

sinister wisdom

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

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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.

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Notes for a Magazine*Caryatis Cardea:*

Well, I'm back, just long enough to help with the transition. Elana has edited her final *Sinister Wisdom* and the new editors, Akiba Onada-Sikwoia and Kyos Featherdancing, begin with the next issue.

When Elana Dykewomon became editor of *Sinister Wisdom*, her first theme issue was "Wisdom." I wrote something then, which I never submitted, about wisdom being that enhanced state of mind which comes about only when we are able to decrease, at least a bit, the "noise" in our lives.

By "noise," I meant the thousand distractions of jobs, family, relationships, addictions, drama, bills, errands and chores that leave so little of ourselves to go about the business of actual life. You know, life, that thing we're all here for, to learn and grow, add to the world's peace and not inordinately subtract from its riches. We especially need relief from patriarchal noise, the grinding and total reality of our oppressions, which keeps lesbians from knowing the things we must come to know: our need for each other, our right to each other in community. Community, Marilyn Frye says, is what happens in the spaces we create.

Producing a lesbian journal has been the process of creating a literary space, where each dyke — artist, writer and reader — can escape the noise, reconnect to her own sacred silence and most ruthlessly honest voice, and reflect on what it means to be a lesbian at the close of the 20th century.

To the new editor, Akiba Onada-Sikwoia, and the circle that will grow around her, I wish all the fun and challenge of new skills and enriching friendships, a road that ascends, but not too steeply, that keeps reaching out to new horizons of lesbian art and politics. Most of all, I offer the admiration I feel for us all when we pick up new responsibilities. And I thank her, personally, for taking up this particular obligation, so that those of us who have nurtured *SW* in the past can

now watch it go on beyond us, growing, changing, transformed by its own age and its new caretaker.

And, I thank Elana for guiding SW through nearly half its lifetime, and for asking me to be part of what became, for several years, my primary political and artistic commitment. What we learned from each other in the process continues to be immeasurable. I think we're each in "holding pattern" now, waiting to see what will fill the space SW has taken in our lives, not to mention our apartments. I hope that whatever comes next will be at least as satisfying, and perhaps not quite so demanding, as it has been to work on *Sinister Wisdom*.

Sauda Burch and Jamie Lee Evans:

Sinister Wisdom 55 is the final issue produced under the current publisher and editorial group. Both Jamie and I have been involved with the journal for a few years. I began working with SW over four years ago, when I helped with SW's fifteen year retrospective issue. Four years later, the journal is nearing its twentieth birthday. That makes SW the longest lived lesbian journal in the United States, possibly the world.

I leave the journal after being part of many editorial groups, co-editor for "Ethics... NOT!", SW #50 with Caryatis and one of several guest editors, including Jamie, for "Tellin' It Like It 'Tis," SW # 47. I have gained a great deal of editing and production experience and have, for lack of a better phrase, 'cut my teeth' on the journal. My volunteer work with SW has helped me move 'lesbianly forward' with my own creative and non-fiction writing and honed my critical thinking about lesbian issues. I would not be exaggerating to say that every editorial group I have been a part of has spent a good amount of time discussing (a very mild word) the politics behind each issue that we have published. That is as it should be.

It is no small feat that a lesbian journal has survived this long. Our longevity is partially attributable to the journal

changing responsibility from lesbian to lesbian. *SW* has been based in many regions of the country; just when it seemed an *SW* publisher needed to move on, another lesbian or group of lesbians assumed responsibility. I am confident this lesbian tradition will continue and that you and/or the next generation of lesbians will be reading *SW* into the 21st century.

As Jamie, Caryatis and I put together this issue, we lamented about the decreasing number of submissions to the journal. Three years ago, I recall that the editorial group would consider over one hundred submissions for each issue. For this open issue, there were less than forty submissions that made it to review. We encourage those of you who write to keep writing and to send your work to *SW* and to other lesbian publications. This is one way you can help make sure that *SW* is still around in twenty years.

Thank you for your continued readership, subscriptions, donations and support of *Sinister Wisdom*. I look forward to the continued growth and spirit of *SW* with its new publishers, Akiba Onada-Sikwoia.



Roxann Burger

Upcoming Issues _____

#56 Language — Akiba Onada-Sikwoia's first issue as editor will be out in August — don't miss it!

#57 Healing — More than ever before we hear the word "heal" being passed around. Some of us have stepped outside of Western medicine and formal psychology to our own paths as non-traditional "healers." Our communities are saturated with books, brochures and workshops that speak of alternative methods of "healing" — from acupuncture to past life regressions. We all know at least one woman who, in time of crisis, has given preference to a psychic, channel, homeopath, or "medicine person," etc. in an effort to cure herself or be cured. By now most of us are either graduates of or participants in a 12-step program, a support group and/or some form of therapy. We're owning our "spirituality" and re-claiming our bodies.

But as much as we continue to seek the answers to our questions and find new ways to understand the concept of healing, dis-ease continues to ravage and escalate in our communities.

What does "healing" mean to you? If you have a life threatening dis-ease or a disability does healing mean you cure it? How do we take care of ourselves when our "well-being" breaks down? Is there a spiritual component to this? How are we healing emotional dis-ease, compulsive behavior, social and societal dis-eases such as substance abuse, battering, rape, incest, eating disorders, poverty, racism and hetero-sexism? We are looking for personal testimonies. How has your "healing" affected your life — not only physically but psychically and spiritually? What have you replaced your dis-ease with? How have you transformed rage and pain? What does "medicine" mean to you? Perhaps you have been touched by someone else's process of "healing." Deadline: June 1, 1995.

#58 Open — this is a great time to send in *any* work in *any* style! Deadline: October 1, 1995.

Xochipala Maes Valdez

Offerings

para Tecolotl

Something touches me, beckons. The hairs on the back of my neck rise to the pull in the smoke filled blackness as a heartbeat drums and offerings in an ancient tongue are sung. I focus on my butt, legs, hands, contacting the floor. Nausea fills my chest and throat as I allow myself to follow the coaxing. I spin around the room, too fast, like a 33 RPM record playing at 78, words and syllables of muttered prayers indecipherable. The smell of burning sage, a steady pounding of the drum remind me I am still in the ceremony. I hear the gourds shake and the deer skin covered rattle touches my hands, my shoulders, my head. Medicine that calls me back into my body.

Several days later the singer calls to tell me I was touched by the Great Owl. He instructs me how to appropriately offer thanks for this blessing.

In the same week, the owl comes to Eva, this brown woman I crave, in her dreams, taking her delicate hand into its flesh tearing beak. The owl pulls her, despite her fear and resistance.

I am malnourished, dying from the slow constant poisoning. I have been force fed manufactured lies, conceived of in the heads of men with wooden hearts and faces of monkeys. I have chewed on empty rituals—rising behind the sun to drive myself to soul-less work, filling time with more projects, more politics, more acquaintances, attempting to quiet my pangs. Rituals that thin out my blood. The heart beat *de mi alma* pounds against my consciousness, rages in *mis sueños* for the nourishment I have been denied: *Las lenguas, los cuentos, las ceremonias de mi gente, de mis antepasados.*

She glided into my heart on the crest of my hunger.

The beginning, our union was for me, a homecoming. Coming home to *La Mujer, La Chicana, La India.* I soared like a

captive condor reclaiming flight and became intoxicated like a starved hummingbird sucking sweet nectar. I tasted in Eva the depths of my blood, wetting my thirst with our shared tongue. My tongue glazed her earth brown body, unfolded butterfly winged lips never before loved by a woman. Her tongue searched out my dark sweetness, danced through colored doors of magic and mystery no white woman was ever allowed to approach. *En sus ojos negros* intact pyramids emerged through crumbling colonies, reflecting the dream I would one day remember.

We invited Tecolotl, the owl, to join our dance and decorated our relationship with cards, trinkets and jewelry of nocturnal winged images, a symbol of a partnership called into being by the sacred. Tecolotl slept in our bed at the dark moon. She gifted us with wings from three great birds with stopped heartbeats waiting on the sides of country freeways. Each time we came upon a roadside gift we thanked the bird and removed its wings. We scratched away at the hard dirt with whatever tool we found, a rock, a stick, broken glass and buried the body in the compacted, off road soil.

As I spiralled further into my buried home I flew into places where my enemy waited for me. Waited with bared fangs, for my flesh. I had been convinced as a child that the doors to life could only be opened by white approval, by becoming white. When those lies began to shatter and I no longer sat in submission on a death road, the enemy transformed its face, using the voices of *mi gente* and sank its fangs of twisted lies deeper, scraping against my bone.

"So you call yourself Chicana. Where's your lengua Whitewash? Tú familia sold out. Sorry, but you can't be granted membership in this Culture Club."

The symphony of voices crescendoed a thousand fold when Eva, my brown lover, examined with a disapproving eye the whiteness in my life. Bit by bit, I became a person without a past, hiding from her my memories of white friends, white lovers, and "white" experiences. When I attempted to retrieve and reiterate Spanish, our last language muted, frag-

ments of my mother's heart sliced the membrane of my throat and I managed only to spit up sour blood. A heart broken from beatings by those of her own blood for not knowing a language she was never allowed to speak. Caught between imposed cages of "too dark" and "too white," I gnawed at my flesh like a wolf struggling to free her shattered limb from the hunter's trap. As I released myself, I turned to face the enemy in yet another disguise.

"After all you're only a woman. She wants the real prize. El Hombre, The Man."

The clamor pounded steadily behind my eyes, flattened out my consciousness until I saw only what I was not. I caught her glances, her veiled flirtations with men. My heart recorded her slightest change in posture, intonation, and focus in their presence. I endured, repeatedly, public scenes of private humiliation where she and he looked more like partners than she and I. I watched quietly his hands/arms constantly against/around her, knowing he would not dare and she would not allow if I, her lover, were a man. I swallowed whole a raging tantrum when she chose to comfort him, for the nth time, over a lost love and sacrifice our plans to celebrate my birthday. I punished her instead with a suffocating silence.

When I crawled out of my dead skin, I looked down and saw myself—a woman who sought women with faces turned, seducing them with the healing that only *una mujer puede dar a la otra*, woman to woman. I saw myself—a child desperately waiting for Eva, this woman facing me, to heal my wounds by not turning away at the snap of a man's fingers.

The desire to escape the enemy's grip rose in me like seething lava pushing out against frozen stone. I envisioned us huddled on an isolated mountain where our love might prevail, insulated from the daily onslaught of hatred. But there was nowhere to hide. The place of the enemies was not a place at all. I had unknowingly chewed up and digested their masks of fear and destruction; the poison seeped into every cell in my body. The only way to free myself was to

bleed out all the pain, drop by drop, to offer my excavated beating heart to the sun and invite the healing fire.

We did not know the messenger owl had summoned us to confront the Rulers of Destruction whose faces were illuminated in our reflections of one another. When we returned home from one trip with owl wings, we covered the decaying flesh where the wings once joined the body with salt in our attempt to preserve them. Days later we gathered the wings, an abalone shell, sage and cedar to clean and dress the wings and perform a ritual of gratitude. We fought before the sage could release its purifying smoke. We withdrew to lick our wounds. We hung the wings in the closet promising to tend to them at another time. That time never arrived. We continued to use the symbol of the owl as a tenuous glue to bind our weakening relationship while wings hung uncared for in the windowless closet.

As we journeyed further through the landscapes of our internalized destroyers and saboteurs, it became harder to retreat to the pasture of tenderness where we first encountered each others' spirits, where love abundantly fed our grazing hearts. We found ourselves more often in the crossroads of suspicion, circling, each waiting for the other to give reason to attack or flee. We were poised for protection, with tails raised ready to spray self-hatred at one another in the name of self-preservation.

When we could name the enemy, we saw each other. But constant battles, like sandpaper rubbing against soft sapling wood, eroded away our joy, and stripped us finally of even the hunger to rise out of the sawdust to find one another.

Tecolotl comes in the dream time calling for her wings. "Return them," she cries, from the underworld, "There is no spirit left in them." I lay the battered wings gently on a bed of cornmeal and tobacco. I pull the edges of the black cloth over feathered arms as grief folds in on me. Sorrow for my misuse of the owls' spirit floods my consciousness opening gates of five centuries of grief. I weep for the disregard de las animas de todas las cosas en nuestra tierra. I lower the bundle into the small grave and sprinkle it with handfuls of sage,

cedar and copal. I dig into the mound of piled earth removed from this new opening into the belly of la madre. As I pray for a reuniting of wings with spirit, I cover the prepared wings with the dirt. I swim in the cleansing pool, el cenote, that waits at the bottom of my grief, and am exuberant as my soul pulsates with the remembering that only those things in right relationship can thrive.

I am grinding up my false self, the colonizer's fabrication. The self I grew accustomed to, calling it my own. I grind the protective shell like Xmucane grinds the yellow and white corn nine times to create the proper substance for human flesh. I grind the foundation like the Lords of Xibalba grind the bones of the twins, Hunapu and Xbalanque, according to the twins' own instructions after they gave themselves to the fire. The Lords of Death feed the meal of bone to the river from which the twins re-emerge, more magical and more powerful to embark on their final voyage to defeat the Lords of Xibalba.

I offer myself to the fire of my rage, of my passion, the fire of the original thinker. I call out to the wind, to Ehecatl for partnerships, friendships, unions with parts of myself, where we become the twins who are not tricked by the Lords of Death. Instead, we become the magicians in their presence.

"Such was the defeat of the rulers of Xibalba. The [twins] accomplished it only through wonders, only through self-transformation."*

* From *Popul Vuh, The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, translated by Dennis Tedlock, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1985, p.155.

Amy Edgington

What the Housemouse Knows

Backsides, insides and undersides of things.
Secret whiskered passages.
The metallic taste of giant fears.

This is no place for cowards:
there are avalanches of pots and brooms and shoes.
In the walls, wires coil, ready to defend themselves;
nails point the way to heaven.

The dirt and smells and messes of the gods
are all the kindness a mouse expects.
Tradition demands that women scream,
stand on chairs and guard our private parts;
that we set traps, lay poison and flush
tiny, ruptured bodies down the toilet.

We cannot bear to be reminded
how we too have eaten crumbs
and have papered our nests with stolen scraps;
how we have cringed from blows or blessed
the lack of them and even called this "love."
We do not dare admit our own internal injuries,
our precarious survival, in a house
where the most we hope for
is to not get caught
by those who lord it over us.

Deborah A. Elliston

Morning

(for Linda)

As she sleeps
her body compacts
like a rose folding inward
by morning she is a small bud
I imagine her billions of cells
every nucleus pulling
its protons and neutrons closer
the space between suddenly too vast
in the heady night air
Along her side
sinewy muscles clutch bone
a tight slow curve from shoulder to ass
warm against my belly and thighs
Stirring beside me she presses closer
as I wrap my arm around her waist
and kiss the fragile neck I love
good morning

Lanie Maeda

On Reading *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm*¹

Introduction

To say that it's unpopular to write against pornography in the '90s is a gross understatement. I know the risk I'm taking putting my words and experience out into the world in this way, and it's scary. But I know there are other lesbians like me who remain silent on this issue for fear of being ostracized and overly criticized for taking an unpopular view on the use of sexual exploitation for the purposes of getting off.

When Diana Russell's *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm* came out, it gave me another opportunity to speak out in my lesbian community about this issue. After reading and viewing the book, I felt compelled to speak, and the risk became less important than the sound of my voice on paper, the expression of my fury.

Background

I am a twenty-eight year old lesbian activist living in the San Francisco Bay Area during the age of glam and gloss; I am surrounded by contradictions and questions of what is community and where my place is in it. I often wonder if I would've been better off born ten or twenty years earlier as my opinions often seem a decade or two off.

Unlike the majority of visible² anti-pornography activists, I am a woman of color from the housing projects and an out lesbian. I come from a violent family of alcoholics and

¹ Though I do use some general descriptions or examples, I have deliberately tried not to duplicate pornography here. Special thanks to feminists who have spent time discussing the topic with me, including: Michelle, Kit, Beauty, Caryatis and Lisa. This piece is dedicated to the many women of color organizing around the issue of sexual exploitation of women.

² By *visible* I am talking about the most well known writers, speakers and out activists who are primarily white, middle class and hush about their sexual orientation.

addicts, whose cycle I do not continue in my own life. Most importantly, I am a survivor of child pornography. There are pornographic photographs of me in the hands of men and in their pedophile fantasies.

Between the ages of five and six, I was sexually abused by several white men and it was filmed. I was physically assaulted and it was photographed. White men have made money off this Asian child's body. My rage against the making and distributing of pornography is deeply connected to my adult survival. I refuse to see adult (or child) pornography as a free speech issue because I know what it feels like to have white men taking pictures of the gag on my child mouth. The speech of women and children in pornography is what should be at issue, but the capitalist pornographer is the one who always seems to win out.³

Antifeminist backlash, homophobia and sexism roar rampant in the male dominated straight world. But some core themes I see in lesbian communities today come from the same seeds as the straight communities. Sadomasochism, and anything-goes-if-you-have-an-orgasm fill the tops of agendas at conferences and events, and the front pages of 'zines and lesbian publications. With few exceptions, if I want to read work by and about lesbians, view a '90s lesbian film, attend a pride march, or even go to a fundraising event I am likely to witness piercings, fisting, women whipping each other, chains, bondage, etc. If I am critical of these practices, I am relegated to the "geeky, unsexual, unliberated '70s generation" or worse yet, subject to intimidation or violence by another lesbian or woman, usually white, if I speak out. It seems that to be a true Generation X'er, I must see fun as priority, "hot" sex as crucial, photographs of it as normal, and the pushing of my own emotional and political boundaries as necessary to continue my growth as a healthy and sexual lesbian. I am excluded and silenced for my disagreement with the supremacy of sexual issues in the '90s.

