



Sinister Wisdom 71

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Summer 2007

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

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Submission Guidelines

Submissions: See page 128 for themes. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org for updates on forthcoming issues. Please read the guidelines below before sending material.

Material should be sent to the editor or guest editor of the issue. Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Writing and Art Guidelines: Please read carefully.

Material may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, material must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. **GRAPHIC ARTISTS** should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300dpi for photos and 600dpi for line drawings. TIFFs are preferred. Please do not send large files electronically – send each photo separately. Include a 3-5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed.

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, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. Because many of our readers are in prison, we cannot include explicit sex, obscenities, or art with frontal nudity. No sado-masochism.

Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored. We are looking for guest editors for future issues.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and psychiatric institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes.

Enclose an extra \$10 to \$50 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). * Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. * Please consider organizing a benefit or subscription drive for *Sinister Wisdom* in your area.

A Journal by and for Lesbians

Contents

Fran Day	Notes for a Magazine	4
Joan E. Biren	Tee A. Corinne Prize	5
Robin Reinach	Normal	6
Virginia Harris	Spirals and Butterflies	8
Lenore Chinn	Affirmations	9
Lisa Castro-Smyth	The Song You Know by Heart	10
Lisa Castro-Smyth	Teach Me the Old Names of Things	11
Sandy Tate	Interview with Annie Soper	12
Marva C. Edwards	Ever Wait	18
Marva C. Edwards	I Listen	19
Susan Hawthorne	Patriarchal Grammar	19
Verlena L. Johnson	Sister Outsider: In Memory of Audre Lorde...20	
Jean Taylor	International Lesbian Day: October 8	21
Saundra Tignor	Welcome Ye Comely Daughters of Africa	25
Shaba Barnes	Combating Ageism: An Organization or a Movement	26
Patricia Kimura	Mother	33
Anita Cornwell	Quotes from <i>Black Lesbian In White America</i> ..38	
Lenn Keller	Welcome to the 21 st Century: A Feminist Butch is Not an Oxymoron	39
Morgan Gwenwald	“Hello There, Remember Love”	46
Francesca Roccaforte	Dancing the Tarantella	49
Cheryl Moore	A Winter Poem	50
Cheryl Moore	Writing Desire	51
SDiane Adamz-Bogus	Colossus of the Pacific: “La Mujer Y La Osa”..52	
Virginia Harris	Random V	59
Alix Greenwood	The Pit	60
Matu Feliciano	You Moved Your Heart in My Direction	63
Joan Annsfire	Before Moving On	64
Virginia Harris	Scrap Attack IV	65
Mona Oikawa	Manitoba Winter	66
Mona Oikawa	Cooper St.	66
Octavia Butler	Writing Science Fiction	68
Morningstar Vancil	My Immigration Story	69
Lola Lai Jong	Excerpt from “Dedicated to the Children”	70

Lola Lai Jong	Faith	71
Kathleen Allen	For Bobbi	72
Jean Weisinger	Photography: An Act of Love	73
Sasha Churchill	Untitled	74
Batya Weinbaum	Reflections on Lesbian Feminism as Inspiration	75
Chrystos	While There's Still	82
Merle Woo	Yellow Woman Speaks	84
Lovel Waiters	Daisies	86
Virginia Harris	Star Box	88
Natasha Carthew	Through Bars	89
alison	Untitled	90
Win Weston	The Photo Shoot	91
Stephanie Barnes	With an Orchid Tucked	94
P.E. MacDavid	Sgt. Dorothy	94
jody jewdyke	An Interview with Lily Yuriko	95
Bea Lieberman	my body came back to me	101
Bea Lieberman	the books are stacked	102
Julie Enszer	Enter Mary Daly's World: Amazing and Graceful A Review of <i>Amazon Grace</i> by Mary Daly..	103
Lori Lake	Recent Nonfiction Resources Spotighting Older Lesbians	107
Contributors' Notes		110
Books Received		119
Ads		120
Back Issues		126
Subscription Information		127
Upcoming Issues: Call for Material		128

ART

Verlena L. Johnson	Journey	Front Cover
Roxanna Fiamma	Photo of Gopher Snake	3
Virginia Harris	Spirals & Butterflies	8
Lenore Chinn	Affirmations	9
Verlena L. Johnson	Spiral Woman	10
Sandy Tate	Photo of Annie Soper	12
Verlena L. Johnson	Sister Outsider: In Memory of Audre Lorde ..	20
Keli Enzweiler	Photo of Shaba Barnes	26
Tee Corinne	Photo of Anita Cornwell	38

Lenn Keller Self Portrait 39
 Francesca Roccaforte Clouds 48
 Virginia Harris Random V 59
 Virginia Harris Scrap Attack IV 65
 Mona Oikawa Self Portrait 67
 Jean Weisinger Photo of Octavia Butler 68
 Diane Pfile Photo of Lola Lai Jong 71
 Jean Weisinger Self Portrait: The Power/Pain of Knowing 73
 Jean Weisinger Photo of Chrystos 83
 Jean Weisinger Photo of Merle Woo 85
 Virginia Harris Star Box 88
 jody jewdyke Photo of Lily Yuriko 95
 Nancy Nau Baby Blue Butterfly Back Cover



Gopher Snake.
 Photo by Roxanna
 Fiamma.

