Lee Evans with lesbian activists.
- #51 **An open issue** where lesbians lay claim to our lives.
- #50 **Not The Ethics Issue** we had planned (read it to find out why). But there is great work on ethics & more. Guest edited by Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch.
- #49 **The Lesbian Body**: here's where flesh and theory meet — Includes lesbians of color, roles, disability, body image, fat, sex, menopause and more.
- #48 **Lesbian Resistance**: investigations into the activist heart of our courage — including messages from dykes in prison.
- #47 **Lesbians of Color: Tellin' It Like It Tis'**. Special 160-page issue edited by lesbians of color, includes new work in all forms — essential reading!
- #46 **Dyke Lives**. New, international fiction and poetry.
- #45 **Lesbians and Class**. The first issue edited entirely by poor and working class dykes includes analysis, personal narrative, poetry, fiction & a graffiti wall.
- #43/44 **The 15th Anniversary Retrospective**. 368 pages, over 90 lesbians' work from the second wave. An amazing, indispensable source collection!
- #42 **Lesbian Voices**. Our first intentional all-lesbian issue includes legal theory, racism, Israel, hair, surgery, the effects of rape on relationships, much more.
- #41 **Italian-American Women's Issue**. Guest edited by Denise Leto & Janet Capone.
- #40 **Special Focus on Friendship**. Essays, fiction, editorial discussion transcript.
- #36 **Special Focus on Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating Emotional Well Being in our Communities**. Includes testimony, prose, poetry and essays.
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- #32 **Special Focus on Illness, Death, Mourning, Healing, the disappeared, hunting season, dealing with suicide, cancer, new ritual observances**.
- #31 **Special Focus on Sex and Fiction, coming out in the south, Found Goddesses**.
- #28 **Special Focus on Women & Work; Body Image, Size & Eating**.
- #26 **Special Issue: To Go To Berbir** by Jill Drew, a book-length journal written by an American nurse working in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion.
- #21 **Separatism revisited, Jewish survival & defiance, Black lesbian writing, photos of dykes in drag, suicide, bars, letters about anti-Semitism**.

We recently found a case of slightly damaged copies of #39, *On Disability* (\$5 ea.). *Sinister Wisdom* #1-19, 27, 37 & 38 are out of print. Photocopies can be provided — \$5 for the first article, \$1 for each add. in the same order (\$17 for a whole issue). Allow one month for delivery.

Notes for a Magazine

Change on the Horizon

It's my great pleasure to introduce *Sinister Wisdom's* new editors: Akiba Onada-Sikwoia and Janet Wallace. They will take over all aspects of publishing SW in February of 1995. The call for their first issue, #56 on Language, is on page 144.

I first met Janet in 1983 at the last Women in Print conference and have known her work as a writer, editor and member of Macdykes off and on since then. Akiba was among the first womyn I called about putting out the Lesbian of Color issue (#47: *Telling It Like It 'Tis*) in 1991 when she was an editor of *Aché*, a journal for Lesbians of African descent. Janet and Akiba are experienced, capable, thoughtful, visionary lesbians.

Sinister Wisdom is graced by this change. I will edit #54, Lesbians & Religion with guest editors; Caryatis Cardea, Jamie Lee Evans and Sauda Burch will edit #55, an Open issue. I hope you will continue to support all of our work. Subscribe, talk about SW, keep sending us your writing and art, arguing with us, subscribing. Your engagement makes our efforts worthwhile.

— Elana

Statement of Purpose

We are two Colored Dykes committed to supporting the representation of diversity within our Lesbian communities. After numerous conversations, several panic attacks, deep thought and much gratitude, we have accepted the opportunity to become the next publishers of *Sinister Wisdom*. Currently we are negotiating with several wimmin, of cultures different than our own, to join us on this exciting journey.