³These ideas are certainly not solely my own, and I know that I am not the first woman to talk about this issue. See Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Diana Russell, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon for more on this idea.

About the Book

Diana Russell's *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm* (Russell Publications, Berkeley, CA, 1993), begins with a warning: "Some of the visuals in this book may cause distress." Indeed while reading *The Evidence of Harm*, I was disturbed, angered and confused. From the distorted fetus-like image on the front cover to the last pornographic image of a man sexually assaulting a woman, I had concerns for what Russell was trying to achieve. What she does in *Against Pornography* is show actual pornography and connect it to sexual violence against women.

In *Against Pornography*, Diana Russell shows us that *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, the "soft" pornographic magazines that can be purchased in nearly every store where you can get a Coke or Pepsi, are not harmless. Many critics of pornography often ignore these magazines thinking that they are merely images of naked women posing in "sexy" or gratuitous positions. But Russell dispels those falsehoods simply by reproducing the cartoons and images which teach how-to's and why-to's, all the while normalizing male sexual violence against women.

Against Pornography contains dozens of horrific, racist, violent and humiliating images of sexualized male violence against women. In addition to the mainstream pornography it also contains photographs from illegal and underground magazines. While all the images are painful to see, these latter ones are the most difficult to look at. However, with commentary near each image, the reader is at once able to see the photograph or cartoon by itself and then hear the voice of Russell's feminist analysis directly beside it.

For those of us who have worked in the anti-pornography movement for a few years, we are likely to have viewed some form of pornography, but have had to research or *find it* in isolation, in the pornographer's forum and on his terms. Most times when I've come in contact with pornography it makes me sick; and my need to cover it, discard or destroy it is overwhelming. In a different context, as in *Against Pornography*, I was able to review it critically, then reflect with Diana's comments on my feminist outrage. Her commentary acted almost as a safety net.

Still, reading the book and seeing again the exploitation and brutal humiliation of women upset me deeply. Witness-

ing violence against women, in particular a violence that is not silent, not closeted, but dearly pursued as entertainment and faithfully protected by patriarchs and now some feminists and lesbians alike, is literally sickening. I imagine deep circles forming below my eyes, grief so profound it seems permanently etched on my face. Knowing that liberals have "political debates" over the life of women who are forced into painful, unhealthy, degrading situations is enough to turn my stomach. To contemplate the pornographers/perpetrators in the act of creating these texts is enough to move me to murder.

But instead I ponder, consider and grieve the circumstance while strategizing and organizing on the solution. I wonder about the implications of a book against pornography filled with pornography. I worry about the repeated harm to my psyche, just one more dose of it! Did I need to see these images or this book to educate me on reality or further ignite my anger against pornography? And what about the women whose photographs are duplicated in this book, what would they think or feel to see their image once again published for public consumption?⁴ What if my image was printed here? I would not be okay with that; it would enrage me all the same.

The Master's Tools?

When considering *Against Pornography*, I think back to Audre Lorde's poignant words, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." I ask myself, is displaying pornography with the intent of educating on pornography still just pornography? Russell begins the preface of the book explaining why she felt the images and actual *evidence of harm* were necessary, "I have come to dislike talking about the effects of pornography with people who have not seen it for themselves...." (p. vii) She is optimistic that "this book will convince many of the people who read it with an open mind, that pornography promotes sexism and rape and other forms of violence against women." (p.viii) But I have to wonder, as one feminist lesbian put it, "how far do we have to go to prove our point?"⁵

⁴ This comes from Caryatis Cardea who asked this important question during an editorial meeting with me on this piece.

⁵ Again, this question came during commentary on this piece by Caryatis.

I appreciate that Russell included in this collection her research on pornography's causal connection to rape. I have turned to that work again and again to remind me of the accessible and solid studies that have been done to demonstrate with empirical evidence that anti-pornography activists are not merely acting on hunches. There have been numerous studies that show men to be more aggressive towards women after they have viewed or consumed pornography. But, having lived in a pornographic culture my entire life, involuntarily viewing mainstream pornography that is a staple to the dominant heterosexual culture, and as a survivor of the sexual exploitation industry, the research findings were all the evidence that I needed to have access to or see.

Ultimately I have to ask myself if the replications in *Against Pornography* will do more good than harm, and in honor of the women survivors in the images published, my answer is no. Any survivors of the pornography industry or any sexual assault will likely be emotionally triggered⁶ by these photographs no matter where they find them. I also strongly feel that while lesbians and feminists strive hard to create our own sexuality, free of violence, coercion and inequality, these images will be an additional barrier to that freedom. As all anti-pornography activists know, images are powerful; they send a message. The messages duplicated in *Against Pornography* are so hateful they are extremely hard to shake.

In particular as a lesbian of color, an Asian lesbian, the racist photographs and cartoons were especially painful to view. Pornography involving women of color almost always contains racist content. Since the "sexiness" of pornography is based on the objectification of the subject, the less institutional and individual power the subject has, the easier she can be made into a object. Pornographers often use women of color in extreme and exceptionally harmful ways. Sexualized racist mythology is also used to enhance stereotypes and eroticize racism. Examples include women of color as animals or partnered with animals and women of color in par-

⁶These triggers could include memory flashbacks, body memories, or any numerous reactions symptomatic of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Rape Trauma Syndrome. See Ellen Bass and Laura Davis' *The Courage to Heal* for more on this.

ticular ethnic clothing and the sexualizing of that culture's patriarchal torture of women, like footbinding of Asian women. These replications hit me the hardest, and actually I won't look back at the book to verify my memory of examples as it is too disturbing. Again, when I think of what these images might do to the psyche of other women of color, I feel unforgiving about their duplication.

Finally, my concern about the use of this book is that it will be a convenient excuse for academic men to view pornography. Russell believes the poor quality of the photo reproduction will discourage pornography consumers as well as the fact that *Against Pornography* costs more than most pornography, but I still have doubts. I think consuming pornography can become a quick addiction⁷, and that viewing some could lead the reader to want to view more.

So, What's the Lesbian Connection?

Straight pornographic discussion means a lot to lesbians. A lot. Lesbians are both sex workers and survivors of straight pornography. For lesbians of color, pornography is yet another way that racism is disseminated, made sexual and just another place where our perpetrators learn their violent ways. And who can forget the growing community of lesbians, mostly white, who are involved in the production, creation and distribution of both straight and gay pornography? These lesbians need to think seriously about the evidence that pornography hurts and destroys women, primarily by telling men that it is okay to treat women as their property. Pornography tells men that women's pain and screams are not real, only smiles, "See, just like in the photograph." Women and lesbian pimps and pornographers are no less accountable for harm than are the male capitalists.

⁷ I'm thinking here of mass rapist and murderer, Ted Bundy's taped television interview a few years ago, where he talked about his addiction to pornography and how it grew from reading detective magazines, then "soft" pornography, then more and more violent pornography. The more he saw the more he "needed" and eventually actual rape, torture and femicide would only satisfy his impulses.

Should we buy the book?

Overall, I hope our anti-pornography movement moves forward without further duplication of pornography. It's hard enough to see it over and over again on television and at the movies; it's too hard to see it in my feminist magazines⁸ and newspapers.

Given the small numbers of feminists and recent texts critiquing pornography, I don't think we should ignore this book; it is a powerful statement, but it seems as though we're playing with fire. If you are a lesbian who debates issues around pornography but thinks that basically "soft porn" is harmless, this book will change your mind. If you are a lesbian who does not believe that pornography can cause men to commit violence against women, this book has the studies summarized for you in the introduction, and Diana Russell's full study in the middle section. But you can also get this in *Making Violence Sexy: Feminist Views on Pornography* (Teacher's College Press, 1993). If you are a lesbian of color wanting to organize around these issues, drop me a note at Sinister Wisdom, I want to meet you. If we don't wake up to the dangers that pornographic exploitation plays in our larger and intimate communities, we continue to let it have power over us, and we fail to provide even a feeble resistance. The evidence of harm is clear. It's not an opinion. Done. Said. From another feminist's mouth. From a pornography survivor's mouth. Now let's get it out of our bookcases, file cabinets and lives and get on with our work!

⁸ I am particularly pissed off that a recent *On The Issues* did an incredibly sensationalized cover using a young girl on a swing next to a neon sign that read "Girls Girls Girls," to introduce the cover story of a convicted child molester, whom I should tell you they granted anonymity to. ARRRRGH! Whoever the girl child is, I feel that her rights have been absolutely violated and her image exploited, not something I expect from my feminist magazines!

Ekua Rashidah Omosupe

My Name is a Song

In this land
of strangers
I call myself
a name
that is difficult
for them to sing
it struggles
on the tips
of their tongues
They do not know its meanings

I sing my name
of birth Wednesdays blessings
my children know
the chorus
dred woman
black
courageous
lesbian
mother
poet
warrior
friend

I am a song
I do not hesitate
to sing
even among
strangers and enemies

Lyn Davis

The Care and Feeding of Birds: A Retrospective

6:00 a.m.

I am captive to the metal pins, nylon lines,
heavy weights that hold my broken leg upright
and confine my fledgling body to this
children's ward hospital bed.

Metal meal tray taken and lecture on uneaten food
given, the nurse begins the daily torture
of bath and bed change. I am left pale, sweating,
muscle spasms rolling from shoulder to toe
and back again.

Only you, my dark-haired mother, swooping in
at mid-morning, promise drugs to ease spasms,
straws slid into cartons of warm milk,
globby chicken, gelatinous mashed potatoes,
canned carrots, green jello cut into bite sizes.

Under your care, I lose weight
but no longer starve.

Only after dusk brings my father and the hall lights
blink three times do you leave,
arm linked through his, measured parental steps
forcing night on my sun-hungry eyes.

1:00 p.m.

Magnificent hawk now withered to a dusky
seaside sparrow, you perch on the edge
of your nursing home bed.

My father and I push aside the paper cup of jelly
beans and white cake with yellow plastic chick
to spread our offerings on your bedside tray.
You pick at the strawberries, egg salad,
take baby sips of the shake, refuse the iced coffee.

You wipe your lips, fold the paper napkin
next to the disposable plate on the plastic tray,
turn brightly to each of us and smile.
Warmth streams from your face but your eyes
are as vacant as the ice cubes glittering
in the untouched coffee.

You tell me to go.

As my measured steps retreat down the hallway,
you chirp language only you
understand. My father's footsteps
echo mine, his tread as heavy as my heart.

10:00 p.m.

Seventy months after you have starved yourself
from life, I have this thought:

Women like me
could be better daughters
to mothers like you
if you could die
or just go away
and then come back.

Now, I could give without worrying how
giving would bind me.

Now, I could feed you what you wanted,
tender bird,
and you could fly,
rest
in any branch you needed.
Even one of my own.

Elissa G. Perry

And Then I Knew

The first time I was attracted to a pair of breasts I was at the table with my family for Sunday dinner. I was sitting next to Joann, my nineteen year old brother's thirty year old girlfriend. I was nine.

I checked her out with long side glances — admiring first her short haircut and brown eyes and working my way down to her smooth dark brown skin stretched over magnificent cheekbones. I quickly looked down pretending that my mouth had been watering because of the dish in front of me, not the dish in the chair to my left. I was only nine, but I knew that such displays were inappropriate at my father's table, especially during grace.

"I'm hungry," Brian said as my brothers attacked their plates. My father, trying to impress Joann, pulled out one of his "I'm a down black man" phrases reserved for occasions when he was in the presence of young black people, like "I'm hip" or "Yeah man" and proceeded to eat his food.

Meanwhile, I voraciously devoured the sights next to me. Joann tossed her head back slightly as she teasingly laughed at my father's outdated expression. Her gold tooth flashed at me from between her pearly whites and wine colored lips. As her head moved back and forth, her vanilla Afrosheen and Halston perfume tickled my nose.

I breathed deeply and just as I was about to sigh I remembered I was at the dinner table and should be eating, not grinning at my brother's thirty year old girlfriend. I ate, hitting my teeth with the fork a couple of times because I was concentrating on not watching Joann in a conspicuous manner.

The table was too quiet. We were eating the leftovers from Christmas dinner. My mother had put chitterlings on my plate. I hated chitterlings. Joann had eaten all of hers.

"Hey! I'll trade you my chitterlings for your greens," I

propositioned.

"Liss!" my mother protested half amused and half embarrassed.

"S Awright Mrs. Perry," Joann drawled. She gracefully picked up my plate and, with the urging of her fork, eased her greens onto my plate and my chitterlings onto hers.

Her blouse gapped as she finished the maneuver and I caught sight of a gold, icicle-like pendant resting in the space where her cleavage began. My eyes continued down and I discovered she wasn't wearing a bra. I could see her whole left breast resting among the folds of her cream colored silk blouse. I am sure my forkful of greens was suspended midair, dripping.

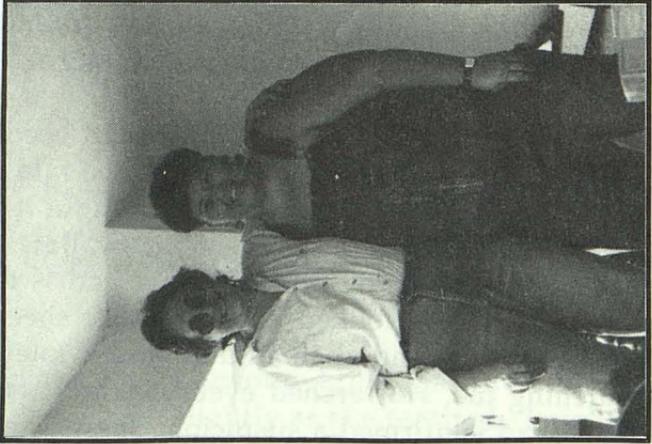
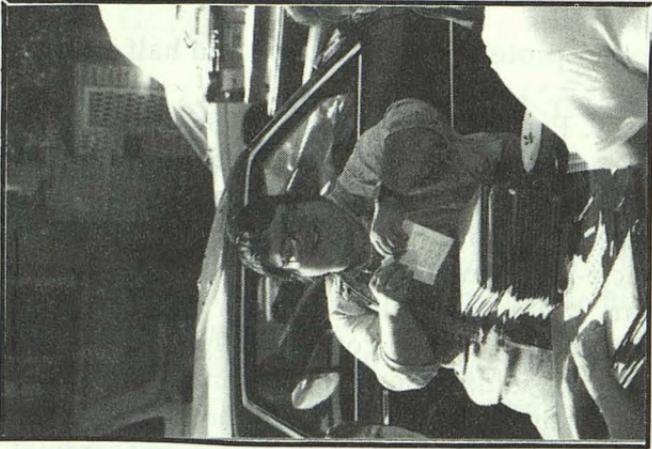
I imagined lifting her dark chocolate breast in my caramel colored hand. Looking underneath it, around it, putting it in my mouth. It would be warm, I thought, and soft, like a baby's skin.

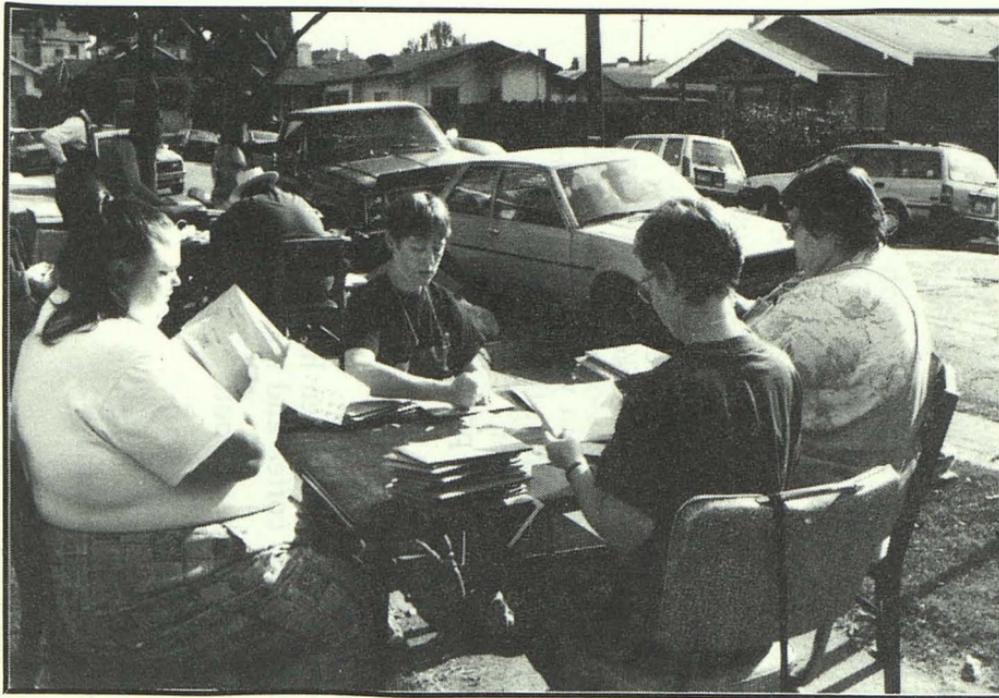
I choked on the cornbread that had become a dry, mealy mass in my mouth since I was projected into my fantasy mid-chew. I reached for my water and brought it to my lips, sputtering and shaking, praying I could swallow before I coughed my cornbread in my brother's face across the table. I swallowed hard and looked at my mother sheepishly. Now her fork was suspended in midair and I knew she had been watching me. Her arched eyebrows and wide eyes told me that I had confirmed a suspicion. She was afraid.