Notes for a Magazine

This Open Issue of *Sinister Wisdom* features many writers and artists new to the pages of the journal; we enthusiastically welcome each of them to the SinisterWisdomhood! These new voices along with those of some of our regular contributors combine to bring us another exciting, empowering issue. Thank you to everyone who helps us celebrate Lesbian words, ideas and images.

A special note of appreciation goes to Judith Witherow and Sue Lenaerts for all the love, dedication and energy they devoted to guest editing *Sinister Wisdom* 68/69 “Death, Grief and Surviving.” They also organized a series of readings held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Northampton, Massachusetts; Shepherdstown, West Virginia; and Takoma Park, Maryland as well as a radio show on WPFW Pacifica. #68/69 is an immensely profound, magnificent issue! Judith and Sue have given a significant gift to our community and we thank them for their hard work and devotion to Lesbian culture. Judith is an active, supportive member of the *Sinister Wisdom* board of directors and Sue is doing a beautiful job as our web designer; go to www.sinisterwisdom.org to view her work and to check on our latest updates. Be sure to read the News Page which includes announcements of events, photos of recent readings, and current information of interest to our community.

I was recently interviewed by Kit Kennedy for Betty’s List regarding *Sinister Wisdom’s* 30th Anniversary. To read the interview go to www.bettyslist.com and look for Conversations with Kit Kennedy (Archives).

For those of you wondering how you can help *Sinister Wisdom* celebrate her 30th Anniversary and beyond, there are many ways to get involved:

- Organize a 30th Anniversary Reading/Celebration in your area
- Encourage your friends, libraries, and bookstores to subscribe
- Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions
- Organize a benefit or subscription drive for *Sinister Wisdom* in your area
- Become a sustaining subscriber by adding money to your subscription
- Put a notice in local papers and newsletters
- Help spread the word at events, online, etc

Fran Day
Sebastopol, California

Tee A. Corinne Prize for Lesbian Media Artists

Moonforce Media has awarded the first Tee A. Corinne Prize for Lesbian Media Artists to Shani Heckman. The \$1,000 grant will be used to support the production of a feature-length documentary video, *America's Most Unwanted: Stories of Hope from Former Foster Kids*. Heckman aims to change our view of foster children as people who end up destitute and dependent. The documentary will focus on wards of the state who have become accomplished adults and show us their strategies for survival. Heckman is a former foster child and orphan who says she is inspired to make this film for her own personal exploration and survival, as well as to share stories of hope with young people trying to succeed without parental support or societal encouragement. *America's Most Unwanted* will also investigate the special challenges to gay youth in state care.

We want to thank all of you who helped make this inaugural grant possible by brainstorming with us, by making financial contributions, and by publicizing the Prize. We hope you will support the second annual prize, so we can continue to honor Tee's legacy and make a difference for lesbian artists. Please pass on the news below. Grant applications for 2007 are due on Tee's birthday, November 3rd. Donations may be sent at any time to: Moonforce Media, PO Box 13375, Silver Spring, MD 20911.

Contact Information: JEB (Joan E. Biren) <http://www.jebmedia.com>
E-mail: Moonforce.Media@starpower.net

Thank you to the following supporters for their generous donations to Sinister Wisdom: Diana Cerise, Corey Deckerman, Marianna deFrancis, Emile D'Orsay, Roxanna N. Fiamma, Sheridan Gold, Diana Grayer, Ruth Mountaingrove, Rose Provenzano, Lauren Ravi, Margaret Reilly, and Irene Weiss.

Robin Reinach

Normal

Sitting alone in the psychiatrist's reception area, I felt quite grown up. It was 1968; I was twelve, and the appointment had been my idea. *Emma*, by Jane Austin, lay open in my lap; my legs swung back and forth, my navy knee socks slouching. A white noise machine filled the room and enveloped me. Turning a page, I glanced up to glimpse my reflection in a mirror. With a stab of shame, I remembered I wasn't Emma Woodhouse, the classy British heroine, but a chubby and freckled, frizzy-red-haired girl from New York City. There in the mirror was my soiled Lenox School uniform—navy tunic with a yellowish splotch—and my short-sleeved shirt with the Peter Pan collar.

Moments before, I'd felt graceful and smart like Emma. Reading had helped me forget my physical self with its visceral sense of wrongness. *Could a psychiatrist heal that wrongness?* I turned away from the mirror with its image of a girl I couldn't bear to be.