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia

I am a 51 year old, out-of-the-closet for 36 years, Black woman of African, Native American and Irish descent. As a Writer, Poet, Performing Artist, Healer and Survivor of the multitude of oppression perpetrated against Black wimmin and children, my primary work has its focus in healing with the acknowledgement that Spirit holds the form.

I believe that our life stories are all that we have — they are how we've survived. To be able to have a public venue that supports the telling of our stories, especially as Two Spirited Wimmin/Lesbians, has often been a privilege — when it should be a necessity.

I am a product of the convolution of experiences in my life. My writer self has grown out of my painful process of healing, re-birthing and the grueling challenge of finding the courage to speak. It has felt devastating to have this precious gift of my truth not venerated. It has been frustrating to have someone else decide that what I have to say would be more appropriate were it expressed in "their language."

I owe much gratitude to the first woman who said, "Akiba, you're a writer," and to all those wimmin after her who recognized that what I had to say and the way I needed to do it was indeed of value. I feel honored to now have the opportunity to support other wimmin to do the same.

Janet Wallace

I grew up in San Francisco and now live in Oakland. I plan to introduce myself more fully later, but for now I'll say that I am looking forward to being one of the publishers of *Sinister Wisdom*.

When I first heard about the editors wanting to pass *Sinister Wisdom* on to Women of Color, I immediately remembered the long hours I'd spent on layout and design for *Aché* (a journal for Lesbians of African descent) and shuddered. No more giving blood to a publication, I thought, at least not in this lifetime.

A month or so later, Akiba approached me with enthusiasm about how publishing was in her destiny. Did I want to participate in this project, she wanted to know. We talked about it among ourselves, and later with Elana and Caryatis. It impressed me that the journal was already 19 years old. I would be a member of the 6th group of women to take it over. I decided that, with the right group, it would be worthwhile and probably fun.

I feel like a caretaker for something precious and special. I am serious about the responsibility and want to see the publication thrive and continue to evolve.

Upcoming Issues

#54 Lesbians & Religion — out in December!

#55 Open — to be edited by Caryatis Cardea, Jamie Lee Evans and Sauda Burch. Now's the time to send us all those manuscripts that haven't fit our themes! Deadline: **October 1, 1994**

#56 Language — The deadline for Akiba and Janet's (see p. 142-143) first issue will be **February 1, 1995**.

The subject of language is complex and evokes many responses such as issues of power, privilege, class, race and color, culture and all the phobias. We envision works addressing questions such as: Who gets to speak for us? What is the importance or non-importance of being bi-, tri-, or multi-lingual? When words like sexism, racism, homophobia, fat phobia, ageism are used to define your oppression, do they define your experience? (For example, over the past 10 years the definition of racism has changed — at one time the dictionary equated racism with economical power, now it's hard to find a dictionary with that definition in it any more.) Who gives definition to these words? Who creates the language we use — does it come out of our communities, does it represent the diversity of them?

What does it mean to use a certain kind of language? Who are you when you use that language? Are you representing yourself as you see yourself? Or are you representing yourself in a way that you think will be more accepted? What does it mean to define yourself and or your experience in the language of an oppressor? (For example, rape defined by men who 99% of the time are the rapist.) What does it mean to be born into a language that is not that of your ancestors with no access to the language they used? Is language just words or is it a way of communicating our feelings, giving meaning to our experiences. How about words like disabled, dumb, mute, blind, etc., do they describe the abilities we may not have or do they make us victim?

You certainly do NOT have to express yourself in some sort of intellectual discourse. It can be fiction or poetry. It can be, if you are so blessed, pictorial rather than textual. It can be a diatribe. In fact, it can be just about anything that we can print on a page.

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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 144 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 publishing costs (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*.

It's still a tossup as to which is the most dreaded word, the "O" word or the "L" word. — *Shevy Healey*

I began to think about myself and the many other black lesbians who no doubt will live and die never having received special recognition ... — *Grear Greene*

The strange thing about getting old, it seems to me, is that only my body ages, not my spirit, my personality, my soul, my inner self. — *Mary Flick*