Everyone else continued eating. I don't think they noticed a thing. But my mother and I had. In that instant I knew what the red sequined discs with tassels, which sat on my brother's dresser, were for and why my sleeping bag smelled of marijuana, Afrosheen, sweat and Halston when my brother returned it without washing it.

I saw Joann's breasts and my hands, lips, teeth and tongue ached to touch them. Yeah, it was then I knew. I sat down to dinner that winter night a precocious young girl addicted to Charlie's Angels and Veronica Hamel on Hill Street Blues and got up a dyke.

Within a month I had my first girlfriend.





Sinister Wisdom Mailing Party

(Top page, L to R: Mady Shumofsky, Susan Levinkind & Hadas Weiss, Betty Rose Dudley.
Bottom page, L to R: Cath Thompson, Aimee Waldman, Susan Wittcoff, Betty Rose Dudley.
Leslie F. Levy

Ali Liebegott

I Never Promised You an Opium Den

IX

Sometimes I feel you
like the first time you held me
when I was dozing in the truck,
you held my head
against your chest
stilling the bumps in the road.

I hear you laughing
on the bus to the airport,
making up lies about my father
owning cilantro fields in Missouri.

I still see the exhaustion in your eyes
when you picked me up at the gas station.
I was drunk and barefoot,
leaning against the pay phone —

exhaustion like hunger
and it can all be slept away
into lesser degrees of pain
until sleep becomes fourteen hours a day
and hunger, some coffee and some cigarettes.

The last month we were both
singed bodies
exposed burn wounds
trying to comfort each other,
and the actual separation

leaving you at the door
trying to walk calmly away
and keep from collapsing
on the driveway,
not being able to remember
last time I sobbed.

XI

What would it mean
to go out of the house at dusk
cast my shadow on the sidewalk,
my abnormally long legs
moving past the shade of the parked bicycle,
where I had set her down for good.

To walk down the stairs
and up the street
away from the drunk mouth,
to burn our past
like buildings and cities
in a riot should be burned,
to dig a hole
and with the tips of my fingers
shape the wet ground
into a bowl
and place the moments
we connected here,
to be kept or lost
forever in the earth.

These are two of twenty-three poems from my chapbook, *I Never Promised You An Opium Den*.

Judith K. Witherow

Label With Caution

I've often wondered if the spirits had given me a choice of health problems, if I would have chosen one that was more noticeable. I have multiple sclerosis, arthritis, lupus, kidney disease, etc. I am a cancer survivor. During the past year and a half I have undergone six surgeries to correct an electrical defect in my heart. The diseases I have invite discrimination — not that discrimination needs an invitation — because I look “good,” because my physical disabilities are not visibly noticeable. Twice I have been questioned by police officers because I was parked in handicapped areas. Both times they told me I didn't “look handicapped” sitting in my car. It made no difference that I had a handicapped permit. The MS Society told me to always carry a card that said I had MS. My staggering walk might lead the police to arrest me on a charge of drunkenness.

I walk with a cane, and I can't count the number of times men have said, “what's a young girl like you doing with a cane?” No one ever told me there was an age limit on disability. Perhaps it's just another secret code that only the enlightened know. Or maybe it's a really dumb line that gets overused. I would rather be asked “do you mind if I asked why you use a cane?” if people really must know.

Dialogue that isn't condescending or insulting is appreciated. Often people act embarrassed to speak to you if you are in a wheelchair. When I'm in a chair at the emergency room, hospital personnel often ask my partner Sue, “What's her problem?” Speak to us! Having a physical disability does not mean that we are not able to speak for ourselves. Allow us the option of answering. It makes us visible and recognized as thinking, speaking humans who just carry around a few more pieces of equipment.

While the women's movement has made genuine efforts at accommodating differently-abled women, there are still as many changes necessary to be made as there are physical problems to deal with. Those who are healthy need to understand just how oppressive they can be when making arrangements for us. Disability is like race: if you don't experience it twenty-four hours a day, you don't understand how it touches every aspect of your life. Just as the sliding scale doesn't erase all of the inequities for the poor woman, a sign language interpreter for the hearing impaired doesn't rectify the correctable barriers that shut out the differently-abled.

The assumption that we are all equally physically capable, unless visible disabilities are noted, is blatantly patronizing. A given number of women will need assistance in one form or another. The Americans With Disabilities Act has a long way to go to implement changes and erase a lifetime of structural barriers that have limited access and participation in daily life. However, there are numerous ways that inclusion of differently abled women can take place with foresight and planning.

As a differently-abled community organizer, I offer the following suggestions to implement as a matter of routine policy to make women's/lesbian gatherings more accessible. When working on any project, allow for the possibility of input over the phone or in written form. Be aware that a woman might need help completing a job or that she may have returned it unfinished because of unplanned circumstances. But don't stop calling a differently abled woman to ask for help or just to see the status of our well being. Don't devalue our abilities the way much of society does.

If there is a conference, workshop, meeting, potluck dinner, etc., make it known whether there is safe, handicapped, or close accessible parking. Know that if there isn't handicapped parking, the general spaces are usually too small to unload a wheelchair and enter it by yourself. Also, in your wheelchair, you are seated so low that your vision is blocked and other drivers can't see you. If there is only on-street

parking, you need to know if a ramp or apron is in close proximity. Is the area well lit? Are there women who will volunteer to transport someone who is unable to drive?

Is an elevator, steps or ramp at the entrance? Don't assume one or two steps are accessible. It could mean the difference between coming by yourself and needing assistance. Often when I have asked if there were steps, I have been told there were a few. On arrival, I have found eight or more steps and my access totally negated. Other times, I wasn't told that the rest room was on another floor and there were more steps to try to climb.

Carrying a tray of food and walking with a cane simultaneously should be an Olympic event. It is that difficult when you have systemic muscle weakness. Could the eating area be arranged for easier accommodation? Will someone be observing to see if extra assistance is needed? The simple act of eating can be so muscle tiring that you risk choking. Yet another of the reasons you don't want your energy wasted trying to gain entrance to an event.

Getting through the door with your cane, wheelchair or walker doesn't end the worry. Nor is the worry over for the woman with health problems that don't require the use of visible aids. We need to create an environment that is friendly to all of us. The usual furniture of folding chairs can make even short term sitting unbearable. If someone is out of her seat and walking around more than she is sitting, don't view this as a distraction. It just might be someone trying to take the pressure off their joints or muscles by increasing the blood flow in the body. Conference organizers should schedule more frequent rest breaks to insure that women who are differently abled or older are given the chance to take care of personal needs.

Disability must be like aging. Your health or body may have changed but the same spirit resides within. Some days I feel like a teenager chomping at the bit, and other times I can't bear the weight of my clothes because the pain is so great. On these days the same woman inhabits my body;

she's just trying to renew. My older friends tell me they don't feel their age. In fact, they resent deeply age classification because they are not taken seriously. They feel like everyone wants to pat them on the head. This behavior is blatantly offensive.

I'm typical of many women of Native American descent: many health problems and little or no access to health care. I'm pleased to say that I am at least eligible for medical assistance. That's probably not the correct shameful attitude, but it beats having no insurance at all. It also gives members of the medical establishment, and others, the idea that you are less deserving as a person. You don't suppose if I were able to work, or off SSI which pays \$446.00 monthly, that I could or would get myself some pricey insurance do you? Without a doubt, I would certainly opt for an insurance that wouldn't automatically devalue my worth. As a feminist warrior of battles still being fought, government controlled medicaid remains another label that keeps me glued in my place.

Labels, stick them on and tear them off, but know there is someone underneath that you might be hurting. Feminists are not exempt from the prejudices they have acquired over a lifetime. I know that I have stayed active because I have the hope that this is a group who will be open to change and debate — painful though it may be — whenever the status of another woman is in question. With the visibility and viability of women of differing races, spirituality, economic classes, sexuality and physical abilities and appearances, we will insure that all women are more equally represented.

Annette DuBois

Proof (Deborah)

She sends me a flower to prove that it really is spring in Ann Arbor. It falls from the envelope to lie small and white and fragile on the red and blue tile of the table: white and star-shaped, one of those that reaches through the snow from between two folded green leaves, asking the world a question.

I love her for her letters.

This one, what there is of it, is written on a paint chip from the hardware store that names different shades of purple. That, and the flower, and the flyer in the shape of the sun from a club in Chicago. Words? Only that she is thinking of me.

Another one: a napkin from the restaurant we went to together, and a shower of confetti. Or the Muybridge pictures of two women dancing, each frame carefully cut out. When she lived in Italy she scoured the museum gift shops for post cards with lesbian pictures; on each one she'd describe one face, or a tree, a monument, a bottle of red wine. I sent her in return the Matisse nude she could have posed for, and the next week copies of all the poems I'd written that year.

We're not lovers; we never have been. She lived next door to me once, and on a long night of my soul she came with a pot of tea, a candle and a poem to read. That was the beginning; the rest follows.

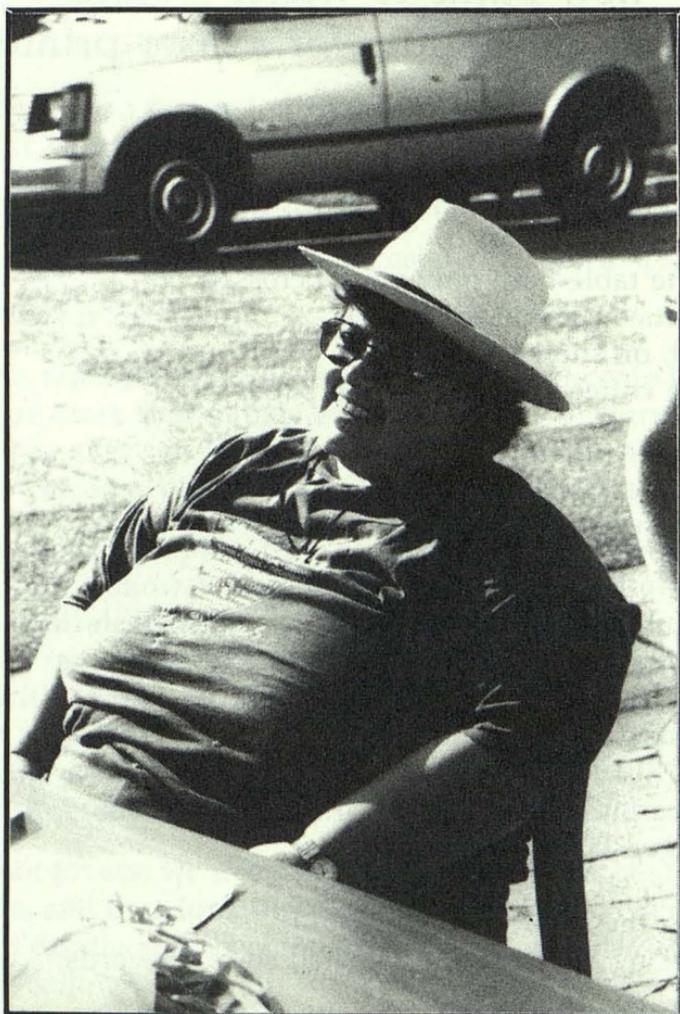
Annette DuBois

new paths to writer's block
(or, my queendom for a laser printer)

You hold my words (and my heart) in your hand.
i swallow and fidget.
across the table i see only words crossed out
the sentence i meant to change
(and did, on some other copy)
the fresh coffee stain across the page.

my poem is embarrassed,
caught on stage with uncombed hair
wearing yesterday's jeans.

groping for her lines she remembers:
once she lay across crisp white paper like fresh linen sheets
the printer at her command to follow her growing
and show each change in its best light.
she would dress herself
in fonts
chosen carefully as matching dishes for guests,
but the guests have come on time
and she is still in her bathrobe
mopping the floor with white-out
and pausing to stir the unfinished soup of words.



Elana Dykewomon at Sinister Wisdom Mailing Party, 1993
Leslie F. Levy

R. Amy Elman

Lesbian (In)Visibility: A Feminist Critique of Gay Historiography

The overwhelmingly favorable reviews and record-breaking attendance for "Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall" suggests that gay men and lesbians have gone from closeted condemnation to visible exoticization for the mainstream.¹ Image, however, is one consideration, political achievement another. First hosted by The New York Public Library (June 18, 1994 -September 24, 1994), the historical exhibit now tours the country. What meaning this "visibility" has for lesbians will be explored through a reflection on various components of the exhibit. More specifically, this article provides a critical analysis of both the assimilation of lesbian identity within a gay male context and the appropriation of the Holocaust as a metaphor for heterosexism. Such assimilation and appropriation undermine the political integrity of lesbianism, visible and otherwise.

The symbol for the "Becoming Visible" exhibit is the pink triangle, a symbol first used by the Nazis to mark gay men for annihilation. It was later claimed as a pride symbol by gay men

1. "Becoming Visible" received frequent publicity and positive reviews in *The New York Times*. This is not surprising once one notes that this conventional newspaper was a donor to the exhibit. That the paper sponsored this exhibit should not be interpreted as a progressive stance towards lesbian visibility. To the contrary, an *off our backs* exposé of the newspaper notes that despite over 50 articles on Stonewall, the coverage was "very male oriented" (branner, 1994). To promote lesbian visibility during the week-long Stonewall commemoration, the Lesbian Avengers organized an international march down Fifth Avenue on June 25, 1994. *The New York Times*, which received an award for its "outstanding national coverage of Stonewall history, culture and events" from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), provided only nine lines to capture this lesbian march which garnered thousands of women.

in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots of 1969. The appropriation of this symbol Americanizes the Holocaust even as it conceals lesbian visibility.² Lesbians, as a group, were never collectively marked for persecution by the Nazis. The pink triangle was an exclusively gay male designation. That this symbol graced the Fifth Avenue entrance at 42nd Street to greet exhibit crowds was the first clue that lesbian visibility would be cloaked within the sexist belief that maleness is so universal that it can embrace "lesbian-kind."

As the exhibit brochure insists, the show seeks to place the Stonewall Inn riots within a "broader context." Attention quickly moves from police violence against gay men in drag and a few lesbians to the larger repressive heterosexual network of church, state and medical establishment. Gay men and lesbians are credited with challenging sanctions that have historically been imposed against them. Such efforts, it is argued, gave rise to an America in which many "believe that homosexuality is as moral, healthy, and socially acceptable as heterosexuality" (emphasis added).

The politics of lesbian feminism are effectively pushed to the margins. The otherwise noteworthy feminist insight that heterosexuality is a coercive institution of male supremacy (Rich, 1980) is ignored by the overwhelmingly queer analysis that permeates the exhibit.³ That many lesbian feminists view their lesbianism revolutionary if not preferable to heterosexuality is not discussed. Lesbianism, no longer regarded as a **choice**, is reduced to sexual practice, one "as acceptable as heterosexuality."

2. For a detailed critique of the appropriation of this symbol as well as the political consequences, see my forthcoming article in *Journal of Homosexuality* (1995).

3. By "queer analysis" I am referring to gay male analysis which, in analytic drag, claims to incorporate the interests of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals alike. Stated simply, one notes a diminished lesbian (not to mention feminist) presence over time. In the words of Sheila Jeffreys, suddenly one is confronted with "the queer disappearance of lesbians" (1994).

The most fiercely feminist aspects of the lesbian movement are given short shrift by this corporate-sponsored exhibition. For example, lesbian separatists are reduced to historical relics of the "early women's community." Separatism is mentioned once and swiftly dismissed: "Separatism as a strategy and life choice was almost exclusively the province of white, middle-class women and was not a useful strategy for many African American and working class women because it could not address the range of problems they confronted in their everyday lives." Ironically, this assertion serves the ends it is meant to critique. That is, African American women of all classes and working class women of all races are made invisible by this biased depiction of separatism.⁴ Male power as a problem confronted by all women is deftly reduced to a non-problem or issue that only "privileged women" have the luxury to acknowledge.

Throughout the exhibit there is the conspicuous absence of meaningful discussion of lesbian desire and need for autonomy. This is to be expected from an exhibit that conflates gay male invisibility and oppression with that confronted by lesbians. Nonetheless, the moments of acknowledged differences bear comment. Under a subsection entitled "Organizing," the exhibit poster and brochure read: "While gay men and women worked together ... many lesbians created their own women's community institutions and lesbian feminist organizations." When the sexism of the male dominated "gay" movement is acknowledged, attention shifts from male domination to the heterosexism of the women's movement: "By 1970, it became clear to many of these women that issues raised by their dual oppressions as women and as lesbians were not being addressed in either movement [i.e., gay movement or women's movement] so they created a new movement, lesbian feminist." Awareness of male domination is diluted by

4. For an excellent collection of writings that help to correct the revisionism of those hostile to women's autonomy, read *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* (1988).

emphasizing heterosexist culprits within the feminist movement. Within the exhibit, there is one statement that exclusively underscores sexism. Morgan Murielchild is quoted, "... Gay men for the most part are as sexist and woman-hating as straight men." This insight, however, was descriptively confined to a "1970s rift." This implies that gay men have more recently transcended their long-held contempt for women.

Charges of racism, like those of heterosexism, are largely confined to women. The racism of gay white men is studiously avoided, as are the various privileges gay men enjoy as men. Yet, gay men are rarely depicted as advantaged in any way. Like other men, gay men often equate each impediment to their full exercise of power with oppression. By contrast, the slightest degree of influence that women have, or are thought to enjoy, is criticized as privilege that will be wrongfully exercised. Male power is justified, women's power is illegitimate and particularly suspect when directed toward their "empowerment."

The racism present in the resurgence of role playing and s/m is devoid of critical commentary. An array of lesbian fiction is prominently displayed with the following text: "Lesbian pulp offered vital portrayals, not of lesbian 'issues,' but of tempestuous lesbian lives and bodies to match — the charming, curvaceous red-mouthed femmes (almost always blonde), the suave, lean, clear-eyed butches (almost always brunette), meeting and making love only as two women can." The exclusion of women of color from this section is not mentioned. One is to conclude that, unlike feminism, s/m and role playing are not problems, but are central to lesbian identity. In a curt reflection on "Night Life," one notes two items. The first is a flyer for a lesbian pride dance, the second an advertisement for the Clit Club. This New York bar boasts of a "woman-only party to benefit the Ms. Northeast Leather Travel Fund." S/M is promoted as modern memorabilia — a central component of lesbian culture in the 1990s.

Numerous references to the Holocaust demonstrate a similar impoverishment of political understanding. Not only is

appropriating the pink triangle a problem, but so too are references to AIDS as a Holocaust. To equate a disease with the intentional desire of the Nazi state to annihilate all Jews is to deny the unique circumstances that contributed to the planned destruction of two thirds of European Jewry. When gay men use the term "Holocaust" to speak of the devastation of AIDS, they disregard the conceptual clarity necessary to guard against its recurrence.

The United States government's early response to HIV deaths was indifference. This probably resulted more from homophobia than from the government's desire to annihilate gay men. The government has since expended more resources to prevent the spread of HIV and assist those who have the disease. To assert that the government's indifference to AIDS is analogous to Nazi perpetrated genocide is to suggest that Nazi atrocities are no worse than the apathy of the United States government when confronting a deadly disease. As the eminent Holocaust scholar Lucy Dawidowicz has noted, subsuming all suffering under the classification of a Holocaust is one of the most treacherous forms of Holocaust denial (1981).

The Americanization of the Holocaust is again evoked by an encased bumper sticker which reads: "Will History Repeat Itself?". Under this red stenciled question, three are listed: Hitler, McCarthy and Anita Bryant. To equate McCarthy and Bryant with Hitler is to argue that the Nazi dictator was not an exceptional perpetrator of evil. It also overlooks the ways Hitler successfully harnessed the energy of "his" people and their state for the systematized mass murder of a people. Senator Joseph McCarthy exploited the fear of Communism in the United States and solidified his power by identifying his opponents as enemies of the American people. The resulting paranoia led to the persecution of people identified as communists. Anita Bryant, a pop singer and spokeswoman for Florida orange juice, campaigned for the repeal of a Florida gay rights ordinance in 1977. She pursued a campaign against gay rights throughout that year. Though her activism intensified bigotry against homosexuals, Bryant's efforts did not

result in extermination. Neither communists nor gays and lesbians, suspected or real, were systematically rounded up, ghettoized, forced into slave labor and exterminated.

The above-mentioned bumper sticker implies that gay men and lesbians share a similar history of state-sponsored genocide on the North American continent. Consequently, all bigotry is reduced to a horrifying and simplistic uniformity. That the Holocaust involved a state and political movement dedicated to the destruction of a people is conveniently overlooked. The appropriation and trivialization of Holocaust symbols and personalities play a decisive role in our subsequent understanding of the horror of this historic tragedy. Careless analogies may result from a lack of language to depict despair and the inability to destroy the social acceptability of heterosexism. However, these analogies desecrate Jewish experience and memory. Such interpretations must be discouraged if we are to effectively understand and counter oppression.

Critical reflection on the past helps to provide an oppressed group with ammunition to dismantle the pernicious conditions of the present. The "Becoming Visible" exhibit boasted of providing such a context. It was purposefully designed to render gay men and lesbians visible in a society that seeks to deny their existence. The exhibit falls short of affording lesbians the political integrity to confront the oppression they experience. There are two reasons for this. First, gay and lesbian oppression is carelessly analogized to other injustices. This reduces all oppression to a simplistic uniformity which compromises our understanding of the distinctive components of various injustices. We render any movement for liberation ineffective when we are analytically imprecise. Second, the show's assimilation of lesbian identity within the gay movement further legitimizes the movement which ultimately advances male domination. Lesbian thought, visible integrity, action and politics are often lost or diminished within the context of the gay male or "queer" movement. Enthusiasm for such hetero-alliances is difficult to sustain in the face of evidence that contradicts such an idealized image of gay and lesbian cooperation and progress.

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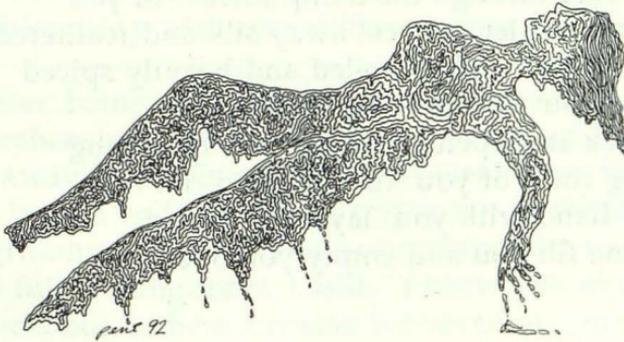
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SYSTEMIC OVERLOAD
PENI HALL

Systemic Overload
Peni Hall

Gloria Yamato

Trust

Lay back
breathe even
content to let me
content to let me take
to let me take what is mine
be content to let me take my time
content to let me stoke a slow burn fire

Lay back and let me run this
Let me run my hand let me run it
over your skin until I find all the places
that hum and vibrate til you purr a drone
as the heat mounts let me mount you ride
across the rustling field of you lay back
let me ride through the damp furrow of you
lay back and let me peel away silk and feathered
layers of you tightly coiled and heavily spiced
curls of you breathe deep and even
laid back and open let me gather quivering
tingling roots of you fill my hand let me
fill my hand with you lay back content
to let me fill you and empty you open

Marg-Adele Norrington

The Waiting Room

I pushed the elevator button and swallowed hard. Despite my efforts, the consuming nausea immediately filled me with helpless dread. The elevator door opened. The woman standing there was in her sixties. Her short white hair, good muscle tone, her straight posture and her bright clear eyes made me hope I would look half as good at sixty.

"Hell, I can still look, can't I?"

She walked in, wincing each time she put her weight on her right foot. She smiled at the girl behind the desk.

I was there for my third year check up, so I too was donning a johnny and robe before coming back to the waiting room. I sat alone until the woman from the elevator came to sit. This room where I waited for radiation treatments three years ago, felt different.

My memory filled the room with women the day one of the machines sprung a leak. We waited together for almost three hours. This brought about an intimacy more intense than friendship and very different from family, almost like sex.

After being away for several days to take my senior comprehensives, I was back. It had been such a big thing to walk away from this one Friday. A week later, it was hard to come back. I had walked in, trying not to show my anxiety and grinning because I knew of nothing else to do. Turning to the full waiting room, I said, "I knew you would welcome me back, but is there a reason for seven of you to be here?"

Lynn, a fifty-year-old woman with graying red-brown hair and wide blue eyes said, "They have a leak. What time is it now?"

Mary, a heavy-set woman lifted her swollen arm and answered, "Twelve-thirty, I was supposed to go at eleven."

Ann smiled, "My appointment is for ten-thirty, and Lynn, you're fifteen minutes before me aren't you, because they have been so efficient that we haven't seen each other all week."

Lois coughed, trying hard to do so quietly. "Let's start telling stories, we could be here hours before they let us go home or treat us. Not only do they have to fix the leak, but then they have to calibrate. If any of us miss today, it just means another day so let's tell our best summer folk stories." She coughed again and then finally sighed.

A young girl with hair about a half inch long came to the door. "Are they running late or is this a meeting?"

Lois tried to answer and gave up in a fit of coughing. Ann answered, "They told us there was a water leak and that was about two hours ago. Go change and come introduce yourself."

Lois, gasping for breath, said quietly, "Bone marrow and breast cancer at eighteen, so she has her nineteenth birthday and they toss her down here with the adults."

Mary said, "I have bone cancer and breast cancer."

Lois said, "I don't want to talk about cancer. I'm going to tell you a true story!"

Everyone smiled and nodded and the young woman came back and took the only vacant seat.

Lois began, "Up in Holton, we have a woman who is a contractor and sometimes a truck driver, but this one summer she had contracted to fix up one of those old farm houses for some wealthy folk from down in New York City.

"Well, I guess they liked the way she did it, there weren't nothing wrong with the work Rita did, cause she always put together a crew who could do anything she couldn't do herself. It was always gettin' her to agree to do it. Anyways, they were real happy with what she and her crew had done up there in Holton. So the man calls when he is down in that New York City and asks Rita to come down cause he wants her to work on something they have in Connecticut. Well now, I guess Rita had always had a hankering to see that big city, so she tells us she'll be back as soon as the job is done and off she goes.

"The man must've give her awful good directions cause Rita didn't seem to have no trouble finding the place. She says as how she had to take the elevator up some fifteen floors and then she steps right out in front of a receptionist's desk. Well, Rita tells her how the man called. This woman pressed buttons and then points Rita toward a big door. Rita walks in and there are a couple of men talking to the guy that called her. Rita tells it that these men are really dressed up with silk suits and fancy shirts and stuff. She said it made her feel kind of foolish in her linen pants suit from Eddie Bauer that she got for her birthday.

"Well now, the guy stopped talking to those two men and he come right over to Rita and starts telling Rita what he wants and Rita says for this man to give her a pencil and paper and she'll figure it out right now. The man gets her the stuff and he takes Rita in another room with a desk and tells her to come right back as soon as she's finished figuring it.

"Rita said she kind of padded the estimate. Even so it was done in half an hour, so she gathers up her papers and walks back into the first office. The man who sent her in the other room has gone out. The other two guys, who were dressed so fancy are still there. They are smiling at each other and staring at Rita. She really should be used to it, she's a fine looking woman.

"Rita, trying to be friendly, asks what they do for a living and they say they run numbers. Rita was thinking about asking if that was like the New York Lottery or such, when one of them asks Rita what she does, grinning kind of funny.

"Rita says she was feeling kind of like she was being made fun of, so she looked the one right in the eye. Then she said, 'I'm an independent contractor. Mr. Smith called me to do a job for him down in Connecticut. He asked me to figure cost and come back in here. Now, do you suppose I should just leave this on his desk or should I wait?'

"Now, Rita had hoped this would sound kind of impressive to these fancy dressed men, but she allowed as how she was totally surprised at what happened next.

"She said those two men jumped up and said, 'A contractor for a job in Connecticut, and he called you from out of town.'

"Rita said she repeated it, for she didn't know if maybe one of the fellows was hard of hearing, but she couldn't figure why they were edging their way along the wall to the door and then they scrambled through it like a couple of barn mice when the kittens start hunting.

"Mr. Smith came back about then. He asked Rita where the other two fellows had gone. Rita explained she had told them that Mr. Smith called her because she was a contractor. Seems Mr. Smith took a fit of laughing and it was another ten minutes until he could explain that down in his part of the country, a contractor ain't a house builder, but a person who does killing for hire. Mr. Smith explained most people were pretty intimidated by his two body guards. Rita's height, she's almost six foot, I think she's five ten, and her total lack of fear had probably gone a long way toward the mistake. He wasn't upset none and Rita made a real bundle doing that house down in Connecticut."

Lois' face was blue from talking so much, but the appreciation all around her partially made up for her pain.

The memory faded and I looked up seeing the only other woman in the waiting room staring at me. I reached for a tissue and dried my tears.

"I was remembering a story a woman named Lois Darby told when I was here three years ago. I would like to know if she made it."

The woman smiled. "No, she died last winter, she was my lover and now it is my turn."

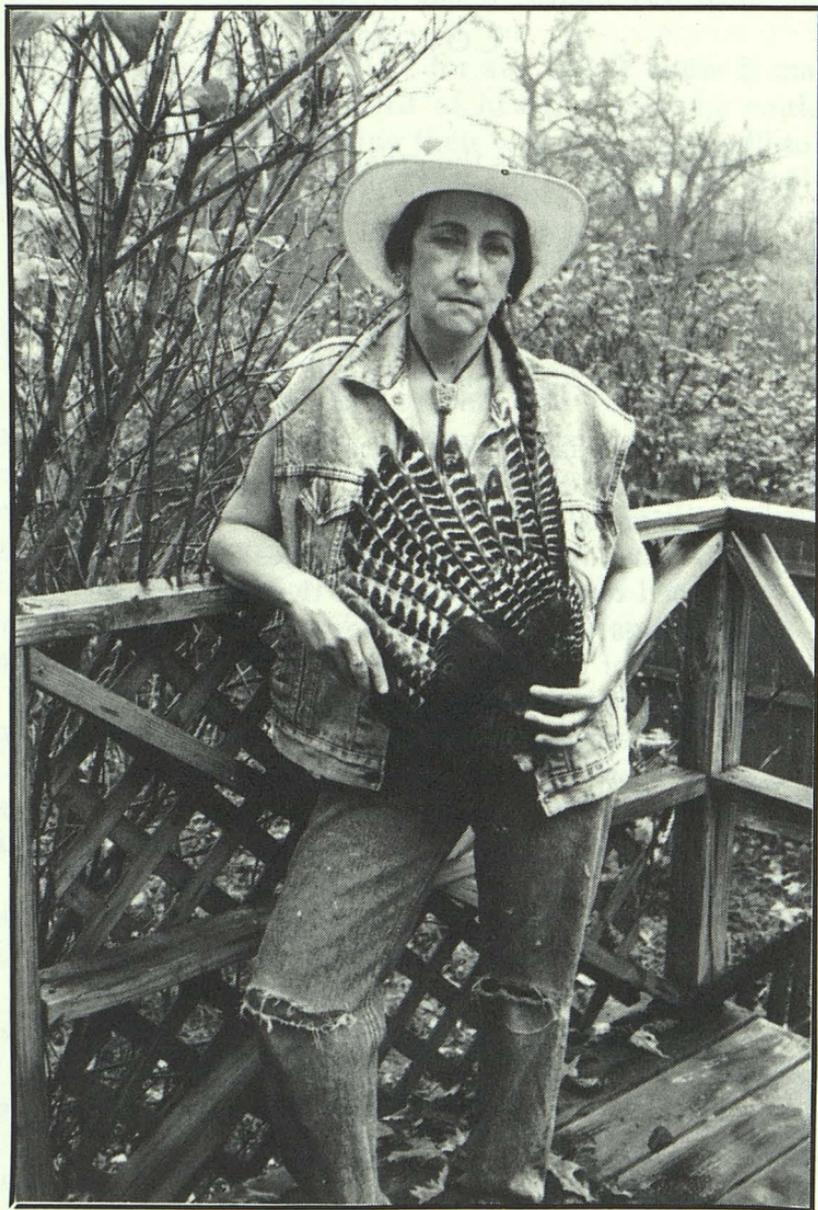
The nurse came to the door, "Rita Taylor, we're ready for you now."

The waiting room filled with silence again in this part of the world where a day is 1,440 precious minutes long and all the women here try to remember that once they were beautiful to someone.

Kleya Forté-Escamilla

Coyotes

the conquest was the great leveler
turning earth into pay n saves clearing
the streets of shy beautiful women in
rebozos downtown where a round plazita
held sheltering cottonwoods there
are straight exact sidewalks &
uniformly cut lawns
there are
no benches no more viejitos to sit on them
the new old stay in hygenic condos air-
conditioned "sun homes"
they have no need for shade trees
no need to move in & out of their
dwellings with the changing seasons no
urgings of the blood but here
in the barrio vacant
lots are sprouting everywhere holes
growing rocks & sage & wild morning
glories each time a bunch
of quelites springs up through cement
cracks mi corazon cheers each time
another neon sign goes out for good
a bigger sky opens to hands & eyes in
the west a natural bajada holds a river
across mountain darkness
ascending earth rims the stars
I count the holes like others count
dollars every deteriorating abandoned
building proof the graft didn't take proof
the desert is alive
barking of dogs echoes through the openings
these days
coyotes are running again with the dogs



Judith K. Witherow
Sue Lenaerts

Caryatis Cardea

A Question of Family

For several years now, I have observed the efforts of dykes to make family among ourselves. I have also watched us mourn our repeated failures. I want to examine what family means, why we want it (or don't), and whether it is success or failure to achieve it. All of this would constitute a book, which means that this is more of a work in progress, in which I will present some of the topics I want us to delve into and some of the reasons I think they're worth unraveling.

All patriarchal societies are structured around the guarantee of female sexual availability to men. It is a foundation so profoundly accepted as never to need stating. Lesbians alone totally reject sexual contact with men. (This is the distinction between us and either straight or bisexual women. Why they find this so difficult to grasp, I'm sure I don't know.) So, right off the mark, we are outside the group of people who could, within the meaning of the dominant society, construct family. A family is a man and his wife, children, pets and possessions. That's the material reality. We don't need to duplicate this, and couldn't if we wanted to. But, there is also the immaterial, the togetherness, the forever-ness, the loyalty, companionship, unconditional love that so many of us associate with the ideal of family. So, what can we do that we could recognize, among ourselves, as family?

Family can be a grouping of people containing no men, but having adult womyn and, sometimes, children related by blood or law or custom. But another problem we have, as lesbians, is that we have no automatic way to designate members of our families. We are not related to anyone but our children by blood or by law. And our customs mean nothing to the outside society and very little more to us. I've known of groups of dykes who took a last name in common, forming a clan of sorts. I've known many dykes who made formal

commitments of permanence with their lovers. And, more rarely, I've known of lesbians who marked, by celebration and special designation, certain long-term friendships. It may not seem like much, but my closest friend for a decade always introduced me as her "dear friend, Caryatis," while I referred to her as "my best friend, Indigo." Of course, she married a man so we don't say those things any more. But, I digress.

More commonly, though, we acknowledge only our lovers in any ritual way, duplicating the only non-blood relationship ceremonially sanctioned in heterosexual life. We also copy the only absolutely impermanent one of patriarchy's relationships. Spouses are the ones who can come and go. It's the sisters who are forever, and the cousins, aunts, children, and those to whom we remain related because of children: co-mothers, ex-lovers, goddessmothers, the children of friends and ex-lovers.

Language, as usual, automatically betrays lesbians. With us, there is only one word other than lover. (And, of course, its variation — ex-lover — and whatever other things we may call them!). The only other term we have is friend. This is most commonly true among white lesbians who, unlike many lesbians of color, ceased addressing each other as "sister" some time in the late '70s. Even among dykes of color in the '90s, though, I'm not sure it is used to distinguish degrees of closeness*. When making introductions, my friend is signified by the term "my friend." My friend's friend is termed "my friend." My friend's lover is deemed to be "my friend." My lover's friend is "my friend." My co-worker and the dyke who rides to marches with me are "my friend" and "my friend." My lover's ex-lover with whom she's still friendly is "my friend." And, if, in some context, the phrase "my lover" is too personal, too revealing a thing to say, then even my lover is "my friend." For that matter, if I'm lucky, my ex-lover, too, is "my friend." Those less close to us may be referred to as "acquain-

* Thanks to Jamie for reminding me of this.

tance," but then we're out of the realm of family. How, from this foundation of uniformity, do we hope to construct the multi-level, multi-layer house in which the tangled network of family lives?

Family is interconnecting strands of purportedly sexual, nonsexual and asexual attachments which, when taken together, give everyone — in theory, now, and in addition to a place to feel wanted and sexual — a place to feel safe, and a place to feel not-sexual. Lesbians have no such place, no such category, no such possibility. Whether or not straight womyn lust for one another in practice, in theory they are nonsexual with each other. They can share sexual secrets and practices and fears precisely because they will never, in theory, be sexual with each other.

Nor will they have a sexual partner in common. Evening soap operas and daytime talk shows aside, womyn rarely run off with their sisters' husbands. And when they do, it is not accepted as simply the next configuration of family: it is a scandal. It is a violation of trust, a breach of one womon's privacy. Again, lesbians have no such safe territory. Everybody seems to be somebody else's once or future lover. We have an excess of sexual vulnerability — and we wonder why we have so much trouble talking about sex.

I was talking to my friend, Suz Fields, one day (see what I mean, that usage cannot convey to you whether this person is a casual acquaintance or a member of my lesbian family — in fact, she is the latter) and Suz said family is what gets created over time with other dykes. You can try to create it, but you'll probably fail. It is simply what happens when lesbians are there for each other over and over through the years.

I think Suz is right about that. We've all watched dykes who are in a new and disturbingly volatile lover relationship move in together after two or three months. Working in lesbian law offices, I've seen dykes give their wills and powers of attorney to lovers they've known less than a year. We seem to be afraid to give things the time they require. Sure, straight people rush to the altar in short order too, but when they end up in

divorce court, they are not soured on the notion of heterosexuality (unfortunately). They simply blame it on men, or womyn, or their parents, or their in-laws, or their own youth. I've heard dykes cite the fact of painful break-ups as a reason to abandon lesbianism for heterosexuality. Dykes tend to throw out our whole concept of self-definition, our belief in the rightness of lesbianism, when a love affair goes wrong.

And there's another term we don't use: affair. For too many of us, anyone with whom we are sexual for a time must be our lover, and must, therefore, be the equivalent of a spouse, someone with whom we need to live, have children, buy a house, marry, write wills or whatever symbol of permanence we attach to such things.

We are lacking the degrees of interconnectedness which bring quality to family life. In the outside world, we know that, with certain exceptions, we are closer to our cousins than to our ex-spouse's second cousin's niece. In lesbian culture, too many of us feel that each of our friendships, any friendships, all friendships, entitle us to the same magnitude of intellectual and emotional intimacy, the same quantity and quality of time as any other friendships. But, back in family, my cousin knew I'd be closer with her than with a girlfriend from my street, who knew I'd be closer with her than with some kid from school, who knew that the exception was I'd be closer with just about anyone than my older sister, who was and is, sad to say, a creep. And they all knew that even though I didn't like my sister much, I would let no one speak ill of her. She earned loyalty just by being my sister. Mostly, the very names by which our relationships were described told us this information. Too often, with us, the calendar is what rules us, preference by right of prior appointment, rather than extent of connection like family.

Occasionally, there are friendship circles that go on for years, much to the envy of those dykes who've been unable to create that. But at the center of such a constellation is often a twin star of two womyn who were once lovers, or who actually want to be lovers with each other, but have never

quite worked it out. Sometimes, their lovers sense this. Sometimes their friends do. Sometimes I run in terror at the very sight of such a spectacle.

It's not always bad, though, to have — or not to have — sexual energy with friends. I have friends of years' standing with whom I have never known a moment's sexual tension. Still, it is our sexuality, our lesbianism, which binds us as closely as we are bound. Some of them have doubted this, but I know us — we're separatists and there's no way we could feel the trust and closeness we share if one of us was doing it with men. Couldn't happen. Yet, we remain safe within the vulnerability of our lesbian intimate friendship because we know, though we may never say it, that neither of us will ever come on to the other. We also know that we respect each other like sisters.

Real sisters. The kind who know that when your sister has been intensely involved with someone, that someone remains off limits to you, even after they break up. Dykes don't live like that. We're done being lovers, we just toss 'em right back into the common pool and when our friends and lovers become involved, the ex'es are just supposed to conjure up some placid, benevolent smile and wish everyone the greatest happiness. That is not how family works.

And it is not how it works for us. We violate every standard by which family is structured and keep wondering why it collapses about our ears. We just keep saying that it should work, and then inflict social punishment on the hapless dyke who publicly admits that she can't make it work. That she doesn't, as a matter of fact, want her best friend and closest confidante to become sexual partners with her most recent ex-lover with whom she wishes she were still involved.

Of course, I've also had friends of years' standing with whom there is something palpably sexual. We're always just a little more physical with each other than is absolutely necessary, or than we each are with our other friends. This is part of the loveliness of lesbianism. We don't have to pretend we have no physical reactions to womyn friends. Sometimes we

have the discussion: Yes, we know it's there, No, we really don't want to do anything about it.

Other times, it is known, but in silence, simply by the fact that we are each so completely into the friend part of our interaction that we wouldn't risk disturbing it, or so into our separate lover relationships that we know we would not jeopardize them. And we may also know that we could never make it as lovers, there just happens to be this physical energy component to our interactions. More of us need to learn how that is done, that business of knowing that two people cannot necessarily make it in an intimate sexual relationship just because they have the hots for each other.

You see, even a ritually sanctioned lover relationship has to signify the link between more than the two parties most directly affected. In heterosexual culture (and I'm not suggesting we take them for our model, I'm only saying that if we are going to keep pining for the security they have, we might as well acknowledge how they obtained it), a wedding is a statement made by the two people to each other. It is, usually, however, witnessed by most of their relatives and friends who become, in a very real way, a part of the pact. They become dedicated to helping the relationship thrive, through gifts and parties, through invitations to the two people as a couple. They respect the relationship's boundaries, adopting the new person in a relationship appropriate to themselves based on their closeness to one or both of the participants.

We have no way to respect the totality of any of our relationships because we have no names, no definitions, no boundaries identifying our connections with each other. We know who our "spouses" are, but who are our sisters — in a familial sense, not a political one — who are our cousins, our aunts, our daughters, our second cousins, our sisters-in-law?

I've heard dykes bemoan the difficulty of creating life-long friendships among ourselves, to parallel those which straight women have little difficulty maintaining. But we are different from straight women. No one on earth is compelled to embrace change like a lesbian. Not to say we don't dig in

our heels now and again, but the very fact of being lesbian, not heterosexual and not bisexual, means that we are anchored nowhere, as females, in this larger patriarchal society and culture. We are, in a sense, cultural wanderers, having drifted from the communities into which we were born, and being still unable to construct a model to replace them. Untethered to many of society's proscriptions, we grow and develop and change and age and mature more, and more rapidly, than straight women could ever do. And, in our maturity, we never look as weary of life as they do.

Heterosexual womyn are bound to one another by the adversarial nature of their relationships with men. They are even safe in their hatred of men — and you're kidding yourselves if you think they don't hate men — because they remain sexually available. With the exception of separatists and a few other radical types, lesbians do not feel safe hating men because we are already traitors to every other expectation of the culture. It's as though they can withhold their sexual selves, but must withhold contempt as well, so as to maintain some approval from the dominant culture. Thus, the animosity between dykes who hate men and dykes who don't.

Straight women have one essential simplicity in their lives which lesbians do not have. They have one pool of people — men — from whom they choose their sexual partners and an occasional friend. They have another pool of people — women — from whom they choose their friends, but never, in theory, their lovers. They also have prohibitions which protect heterosexual intimacies. A heterosexual woman can sit in a group of any number of womyn and talk about her sexual history, preferences and hang-ups without fear of violating the privacy of another woman in the room, who happens to be her ex-lover. She can talk about her past lovers without fear that her ex's current lover is in the room. Straight womyn possess a whole zone of privacy we've been trying to live without, and we simply don't know how.

Before we can even begin to discuss these things among ourselves, we must recognize how relatively defenseless we

are against each other. In the dominant society, things told among women in their private world apart from men remain in that world. Dykes have no such separation nor any possibility of creating one. (The possible exception would be the ultra-stratified world of butch and femme, which appeals to me about as much as heterosexuality itself.) I don't think inventing words to better describe our relationships is necessarily the answer. I am overwhelmed with the possibilities for such naming, in a subculture which has 18 different ways to spell woman. It is more important that we develop an ethics on which we can rely for the psychic separation, the emotional boundaries, the intellectual safety we need to survive within the romantic and sexual vulnerability of being lesbians who love lesbians. It is this set of ethical standards I encourage us each to work to create.



Billie Mirra

Erika Feigenbaum

untrue

She had seen the vacancy before
while rain batted coldness through the car
and through the windshield reflected like tears
in streams on her cheeks. Only she had not
been crying, not at all. For years
she echoed stillness, waited for this pause.
I hung myself up on the seat to hear
her heart slip between the sighs and silence
of the rain. It called distinctly on the
melancholy prose she'd read for years
which empties our callings like a cruel stain
whispering a craving for unseen color.
We syndicate the kisses like tiny experiments
and jest at perennial loves that taste
of sweet grass and sage, too simple
for our pain. Until the clouds thicken
into wide paragraphs I'll watch the trembling
seconds mesmerize our hands, knuckles knotted,
when our grip shifts to singleness in dismay.
Only the rain stops its pelting,
but the burden rests with us.

Lisa Manning

I don't need *you* to agree with me

the man with the borrowed head comes up talking to me now I'm not saying I didn't invite engage involve him, I did. so he comes with his chirpy little agreement and acceptance story, the yes-it's-all-terrible-but-oh-well-life-is-like-that story. he chirps his little story to agree with my cursing spitting story of frustration and futile rage and chirps on in agreement with himself everything is that bad, but not really, the story turns into a chuckling little story about how the world goes — made for him, of course, it is, the white man, smiling and in agreement with himself. he is wonderful, everyone can see it.

Sauda Burch

Fragments

I performed a piece of this work for a final class project at Brava! For Women in the Arts, in San Francisco, CA during the summer of 1994. For my final project, I chose to explore the relationship between a lesbian daughter and her mother. The mother in this piece, is also mentally disabled. I am a lesbian daughter with a mother with mental and physical disabilities. This autofiction piece parallels my own experiences.

When I began writing this piece, I was hopeful about my relationship with my mother. We had been talking more and fighting less. I felt she was finally coming to some resolution about my being a lesbian. I have been "out" for over twelve years and would characterize our relationship as sporadically hostile. Most of our interactions seldom touch, on any substantial level, my lesbianism, helped in part, by my moving to California.

As I delved into this work, I was struck by how often I wanted to cry, scream, rage, realizing, on a new level, the shields I had erected to protect myself against my mother's abandonment and illnesses. I held an enormous amount of grief. I wished my mother and I could find a place with each other that wasn't so painful.

Midway through the class session, my mother and I had a major falling out. I decided that I could no longer have her in my life. Suddenly, my theater piece transformed from a work about mending relationship to one about the loss of relationship. Few of the words in my piece had changed, but my relation to the work was radically altered. I was an emotional mess. Each time I got on stage during class, I fell apart. I decided not to perform. Fortunately, my director, Amy Mueller and my partner, Xochi helped me realize that performing might help release and resolve some of the pain I was carrying.

"Fragments" is one of thirty three works in progress that explores my relationship with my mother. Writing and performing is one way I stay emotionally healthy and creative, a way of validating my life experiences.

Note: There are three other typefaces used in this piece. The sans-serif bold type is directly from my solo performance. The material in sans-serif roman is flashbacks or internal dialogue. Towards the end, the serif roman type is pieces of a short story.

Daughter

When I was a little girl, I thought you were the most beautiful woman in the world. All my friends said so. Yo mama sho' is pretty. What happened to you?

Sometimes at night when I am lying alone in the dark, I remember sleeping with you. How all five of us fought to get in your bed.

When it was my turn, I anticipated having you to myself, falling asleep to Muzak — bland distortions of all my favorite songs.

On weekends, we would wake up and talk, just you and me. I would get up and make breakfast, bringing yours to bed.

You were the first woman I fell in love with.

Mother to Psychiatrist

There it was. Sitting in front of me like it belonged to somebody else. One morning the walls were closing in, cold, cement lime green blocks, fighting for space, blocking me in. That afternoon, with nothing particular having happened, no child hurt or sick, the same walls shrank away, baring me — leaving me to myself. The further away they moved, the more I ached for them.

Doctor, you're always telling me to sit down. But that's the problem — sitting still. I have spent years in one chair, in the same room, watching everything and everyone pass, faster and faster, moving away like the last train to places I will never see. I come here every day hoping something different will happen. Like you will talk to me as if I matter. But you just sit there staring. You don't smile at me. You don't really look at me, do you? I can see you looking past me, at anything but me. Are you afraid? Worried you can't make my life better? My life may seem small and predictable

but it's all over the place, messy, refusing to fit. It can't be made neat in your chart and then filed away until the next time.

I wonder about people who ride the trains, moving away from what they know. When you find yourself at the place the train takes you, can you ever come back home and want to stay?

Daughter

The first time Mama went away I was eight years old, though I remember feeling much older, as if I had gone through it all before. I could not have told anyone how I felt. I swallowed down the feelings that came up from my stomach, the spinning in my head that left me dizzy.

Maybe I remember that first time because my baby sister had just been born. Daddy had left us and Mama got sick. Actually, Daddy left first, my baby sister was born and Mama went into the hospital a few weeks after. But Mama must have gone away before. Everything was oddly familiar. One day things were as they had been, the next day we were separated from each other, Mama, our new baby sister.

I was sent to stay with my favorite girl cousin. She lived in a sprawling public housing project, five buildings, each with eighteen stories of box apartments with long outdoor corridors and huge gray elevators which smelled of old urine. Alice lived with her mother, her father and four brothers. They had three bedrooms and Alice had her own since she was the only girl. She had plastered her walls with Michael Jackson posters. She played his records over and over, and fantasized that she and he would be married. No matter where I turned in her room, there he was, smiling at me with those dreamy eyes.

I sat alone at the kitchen table eating Corn Flakes after my cousins left for school. Late afternoon, I stared out the window while I waited for my cousins to come home.

My brothers went down South — Mississippi to stay with our people there. My older sister and the baby stayed with my father's sister. When we were back home, my brother told me

he felt like running away. He kept calling home to have Mama to come get him. There was no answer. What could I say to comfort him?



Mama has night sickness, throws up sausage in the bathroom sink. She comes in our bedroom and talks about names for the baby. She sits on the edge of my sister's bed, staring out the closed window. The lights from the street shine on her face. The window is all steamed up. It's winter, but our room is overheated. The heat never goes off in the winter and we have no way to control it. She sits still for a long time, as if she wants my sister or me to do something. She wants to talk about what's really on her mind. Maybe she wants to talk about Daddy leaving. Maybe she wants to come lie in bed with me.

Daddy comes to visit. He says the baby is of the devil. I don't hear him say it but Mama tells us later. Look how she never stops crying he says. It's true, the baby opens her mouth and lets go huge screams that wake us and the neighbors next door who pound on the wall with a broomstick. Why doesn't she stop crying? Daddy comes to see her but he doesn't pick her up. He just stands over her crib looking down at her, shaking his head. Maybe Daddy didn't want another baby. But I think he made Mama scared of the baby. She believes something's wrong with the baby too.

After my mother comes back from the hospital, my little brother lies like a puppy under the cocktail table near her feet. He sucks his thumb and falls asleep, not moving until Mama takes him up to bed.

Mother to Psychiatrist

I don't trust nobody now except God. Save yourself a lot of heartache. People tell you they're going to do a lot of things; they make big promises that they don't plan to keep. I say, when I see it, I'll believe it. I don't get my hopes up.

My mother and father were together until my mother died. And after Mama died, Daddy never remarried.

I expected my marriage to be like that. I didn't plan for it to be any other way. I trusted my husband would stay with me, to raise our children. He didn't. He left and left us with no way. I was raising five children alone.

I was mad as hell. But I kept smiling, while inside I didn't know how I was going to make it alone. I had a new baby, and three little ones under nine years old. All at once they needed so much from me — to be Mama and Daddy and to explain to them why their father wasn't coming back. What could they understand? How could I tell them that he gambled away his paycheck and kept another woman on the side?

Life just stopped making sense. I didn't know who I was anymore. Everything fell apart.

When it got to be too much, I checked myself into the hospital. Each time I couldn't handle it, I'd put myself in again. Wasn't much else I could do. Who was going to take care of five kids unless I was too sick to take care of them myself? I needed time to think, to pull myself together. I needed to be taken care of for a while.

Daughter

It wasn't that bad, was it? Mama always put herself in the hospital; no ambulance ever came to take her away. Just before she would go she would stop cooking, feeding us canned beans and franks or tuna salad. She looked like she had gone as far as she could without breaking.

Mama's got a sister who's been in a mental hospital for thirty years. They put her there after she stopped talking. Mama doesn't really remember her since she was a little girl when Aunt Ella was nearly a grown woman. Aunt Ella got pregnant and she wasn't married; and this was in the 1940's. The boy who got her pregnant got another girl pregnant too. But he couldn't marry both of them and he married the other girl, even though Aunt Ella was high yella and pretty, a mess of red hair, and built like a Coca Cola bottle. Mama says he married the other girl even though she looked like an ape. Aunt Ella had a baby boy. When she was in the hospital after having the baby,

the other girl's mother brought her some cake. Mama said that cake was full of voodoo, and Aunt Ella shouldn't have eaten it. She never spoke again.

Mama says men don't want nothing but one thing. Mama says when she was in the hospital once, a man came in her room and tried to rape her. Men are dogs. You better not give yourself up for free. She's got five mouths to feed and a wet ass don't pay no bills. Mama says don't lay down with no man and only get up with nothing. She ain't no prostitute — not much difference though between a prostitute and a married woman. Mama puts locks on the inside of our bedroom doors. When her boyfriend visits she makes us lock ourselves in. Says she can't protect us when she's asleep. Mama says don't sit on no man's lap, not even your daddy's. And don't wear nightgowns 'cause you got brothers. Don't 'go down' on a man cause you don't know where they've been. Don't let them suck your breasts; you can get cancer. Mama always got worse when there wasn't a man around.

You taught me a lot about men and women growing up, Mama. You taught me that women had to take a lot of shit and men were good at passing it out. Like womanhood was some kind of endurance test, having abuse hurled at you all the time, dodging, evading, manipulating, hiding, lying, covering up who you really were...

I don't think that I would have survived this long if I were straight. I was never good at the games men and women play. I thought there was a manual somewhere, that I didn't get, that decoded the language and expectations of heterosexuality. That could show me how I could love myself and be with a man.

Listen to me Mama. Look at my life. This is not a tragedy. Loving women saved me. I know that sounds emotional, trusting, everything you taught me not to be, but it's also true.

The love of good women saved me.



I visit Mama in a women's psychiatric hospital on the far west side of Chicago. I find her sitting alone in the TV room. The television is bolted high on one wall and she cranes her neck to one side as she watches the soap operas.

Mama's dressed in brown polyester pants with sewn in creases and a flowery oversized top. Her head is covered with a tiny yellow cap, pulled down over her ears. "Been in here a week and you just now come to visit," she quipped not turning away from the screen.

Mama takes me to her room at the far end of the hall. The room is small but sunny. The twin beds are covered with bright bedspreads, one yellow, one green. A vase of fresh yellow roses sit on the night table between the beds. Mama goes to the window and pulls the blinds. "My roommate went home two days ago," she said pointing to the empty bed. "She was schizophrenic, you know."

"No," I say. "I didn't know." After fifteen years, does my mother's illness have a name?

"I was afraid to go to sleep at night," Mama continued. "Thought one of those voices in her head was going to tell her to kill me. Last night was the first good sleep I've had since I've been here."

I looked at the empty bed and at Mama. Had the woman worried that Mama might hurt her? How many nights had I lain awake terrified that my mother might hurt me?



There were times. Times when I snuggled against her warm, full woman body, and Mama would hold me, her small brown child close and safe. I would have followed her anywhere. Given anything for one approving look, one nod, one smile for me.

Before the break/ before the slashing/ before the end.

Now silence. Silence that covers us like a wet, dirty sheet, its chill unrelenting, clinging to our shivering, naked bodies.

We circle each other like hungry vultures, teasing out

the weaknesses and soft spots, and striking — decisively — when we find them.

We have choreographed this dance of missteps, holding on too tight for too long. The music stopped long ago, but we continue to dance.

All we have is the dance.

I feel her hot breath on my neck. Her teeth pierce then break my skin. My blood, warm and thick flows quickly and gathers in a pool beneath my feet.

"Don't hurt me, don't hurt me. It's me, Mama," I want to yell, but instead I turn and tear open her chest, plunging my talons into her weak heart.

We are ravenous for the spoils, but the scattered remains are our own shattered bodies, not the rotting meat of dead prey.

There are no safe corners, no shields, no protection for either of us.



Mama sat on the end of her bed. She wrung her hands together and worked her mouth in a nervous chewing motion. Her gaze rested on my feet. Those are nice shoes," she said. "I could use some new shoes." She got up and walked to the closet. She began to rearrange the few clothes she brought with her.

"You have to hide your nice underwear here; anything you want to keep." Her voice was muffled as she spoke into the closet. "It's the nurses, they steal anything you don't tie down. They think you too crazy to notice. But I notice everything. I ain't that crazy."

Mother to Psychiatrist

What would you like me to say doctor — that this is all my fault? Well, I won't. I won't give you or them the satisfaction.

I'm here because of them. They tell another story I'm sure. That I can't stand to be around them? Well I can't. I'd rather be here than in that hellhole. Three grown children,

not one lifts a finger to do anything around the house. I didn't raise them that way. My sons parade their girlfriends in and out at all hours of the night. My baby girl with a baby herself. My other daughter a lesbian...

Did they tell you that? What I have to put up with — what they put me through?



"Why would anyone want to steal your underwear?" I asked.

Mama ignored me and retrieved a tattered gym bag from the back of the closet. "I want you to take these things home," she ordered as she stuffed random belongings into the bag, earrings, several pair of nylon panties, a pair of house slippers with glass beads stitched on the front.

"Can you imagine there are some things you don't know; that I can teach you?" she turns on me. "It's the nurses' aides that steal. They don't make much money and they do most the work — hell, they do all the work. I give them a tip when they do something for me. Then they are less likely to take your things". She zipped the bag and handed it to me. "I've been in enough of these places to be the expert, don't you think, Miss Girl?"

"So what's so important that you can't come see your mother; can't call? Did you break your fingers?"

"It's hard for me Mama, you know that. I can't stand to be in these places..." I started.

"Can't be as hard as being in here," she interrupts. "I'm the one sick; you need to remember that."

Mother to Psychiatrist

All I want is to be treated like I matter. Is it too much to ask that your own children respect you? Did you tell them how sick I am?

Of course you did. And what did they say?

They didn't bat an eye, did they?

Well, I took care of my mother when she was sick. I had seven older sisters, but I dropped out of high school to take care of Mama.

I was glad to take care of my mother. I was a good daughter.

Of course my sisters could have done it, but they were married with children by that time. Should they have left their children to take care of Mama when I could be at home?

You don't understand do you?

The sacrifices a mother makes. How you put yourself last, if you think about yourself at all. Of course you don't understand, you're a man. You only know what it feels like to be taken care of, first by your mother, then your wife — you have a wife don't you? You don't stop to question the order of things, you just suck up it all up.

Well I would like to suck it all up too. Tell me doctor, what is it like, always being put first, having somebody always trying to make it better for you?



Mama shifted uneasily on the bed, leaning closer to me. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a crumpled wad of paper. She opened it and smoothed it against her pant leg and handed it to me. "Was going to throw this away. Did it this morning in group. Don't see what's so helpful about talking to a bunch of strangers about your life. Some things so private you don't want to share them with anybody."

"We had to write the ten things that bothered us the most, why we thought we were in here." I only got to four things; I got depressed and gave up.

I looked at the paper. Across the top, she had written "The Ten Reasons I'm Here":

- #1 My daughter is a lesbian
- #2 My youngest daughter is having a baby
- #3 My feet are too big
- #4 I'm too fat

Mother to Psychiatrist

She thinks she's a lesbian. I don't. I birthed a girl child. I didn't raise her to be that way. Maybe it was her father's fault. They were really close. When he left, she nearly got an ulcer, started spitting up blood. She was only eight years old. I told her then she had to learn to walk on her feelings. Wear them on the bottom of her feet.

But she's a dreamer like her father. I could tell what I was saying to her wasn't going to make much difference. There are some people who can't hide what they feel and those people got it hard.

I saw so much of her father in her. I wanted to hold on to all that was good and fling the rest of it as far away as possible, the part of her that I knew would take her dreams away without looking back.

God knows she didn't want any part of my life. She left to get away from me.

You know these things as a mother. They don't have to tell you. I could tell by the way she looked at me. Like nothing I said was important. How many times have my children told me that?

Maybe you can help me figure this out.

How much further from me can she get than by doing this? Living a life that will take her nowhere? How long will she punish me for not being a good enough mother?

Daughter

My sister says that I must understand my mother. She says that I was the only child my parents planned, wanted.

She asks me, "Do you know how it feels to have something you planned for turn out to be wholly different than what you expected?"

I understand. I am not the planned daughter. Does my mother understand that she is not the mother?



I stared at the piece of paper. I was afraid to look up. Afraid of what I might do. I don't remember when I stood up and walked out. I don't remember saying the things Mama told my sister I said to her. What I do recall is wishing for the number two spot. Instead of being the reason she thinks the walls close in on her. The reason why she can't keep food down, why the world seems unmanageable and hostile.

In those few moments, I saw Mama as she was now in her big flowered blouses, trying to hide her ample body. And I saw her ten years before, dressing before a date, emptying her breasts into a 40DD bra, stuffing herself in girdles and control hose, tottering on three inch heels.

She would come home hours later, and release herself into a cotton nightgown. I would crawl into her bed and fall asleep, leaning against her, comforted by the now faint smell of her perfume.

My sister said that I cursed the day I came through my mother's loins. But I only remember the voices that propelled me toward the outer doors, away from her. The loud buzz that put me on the other side. The humidity that enveloped me as I staggered from the building. Past the young girls jumping double dutch, the men hanging out on the corner. I ran all the way to the bus stop, my blouse clinging, dragging my heavy bag. They must have thought I was a madwoman, stumbling onto the bus, out of breath, collapsing into a seat, sobbing.

They must have thought I was completely mad.

Jessica Stein

Chord

Mid-kiss, she shakes her head. We
disembrace. *My life*
has a soundtrack, she says.
And when we break up, or
one of us moves away, or
dies somewhere, I'll
hate this song. I kiss
her eyes, her nose,
finally lips. I love her
for this. I tickle her until
she smiles. The CD hesitates
like a nervous suitor and then
there is another song, anyway.

Joan Annsfire

At Work

at work the women smile too much
fold neatly shaven, nylon legs
and speak the language
of silver patterns and matching china.

men move as though
their shoulders were clenched fists,
wax nostalgic on subjects
such as getting drunk
and sports involving balls
of various shapes and sizes.

the work day is divided into
carefully measured minutes
marked off like cross-hatches on a jail cell wall,
deadlines approach,
workers flutter like flocks of industrious birds,
days slip by unnoticed.

I think of Joyce on the AIDS ward
surrounded by the ravages of disease,
the urgency of life in its final stages,
stark reality cutting away
the shiny, useless veneers
that wall us off from each other.

I am a visitor from an uncharted planet
I observe their customs and traditions
with the watchful eye and curious ear of an outsider.
I recall the names of each co-worker's spouse or lover,
although my lesbian life
has been filed away like a dirty secret.

I remember when Diane
was in the hospital with Shoshana,
her partner who was dying of cervical cancer.
the nurses permitted Diane to stay
at her lover's bedside overnight
but never once offered her a cot to sleep on,
as they did for the husbands and boyfriends
of the other women patients,
yet they considered themselves
so liberal, so open-minded,
for allowing her to stay at all.

I want to scream,
to shove my pushy, damn-lesbian's face
into the blank, anonymous abyss
of an indifference far worse than hatred;
the uncanny ability to
turn the other cheek, avert the gaze;
quiet complicity in the eye of
someone else's hurricane.

at work the people smile
hollow, distracted smiles,
discuss tv shows and movie stars,
yet speak most powerfully
with silence.

Janell Moon

The Deal

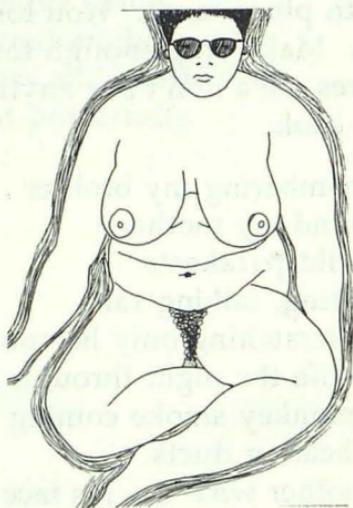
The mother sits slumped on the couch
could you, could you
sorry to be such a bother
wants a little hot water to warm her fingers
her right hand flutters to her buttons
takes out her full breast
offers suckling to her full-grown daughter
the nipple flat from age
the slit shadowed.

My lover, mesmerized stands locked
staring at her flesh. She smiles at her
mother, asks only does she want a snack.
The mother puts her heavy breast away
asks for something more substantial.
Duckling with plum sauce. Won ton soup
with shrimp. Make only enough for two.
My lover gives me a don't say anything look.
She starts to cook.

I am left remembering my brother
wrapped around my mother
that boy of wild parakeets
nights of wetting, talking rain
violin's high scratching only he could hear.
He'd ponder life the night through
some sweet monkey smoke coming
through the heating ducts.
I'd ask my mother what do, his face
so flushed and red. She would not talk
of it. Turned her back, made dinner.

Once again I'm caught, seeing
this mother and the deal.
Don't speak of it; I'll take care
of you, if you take care of me.

The promise hovers in the air
covers the house tonight with brown light
Spiders spin ancient webs.
There is a certain silence.



Room to Expand
Aspen

Wyrda

In the Outhouse

A Maternal Odyssey

"So, what's your mother like?," my newish lover asked.

I cringed, as I always do when asked that question. It's one I never know how to answer. Do I give her background? Working-class immigrant from Scotland. Do I describe her? Short, dark, square. Or do I give a Readers Digest version of our relationship history? Even the edited version could fill a book and often leaves the listener with the impression that I hate my mother, or at least that I should. I don't hate her. And I certainly don't encourage my lovers or friends to. Lovers usually end up getting all the various versions over time. Sally had even talked to Mom on the phone, quite an ordeal, as Mom can talk the ears off corn, especially when she's nervous.

Mom had reason to be nervous. This was the first time she was going to visit me since I'd moved to Oregon. Sally and I had been lovers for about four months when Mom decided to come down for a concert I was doing. I was getting my first "BIG BREAK," opening a show for Jamie Anderson. I was nervous about the show. Nervous about Mom staying in my amenity-free house. Downright terrified about my mother and lover meeting. My brain was in high gear going nowhere playing out "what ifs." What if they hate each other and Sally decides I should cut Mom out of my life? (A previous lover had taken that stand.) What if they really like each other and Mom decides to become a dyke and they run off together? (Mom and Sally are closer in age than Sally and I.) My brain positively excels at "what ifs."

The day finally arrived. Sally was working so I went alone to pick Mom up at the Greyhound stop. I took her to a

local greasy spoon for dinner. There I broke the news that she would be staying alone at my house. A decision that had cost much soul searching and a fight with my lover. I explained to Mom that my house only had room for one person, and that Sally and I had a standing date to sleep together at her house on Thursdays. Mom was not thrilled, I don't blame her. After much discussion, Mom said that if I had to have somebody pissed at me, it was probably better that it be my mother than my lover.

I took Mom back to my house. I showed her where the outhouse was, where the drinking water was, where the candles were and how to start the wood stove. She put a good face on it. She said it would be sort of fun, like camping out. We then went on the grand tour of "woman's land." Mom was impressed that the main house had a real propane stove, as opposed to my two burner camp stove. We went over to my land mates' house for tea. As expected, Mom went into over-drive chatter mode. When Mom is doing binge talking, no one can get a word in. She doesn't even hear the "Yes, buts," or "Well, I think." Even exceptional conversationalists give up in awe of her ability to Mom-ologue. After exhausting my land mates, I took her back to my house and left her to settle herself while I went to keep my date with Sally.

The next day, Sally was off work. We had planned to pick Mom up and take her to visit a friend who runs an RV park for gays and lesbians. Off we went to pick Mom up and see how she had survived her first night "camping out" at my house.

"You didn't leave me enough kindling," were the words she greeted me with. I had also forgotten to show her where the hatchet was and some animal, she thought a bear, I figured a raccoon, had kept her awake all night climbing around on the roof. After I introduced her to Sally, she reminded me that I hadn't shown her how to use the camp stove. She wanted coffee, NOW. That taken care of and my daughterly guilt firmly in place, we went down the road to see Ann. Mom really liked Ann and the RV park. In fact, she said that if she *ever* came back to visit, she wanted to stay *there*.

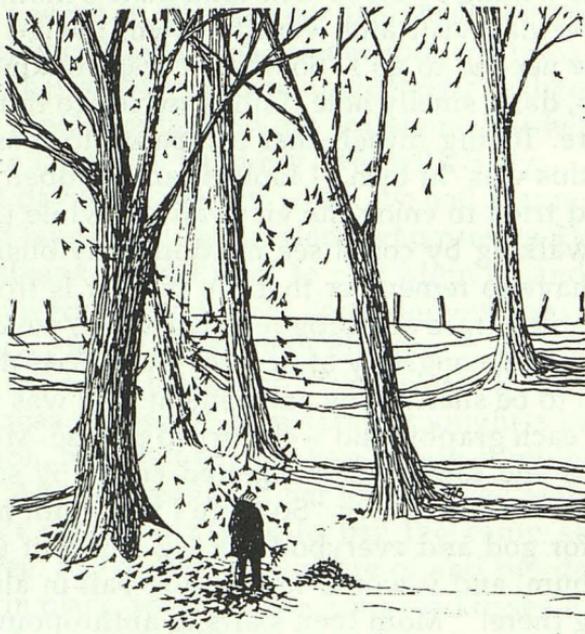
That night I was again staying with Sally. She and I talked about her difficulty relating to my mother. Sally became acutely uncomfortable around people who are graphic about body functions, particularly "bathroom talk." She was having a hard time with my mother's free use of the word "shit," as well as her constant talking. In fact, it was my mother's use of the phrase "Diarrhea of the mouth" that had brought the subject up. I was not terribly sympathetic. I was also practicing not defending either of them to the other, a sanity-saving decision.

The next day was the concert. Sally and I picked Mom up from my house. She still hadn't figured out how to use the camp stove. I made her coffee and we went for a drive. Mom had said that she wanted to see the Umpqua river. We meandered along back roads on the way to Roseburg. Mom was apparently still nervous, the monologue continued. She was telling the story of her encounter with the outhouse. (At least Mom was willing to use it. One land mate's mother had come for a three-day visit and went to town, twelve miles away, when she needed to go.) "So, there I was, looking down into this deep, dark, smelly hole. Telling myself to think of it as an adventure. Telling myself that compared to most of human history, this was 'hi tech.' I looked out the open sides of the thing and tried to enjoy the view, all the while thinking that anyone walking by could see me doing my business."

You have to remember that my mother is from Scotland. There is still a trace of a brogue in her voice, which to me just added to the incongruity of her story. I noticed that Sally did not seem to be sharing my amusement. She was visibly tensing with each graphic and well-turned phrase. Mom may talk a lot, and she might be considered crude by some, but by damn, she can tell a story. "So there I was, with my ass hanging out for god and everybody to see. The shit was hanging out my bum, and it would not let go! 'Fall in already. Don't just hang there!'" Mom then starts to anthropomorphize like mad. Giving a very good rendition of what shit would say in that situation. "No, no, please don't make me go into that

terrible place.” I’m having hysterics in the back seat. Sally is staring fixedly ahead, white-knuckling the steering wheel. Mom is on a roll and is paying no attention to either of us. “I wiggled, I shook, I bounced up and down. I had visions of being trapped there forever. You would have had to dig a new shitter and make me into a monument. ‘THE MOTHER WHO COULDN’T GO!’”

At that point, I noticed that Sally had scrunched down so far into the front seat that she could hardly see over the dash. I figured Mom’s story was good for at least another five hundred words. What to do? Interrupt in order to save my girlfriend from terminal embarrassment, or ignore Sally’s discomfort and just be glad Mom could keep her sense of humor about her “exposure” to my lifestyle? I finally decided to turn it over to whatever higher power deals with lovers, mothers and shit. I sat back and enjoyed the rest of the story.



Roxann Burger

Helen Porter

two untitled poems

Moonlight begins to dance on a carpet of verdant moss
as dusk fades into night.

Reclining, eyes closed, I see the negative image of the trees
silhouetted against the raven sky.

I lie remembering, questioning, defending and wondering.
The metronomic cadence of the crickets blends with
my soft breathing as time merges with the darkness.

Cool mists stealthily encroach, muting the landscape, blunting
the sharp contours, soothing my mind.

Sleep encompasses.

Pain begets pain
Pain relieves pain
Adjust the emphasis
Bloated, decayed, noxious wanderings
Burst to the surface
Misshapen beyond recognition
Forgetting is not impervious
Thoughts sweat through

Helen Porter

The Bewilderbeast

Manifold impressions, daily consequences.
Multiplicity and confusion.
Perception of the actual?
Interpretations.
Reality's clash with desire.
Choice?
Situational colors regurgitated,
Ambiguous shades.
I am the Bewilderbeast.

Caryatis Cardea

falling trees

did you ever think
it would come to this

so there we were
talking about community
lesbian communities
let's imagine one i said
all our differences to resolve
barriers to overcome
food and families and tastes in music
what about battery i asked
can a dyke find asylum
in this ideal world we're dreaming
from an abuser who is also a dyke

damn
did you ever think
we would come to say these things
that lesbians would need refuge
from other lesbians

but we do and i know this
i am a lesbian and this is my life

someone else
in her own disbelief
said
but how will we know
i mean is there a list
can we just believe a lesbian was battered
only because she says so

did you ever think we would come to this
that we would not believe a lesbian
how can we not believe her
when she says so
i never dreamed it would come to this

and then at the magazine
it's time we said
to do an issue on ethics
the ethical challenges lesbians face
and we began to talk
about lies and cheating and break-ups
and other travesties we bring to each other
like battery

someone said
and i felt strengthened
someone besides me had raised the issue

like what happens she went on
when a dyke is accused

of battering another dyke
i mean is she branded for life
just for one act

when does the ostracism end
and suppose it isn't true
what happens to those lesbians

i never thought we would come to this
did you
did you think we'd have to make our communities
safe for batterers
did you ever

their victims hide and whisper
they don't appear in public

or in phone books
lesbians say get over it
put it behind you
stop telling about it
don't tell

but i have to tell you
 i am
 a lesbian and this
 is my life

the patriarchy lives
 you know
 the patriarchy lives here
 it lives here inside
 it lives inside our communities
 inside our relationships
 here in our bodies and our minds
 inside our hearts and inside our spirits

i never knew it would come to this
 did you know

we've been trained all our lives
 for this silence

don't tell

don't ever tell

who would believe you
 everyone knows girls lie
 no one will believe
 no one will believe you
 a mere child and female at that
 and no one did believe
 not parents or neighbors
 or teachers or friends
 sometimes not your own self
 and now not even lesbians

did you ever think it would come to this
 did you imagine we would be silent
 to someone saying i am a lesbian
 listen to my life
 did you imagine

the patriarchy lives
 if anything so dead

can be said to live it lives
and brings death
with the suffocating
stillness of the things we don't tell
and the stifling suffocation of the things
we won't believe

silence kills they say
and even while resisting
the allusion to ability
i know what they mean
not voices or ears or what we say or in what language
but what we tell however we tell it
and what we understand and how they stop us
before we start
and how we stop each other for them
silence kills lesbians for the patriarchy

i never thought it would come to this
i never
imagined

we have to tell
and we have to ask
ask me and i'll tell you
i am a lesbian and this is my life

did you ever imagine this
that here in the world we built
with our own breath
and fire
where we live so close
your wounds make my wounds
bleed
did you ever think
that here too the rule would apply
don't tell
bad things happen if you tell
suppose you misunderstood

you could harm someone innocent
 and what was your part in it anyway
 did you ever think
 it would come to this

the damage was done to our bodies
 we know this
 and to our trust and our sexuality
 but also our belief in the reality we perceived
 and our sense of honor and our self-esteem
 and the damage is held in place by silence
 we cannot rid ourselves of it because
 it is only real when we tell it and
 we are believed

our wounds are held open
 by silence

did you ever think it would come
 to this
 i never did

as a community
 lesbians seem to say
 we can't know about it
 that thing we call incest
 that which is rape and torture
 forced prostitution and entrapment
 which twists the minds of girls
 into man-made shapes

that which happens in the home
 at the time the whole world that matters
 to us as children

did you ever think

so we make our own homes
 in lesbian nation
 and it is the whole of the world
 that matters to us
 as dykes

but here also
no one listens
and no one believes

did you ever think
it would come
to this
did you

and we can't know about lesbian battery
because dykes don't do that
and you can't let someone
control your feelings
and we're all doing the best we can
and suppose she goes to meetings
and to therapy and gets better
that would make it OK wouldn't it
then you could stop telling
couldn't you
stop telling
couldn't you
stop

i never thought
did you ever think
it would come to this

if she can put it behind her
why can't you

did you ever think we would come to say
these things
did you think it would come to this

to this
this message
that battery isn't ripping apart
our communities
but telling about it is
don't ever tell
don't tell

and memories of daughter-rape aren't gutting
 our relationships
 but telling about them is
 don't tell

can you imagine that we have come to this
 is there a list
 and what about false accusations
 did you ever think this would come
 that we would seek asylum
 from the truth of our lives
 who will protect us
 we want to know
 who will guard us against lying females
 did you ever
 ever think
 did you think it would come to this

if a tree falls in the forest
 and there's no one there to hear it
 it still makes a sound
 heard at least
 by other trees

when a lesbian speaks in the patriarchy
 and no lesbian is there for her
 she makes a sound
 indecipherable to anyone else on the planet

we are never more real
 than this
 when we are known to other lesbians
 did you ever think
 did you

break the spell
 tell
 we are never more real than this

tell
and keep telling
until lesbians listen
bring it up over dinner
and on line at the movies
tell and keep telling
spray it in graffiti
fashion it into a drum
make it the part of our lives
that it is

could we ever have known it would come
to this

more of us have lived this
than not
how can we be silent

i never thought
did you think

make it a vow
make it a promise

if a dyke speaks in the patriarchy
i will be there to catch her sounds
if i am not there to catch her
she falls

if a dyke falls in the patriarchy
the silence will topple
us all

did you ever think it would come
to this

make it a refrain
make it a chant

speak lesbian truth in the patriarchy
and let the goddam patriarchy fall without a sound

make it an assurance
 a solemn oath
 i will ask and keep listening
 i will tell and keep telling

from pen to paper
 hand to hand
 from a life to a lesbian life

how could we have known it would come to this
 could you have imagined it would

from my lips to your ears
 from one dyke to another

i am a lesbian
 and this is my life

i am a lesbian
 and this is
 my life

Contributors' Notes _____

Ali Liebegott is a disheveled dyke diner waitress poet who recently moved to New York from San Francisco and is trying to save enough money to get back. She has three chapbooks of poetry, *The Daze of My Life*, *No Pink Bows* and *I Never Promised You An Opium Den*.

Amy Edgington — I am a white, disabled Lesbian artist and writer, living in the South. My work has previously been published in *Sinister Wisdom* (#39 on Disability), *Heresies* #25, *Garden Variety Dykes* (HerBooks, 1994), *Sister/Stranger* (Sidewalk Revolution Press, 1993) and in other journals and anthologies.

Annette DuBois was born in New England and came to San Francisco by way of Oberlin College and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where she studied mathematics before realizing what she really wanted to be when she grew up.

Aspen — I am fat, forty and disabled, enjoying life with lesbians. I am white, educated, raised by "aspiring" working-class parents.

Billie Miracle — I am 51 years old and have lived on women's land in southern Oregon for twenty years. I am an art teacher and illustrator. I paint in acrylics and make block prints.

Caryatis Cardea is the fourth of nine Irish-Catholic/French-Canadian children of working-class parents. She is forty-four, disabled, vegetarian, separatist, and believes that life is essentially a tragedy with a laugh track.

Deborah A. Elliston is a lesbian feminist writer based in New York City. She is also a Ph.D. student in feminist anthropology, studying non-Western societies in part for visions of how to change her own. In 1995, she'll be living in French Polynesia doing her dissertation research. She was recently married to her lover, Linda Daniels, to whom most of her poetry is dedicated.

Ekua Omosupe is a professor of English at Cabrillo College in Aptos, CA. She teaches writing, Women's Studies and American Lit. Ekua lives in Santa Cruz. She is a single mother for three children and is a business woman. She and partner, Maria Davila, are co-owners of an ethnic jewelry, arts and crafts business known as MAKUA PRODUCTIONS.

Elissa G. Perry is a San Francisco-based fiction writer, student and Jane of all trades, originally from St. Louis, MO. Her work can be found in the anthologies, *Girlfriends Number One* and *Beyond Definition* as well as a variety of magazines and newspapers both local and nationally.

Erika Feigenbaum — Ms. Feigenbaum is currently completing her undergraduate degree at Cleveland State University, and her work has appeared in *The Creative Woman* and *The Hiram Poetry Review*.

Gloria Yamato writes poetry, short stories and literary hybrids. Her work has appeared in *Making Face, Making Soul: Race, Class and Gender* and *Raging Muse*. A collection of her short stories will be included in *New Voices I*, published by Aunt Lute Books, Spring 1995. Gloria lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Helen Porter — I am a lesbian writer living in Oakland with my two cats.

Janell Moon lives and writes in San Francisco. Her poetry has appeared in dozens of journals across the United States. Last year she won awards for her poems in the National Poetry Competition, the Billie Murry Denny Poetry Contest, and the S.S. Callope Poetry Contest. She published a chapbook, *Woman With a Cleaver*. She is a graduate of Ohio University and has a private practice as a hypnotherapist. She teaches counseling classes at the College of Marin. She is co-founder of a San Francisco women's art and writing salon, Sunday's Child.

Jessica Stein is a transplanted poet itching for Manhattan. She is shocked that two of her favorite people have turned eight and six, respectively, and that she is finally eighteen.

She has had work published previously in *Sinister Wisdom* #54 and *Hanging Loose* magazine. A proud feminist, she is at least as beautiful as any boy/or helicopter.

Joan Annsfire is a lesbian poet who lives in Berkeley, California.

Judith Witherow is a Native American. She is a fifty year old Lesbian feminist writer, artist and community activist. She has lived with her partner Sue for the past eighteen years. Together they have raised three children and numerous animals.

Kleya Forté-Escamilla is the author of *Daughter of the Mountain* (Aunt Lute), *Mada* (Sistervision) and *The Storyteller With Nike Airs* (Aunt Lute). She is an Astraea award-winner for 1993, a bilingual Chicana writer living in Santa Cruz, California.

Lanie Maeda is a Japanese Lesbian Feminist doing her work in the Bay Area. She would rather be destroying pornographers.

Leslie F. Levy is an attorney, specializing in issues of violence against womyn. At other times, she does photography and volunteers, helping injured seals heal and return to the wild.

Lisa Manning grew up in North Carolina and has lived in San Francisco for over fifteen years. She is a clerk in a specialty print shop. She writes poetry and short fiction. Her work has been published in a variety of journals and anthologies.

Lyn Davis is a lesbian terrorist who dons state worker disguise five days a week. In the evenings and on weekends, she writes poetry and autobiographical short fiction. She is lucky enough to live in Tallahassee, Florida, where she revels in the love of Leona and their two sons.

Marg-Adele Norrington — I was born 50 years ago. For 50 of those years, I have loved various women, usually silently and from a distance. Arthritis and cancer do provide different lenses to view women. Sharon is the woman I have lived with for 12 years. We have 2 dogs, a heroic border collie and an epileptic mutt. We also have 2 cats, one over 16, and one who came in and decided to be a domestic cat, after being a feral cat for about six months. We do have a recuperating hen, that the border collie rescued from the fox, living in the basement.

Peni Hall is a visual artist, video producer and technical coordinator for theater and video who resides in Berkeley, CA. Since 1985, she has worked as Technical Coordinator and has been a performer with WRY CRIPS Disabled Women's Theater.

R. Amy Elman teaches politics and women's studies at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. Her forthcoming book, *Sexual Subordination and State Intervention*, explores sexual abuse and violence against women in Sweden and the United States (Berghahn Books, 1995).

Roxann Burger is an artist living in Washington state.

Sauda Burch is a thirty four year old Black lesbian writer and activist originally from Chicago. She has lived in Oakland for seven years and is currently at work on her first novel.

Sudie Rakusin — My path turned inward last year and it was a deep time. My work these days seems to be pure exploration. It has taken me through several media moving into three-dimensions. I am slowly getting to enjoy not knowing where all this is headed. I live in the woods with my three dog companions, putting my trust in the universe to bring me what I need to learn the lessons of my soul.

Sue Lenaerts — Long-time activist and openly lesbian commissioner for her local Maryland County. Partner and photographer of author Judith Witherow since 1976.

Wyrda — I am a working class, white lesbian born and raised in San Francisco. I have lived in Oregon for the past six years and find it more suited to my vision. I am a thirty-three-year-old redhead with green eyes and an attitude of joyous irreverence. My friends put up with being material because I make them laugh.

Xochipala Maes Valdez — I am a Chicana writer/artist/performer whose family has been rooted in Southwest soils as far back as our conscious memory takes us. My creative process is a way for me to remember what lives in my unconscious memory as it has been passed to me through the blood of my peoples. My work is a tribute to my ancestors.

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 we should. 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. Many of the most compelling books are coming out of Canada from Press Gang, Women's Press, Gynergy and Gallerie — make sure your local bookstore carries them. — *Elana*

Resist! essays against a homophobic culture — is the most diverse (by race, class, ability), interesting looking collection to show up this season, with 23 dyke and bi contributors, mostly Canadian, edited by Mona Oikawa, Dionne Falconer, Ann Decter. 1994, \$14.95 (CND), Women's Press, 517 College St., Ste. 233, Toronto, Ont., Canada M6G 4A2.

The Colours of Heroines — just scanning this poetry makes me want to spend the day with Lydia Kwa's first collection of strong, imaginative, multi-layered poetry — check it out. 1994, \$11.95 (CND), Women's Press.

Fat Girl Dances With Rocks — a teenydyke coming of age story is the core of this eagerly awaited, wonderful first novel, by Susan Stinson. 1994, \$10.95, Spinsters Ink, POB 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403-5170.

The Lessons — rookie and veteran hunt a serial rapist who specializes in dykes, by police officer Melanie McAllester. 1994, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink.

Mother Journeys: Feminists Write about Mothering — an interesting gathering of lesbian & straight writers from Rita Dove to Marilyn Hacker explore their mother stuff, edited by Maureen T. Reddy, Martha Roth and Amy Sheldon. 1994, \$15.95, Spinsters Ink.

Belly Dancer — new stories from the co-editor of *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*, SKY Lee. 1994, \$16.95 (CND), Press Gang, 101-225 E. 17th Ave., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5V 1A6.

Now Poof She Is Gone — Native American writer Wendy Rose has published ten books, but this is a collection of the “me” poems she held back, exploring violence, dislocation, mixed-blood pain. 1994, \$8.95, Firebrand, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Stardust Bound — speculative (science) fiction with an ecological bent and a dyke hero. 1994, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Sister Safety Pin — a punk lesbian novel with attitude from funny, sharp SW contributor, Lorrie Sprecher. 1994, \$9.95, Firebrand.

Another Wilderness: New Outdoor Writing by Women — 23 contributors tell physical, spiritual and transformative stories in this dyke-spirited collection, edited by Susan Fox Rogers. 1994, \$14.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., #410, Seattle, WA 98121.

A Small Sacrifice — the fifth Jane Lawless mystery, a strong entry in that genre from Ellen Hart. 1994, \$20.95 (cloth), Seal Press.

Lover's Choices — a reprint of Becky Birtha's excellent second book of short stories. 1994, \$10.95, Seal Press.

The Second Coming of Joan of Arc and other plays — *Sinister Wisdom* first published “The Second Coming ...” in #35, and it's brilliant work, by Caroline Gage. 1994, \$10, HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Shedding and Literally Dreaming — three decades of writing by the influential German feminist, Verena Stefan, compared in importance to Wittig, Rich and Brown in the press release, afterword by Tobe Levin. 1994, \$14.95, The Feminist Press, 311 E. 94 St., NY, NY 10128.

Cactus Love — a new collection of old fashioned dyke stories from Lee Lynch. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Second Guess — the second Amanda Valentine mystery, set in New Zealand, by Rose Beecham. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

The Sure Thing — earthquakes, racism, TV, the Rodney King riots and love, by Melissa Hartman. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Body Guard — the sixth Carol Ashton mystery, a political thriller set in Australia, by Claire McNab. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Painted Moon — artist and architect trapped in a mountain snow-storm, by Karin Kallmaker. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

The Mysterious Naiad — Love Stories by Naiad Press Authors, 20 of them, edited by Katherine V. Forrest and Barbara Grier. 1994, \$14.95, Naiad.

Curious Wine — read by Jane Merrow, a two-tape version of the popular romantic novel by Katherine V. Forrest. 1994, Naiad.

Ghost Motel — a first lesbian mystery from accomplished fiction writer Jackie Manthorne. 1994, \$9.95, Gynergy Books, POB 2023, Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada, C1A 7N7.

Skin Deep: Women Writing on Color, Culture and Identity — an important, varied, deep collection of over 50 women's work (straight and lesbian), by Elena Featherston. 1994, \$14.95, Crossing, POB 1048, Freedom, CA 95019.

Out of the Class Closet: Lesbians Speak — 35 dykes fill 478 pages with a wide range of class perspectives — an important collection that draws you in, edited by Julia Penelope. 1994, \$16.95, Crossing.

Quite Mad and Other Works — a picture book for grown-ups, by Molly Barker. 1994, \$10.95, Crossing.

Voices Under One Sky: Contemporary Native Literature — 44 contributors, half are women, some lesbians, representing a broad spectrum of work being done on Turtle Island, edited by Trish Fox Roman. 1994, \$12.95, Crossing.

Feminist Parenting: Struggles, Triumphs & Comic Interludes — many women and a few men, roughly 1/3 dykes, give their views, edited by Dena Taylor. 1994, \$14.95, Crossing.

O Mother Sun! A New View of the Cosmic Feminine — turning around "the Apollo conspiracy" with a very world-wide awareness, by Patricia Monaghan. 1994, \$12.95, Crossing.

Creating Circles of Power & Magic: A Woman's Guide to Sacred Community — a fairly straight do-it-yourself guide to Wiccan and related practice, by Caitlin Libera. 1994, \$12.95, Crossing.

The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex — something for everyone in this supermarket catalog of sexual possibilities, "style" and hardware — fun marketed as feminism, by Cathy Winks and Anne Semans. 1994, \$16.95, Cleis, POB 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex — essays on maintaining a defiant stance, by bisexual Pat Califia. 1994, \$12.95, Cleis.

The Case of the Good-For-Nothing Girlfriend — a parody of many facets of the mystery genre, from Nancy Drew to Naiad staples, set in a very dykey world, by Mabel Maney. 1994, \$10.95, Cleis.

Putting Out: The Essential Publishing Resource for Lesbian and Gay Writers, 3rd Edition — over 500 places to send your work, edited by Edisol W. Dotson. 1994, \$12.95, Cleis.

A Taste of Lemon — lesbian inquiries into love and being, poems by abuse survivor Jane Oxley. 1994, \$8.95, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., NY, NY 10001.

Other Words For Grace — a coming-of-age exploration, pushing the boundaries of language in poetic forms, fascinating work by Margaret Christakos. 1994, \$11.95, Mercury, 137 Birmingham St., Stratford, Ont., Canada N5A 2T1.

The Black Diamond Ring — interesting straight feminist short stories, by Patricia Seaman. 1994, \$14.50, Mercury.

Gestures of Genius: Women, Dance, and the Body — examines the place of dance in the history of women through essays and interviews with a wide variety of dancers, by Rachel Vigier. 1994, \$16.95, Mercury.

Natalie on the Street — the journal/story of a friendship formed with an old homeless woman, by Ann Nietzsche. 1994, \$14.95, Calyx Books, POB B, Corvallis, OR 97339.

The Homophobic Healer: A Primer for Gays, Lesbians and the Families and Friends Who Love Them — a very god-based, recovery-speak text, by Sandra St. John. \$8.95, 1994, The Goddess Express, 6860 Gulfport Blvd. S., #920, St. Petersburg, FL 33707.

The Menopause Industry: How the Medical Establishment Exploits Women — an important exposé of hype and hardsell, encourages trusting our own bodies, by Sandra Coney. 1994, Hunter House, POB 2914, Alameda, CA 94501-0914.

Lesbian Choices — a dyke philosopher examines how we construct identity and social relationships, how we frame our ethical dilemmas, by Claudia Card. 1994, \$29.95 (cloth), Columbia Univ. Press, 562 W. 113th St., NY, NY 10025.

Adventures in Lesbian Philosophy — 18 dykes address ethics & eros, love & justice from a generally academic perspective, edited by Claudia Card. 1994, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, IN.

The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman's Tales of Alienation — short stories by a "single, educated woman" set against the background of the Lebanese Civil War, by Daisy Al-Amir, translated by Barbara Parmenter. 1995, \$8.95, Univ. of Texas Press, POB 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819.

Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature — a blend of “cultural geography and literary analysis ... on the struggle between Palestinians and Israelis over a land that both divides them and brings them together.” 1994, \$9.95, Univ. of Texas Press.

People of the Noatak — a reprint of the early '60s illustrated journal about “life among the Inupiat” by a white woman who appears to have been respectful and respected, by Claire Fejes. 1994, \$15.95, Volcano Press, POB 270, Volcano, CA 95689.

Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America — a special issue of the *New York Folklore* magazine, with half lesbian content. 1994, \$12.95, New York Folklore, SUNY, 735 Anderson Hill Rd., Purchase, NY 10577.

The Next Step: Lesbians in Long-Term Recovery, Out From Under Volume 2 — 18 dykes dealing with addictions, edited by Jean Swallow. 1994, \$9.95, Alyson, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Amnesty — a first novel exploring intimacy and childhood, by Louise A. Blum. 1995, \$19.95 (cloth), Alyson.

One Teacher in 10: Gay and lesbian educators tell their stories — a few more men than womyn tell their stories in this resource, edited by Kevin Jennings. 1994, \$9.95, Alyson.

Sister Stew — multicultural fiction and poetry by 49 women writers, many based in Hawaii. 1991, \$10, Bamboo Ridge, POB 61781, Honolulu, HI 96839-1781.

Lesbiōt: Israeli Lesbians Tell Their Stories — a remarkable collection of 21 oral histories taken and coordinated by Tracy Moore and edited by 19 other lesbians, reflecting a deep community involvement among both Israeli and U.S. dykes. 1995, \$16.95, Cassell, 387 Park Ave. S., NY, NY 10016.

Daring to Dissent: Lesbian Culture from Margin to Mainstream — U.S. and British dykes write essays on creativity and the media, edited by Liz Gibbs. 1994, \$15.95, Cassell.

Announcements and Classified Ads

PUBLICATIONS

CONMOCIÓN, revista y red revolucionaria de lesbianas latinas, a new national publication with 100% Latina lesbian vision, seeks writings and art by Latina lesbians in Spanish, English or Spanglish, any form. Subs: \$13 for 3. Info: 1521 Alton Road #336, Miami Beach, FL 33139.

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. Land dyke networking since 1983. Sub: \$10/4 issues. Single issue \$3.50. *MAIZE*, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

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

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

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

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.

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

VAMPIRE JOURNALS, a new lesbian & bisexual quarterly, seeks writers and readers. Send SASE for guidelines, info to: The Queen, P.O.B. 681, San Leandro, CA 94577.

VIRAGO, a new quarterly for lesbian veterans, seeks all forms of writing. Queries: POB 1171, New Market, VA 22844.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

BLACK LESBIANS' COMING OUT STORIES — all forms for anthology. Send to Lisa Moore, POB 861, Decatur, GA 30031. Deadline: June 30, 1995.

Lesbian couple constructing anthology based on **FIRST-TIME EXPERIENCES OF LESBIANS**. Interested? Write for info: POB 458, Monroe, MI 48161.

QUEER WOMEN ABUSED BY WOMEN — an anthology of writings about lesbian date rape/sexual assault, lesbian battering, and special emphasis on childhood sexual abuse by female perpetrators. Deadline: June 1995. 5-7 pages. Send w/ SASE to Tamar Avishur, Anthropology UCSC — Women's Center, Santa Cruz, CA 95064. Please no calls. Will send response card.

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.

QUEERS R US: anthology of ephemera — 'zine, posters, fliers, newsletters — that deserve a bigger audience. Material and queries to: D. Gould, 4646 N. Winchester Ave., #2, Chicago, IL 60640. E-mail: erand@bates.edu. Deadline: May 1, 1995.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE — 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.

RIPENING LESBIANS, an anthology, seeks all forms from all dykes on growing older. Queries, submissions w/SASE to Tirzah Gerstein, 85 Newbury St., Hartford, CT 06114.

LESBIANS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN — good and bad, sought for anthology. Women's Press, #233-517 College St., Toronto, Ont. M6G 4A2, Canada. Deadline: June 30, 1995.

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.

DISABLED WOMYN'S WRITING — "dykes, two-spirited, bisexual or transgendered" — particularly work by womyn of colour — sought for anthology edited by Shelley Tremain, Women's Press, #233-517 College St., Toronto, Ont. M6G 4A2, Canada. Deadline: May 15, 1995.

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

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/RETREATS

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS; CULTURAL, INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL (R)EVOLUTIONS — 16th Annual National Women's Studies Association Conference, June 21-25, 1995, Univ. of Wyoming. Info: NWSA '95, Women's Studies, Ross Hall 405, UW, Laramie, WY 82071, E-mail: WMST@UWYO.edu.

"COMPLICATING CATEGORIES: WOMEN, GENDER AND DIFFERENCE," 10th Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 7-9, 1995. Write for info: 1430 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138.

PREVENTION OF HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA — put on by The Vermont Conference on Primary Prevention, Inc., June 14-17, 1995. For info: UVM Conferences, att: VCPMP, 30 S. Park Dr., Colchester, VT 05446, 800-639-3188.

WOMEN LEADING: TODAY AND TOMORROW, national conference for college women student leaders, June 8-10, Washington, DC. Info: NAWE, Ste. 210, 1325 18th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036

THE LIFE AND LEADERSHIP OF ELIZABETH CADY STANTON: A Centennial Celebration of The Woman's Bible, keynote by Gerda Lerner, Oct. 6-8, 1995. Info: V. Fowler, Dept. of Religion, Columbia College, 1301 Columbia College Dr., Columbia, SC 29203.

GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS COALITION INTERNATIONAL 16th annual conference, June 30-July 3, 1995, at the University of California at Los Angeles. Details from GLPCI'95, 7985 Santa Monica Blvd., Box 109-346, West Hollywood, CA 90046.

THE FATE OF FEMINISM: IS THERE A NEXT GENERATION? S. Conn. State Univ. 5th Annual Women's Studies Conference, Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 1995. Info: V. Neverow, Women's Studies, SCSU, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515, E-mail: neverow@scsud.ctstateu.edu.

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.

GAY & LESBIAN BUS TO OVETT, MISSISSIPPI, May 26-30. A work and demonstration weekend at Camp Sister Spirit. Call or fax Wanda & Brenda Henson at (601) 344-1411 for info.

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.

COTTAGES AT HEDGEBROOK — A Retreat for Women Writers grants cottages and meals for writers for a stay of up to three months. Application deadlines: Apr. 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.

AD(VENTURES)

NANCY EVECHILD: a professional, well-respected psychic reader, teacher and healer in private practice since 1988. Insightful, useful, in-depth readings available by mail on tape. Call or write for brochure. 3608 14th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55407, (612) 729-5984.

SALLIE & EILEEN'S PLACE, vacation cabins for women. POB 409, Mendocino, CA 95460, (707) 937-2028.

RED RIVER, 100% Cotton Menstrual Pads, comfortable, ecological, economical. Made by Land Dykes. Write for brochure: Red River, Box 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

SUPPORT

AILEEN WUORNOS DEFENSE COMMITTEE postcard campaign to demand a new trial for Wuornos. Postcards to: Florida Supreme Court, 5th Judicial Circuit, 300 S. Beach St., Daytona Beach, FL 32114. Call 415-995-2392 for more info.

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

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

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.

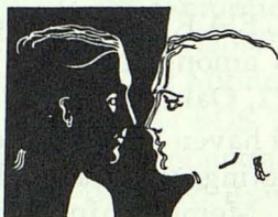
LESBIANS IN CRITICAL NEED have been sending us increasing numbers of requests to run announcements for their personal funds. Instead of printing these individual appeals, we urge you to contribute frequently and generously to local organizations. Imagine if we just told you your childhood best friend, 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.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ada Joyce, who was in prison in Mississippi, and whose correspondence was quoted in SW #51, wants you to know she's free!

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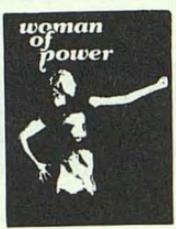
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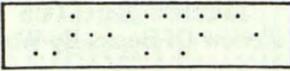
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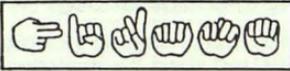
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- #54 **Lesbians & Religion:** explores questions of faith and community from many directions (Elana Dykewomon's last issue as editor).
- #53 **Old Lesbians/Dykes:** guest edited by 9 old dykes, features the work of 38 womyn over 60, including Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon & Sally Miller Gearhart.
- #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.
- #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.
- #35 **Passing.** Investigations into trying to appear other than we are.
- #34 **Special Focus on Lesbian Visions, Fantasy, SciFi.**
- #33 **Special Focus on Wisdom.** Lesbians of Color, non-violence, war stories, incest, leaving a will, assimilation & The Real Fat Woman Poems.
- #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 Beirut*** by Jill Drew, a book on being in Beirut in 1982.

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).

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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 6 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 needs 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*.

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