"Robin?" A bespectacled man emerged from a short hallway. "I'm Dr. Lasker." He gestured me to follow him.

Nervously, I stumbled into the doctor's book-lined office. Bumping into the analytic couch, I thought, *stupid, stupid* and hated myself for clumsiness. Flopping onto a leather easy chair, my sweaty thighs glued to the surface. I dreaded the noise I knew would result when I peeled my skin off that seat.

Dr. Lasker's office smelled of tobacco; beside him was an end table with a pipe. But I was used to overflowing ashtrays and the stale, rank odor of smoke. Cigarettes were plentiful in my parents' home; in just two years I'd start smoking myself.

Over his glasses, Dr. Lasker looked at me, offering a half smile.

Was I supposed to start? I wondered, shrugging an apology.

"Anything you say will remain between us," Dr. Lasker finally said. "Our session is confidential. Do you understand?"

"So you won't tell my parents?"

"Not unless I believe you're in danger."

I recognized the loophole through which the doctor could drop my secrets if he chose.

"I understand you're in eighth grade?" he said next, after a few moments of silence.

"Uh-huh." This wasn't how I'd imagined our session.

Another pause and then he asked, "How's school going this year?"

“There’s this teacher, Mrs. Bennett, who I like very much,” I blurted. I’d been preoccupied with Mrs. Bennett all year; the ruminating was painful.

“A teacher,” he said, reaching for his pipe.

“Yeah.” I looked to his face for encouragement. “I like her too much,” I forced out fast, as he struck a match. “I’m in love with her,” I added in an urgent whisper, shame spreading through my chest like a wet stain.

The doctor’s mouth puffed on his pipe. His face was neutral, but the quiet between us seemed a live presence that could suffocate me.

“She got pregnant,” I rushed to fill the empty space. “So did the two teachers I loved before her.”

To my surprise, Dr. Lasker didn’t comment on the coincidence of three pregnant teachers in a row. Of course, he hadn’t seen their ripe fullness.

“I keep falling in love,” I forced myself to continue.

Who else could I tell about this? “Mrs. Walker, Mme Reme, Mrs. Bennett. The first two left school and forgot about me.”

“What do you mean?” The doctor’s tone was level. His unblinking eyes seemed blind to my yearning. Between us, grew a cloud of smoke.

“Mrs. Walker went first, to Canada. I wrote 52 letters, but she never wrote back—not even once.”

Who wrote that many times without getting a reply? It was weird and unrequited. The longing that welled up in my chest when I remembered Mrs. Walker’s face was creepy too. I wasn’t supposed to feel that way about anyone.

“A lot of girls have crushes on their teachers,” the doctor told me. “It’s normal.”

But even at twelve I knew the intensity was too much.

Why didn’t Dr. Lasker see that? “I wrote to Mme Reme too,” I pursued, still hoping to make him understand. “She was my French teacher before moving to Thailand. I even called her once long distance.”

“Did the French teacher write back?” he asked evenly.

I nodded, but it hadn’t really helped.

“Well, that’s better, isn’t it?” He knocked his pipe against the ashtray and then dumped the charred tobacco out.

“I guess.” *How could I explain about the loneliness that nothing seemed to assuage?*

“At your age, these crushes are normal,” Dr. Lasker pronounced, refilling his pipe while I squirmed in my chair.

So he couldn’t help me. The rest of the session I answered his questions, pushing down the emptiness and turmoil inside.

“Is there anything else?” the doctor finally asked, smiling, setting his pipe down.

Then the secret thing flew into my mind, but I realized our time was ending. No matter—the private act I did in the bathtub was impossible to share. It was shameful as my longing, confusing as my crushes, yet deeply compelling. I'd discovered a way to position myself beneath the faucet so the rushing water enticed me to orgasm. At twelve, I'd never heard that word or been told about masturbation, but I knew enough to hide the act.

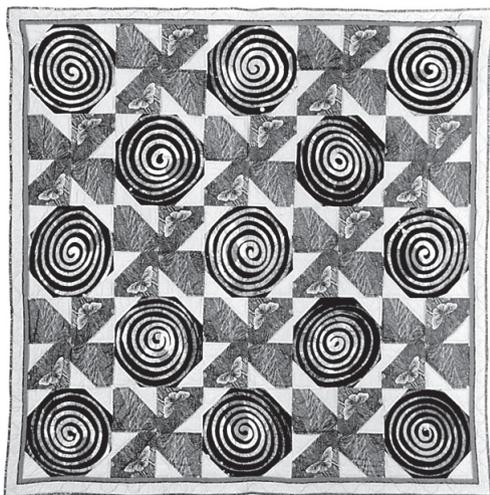
“Don't worry if there's something you didn't say,” Dr. Lasker reassured me when I was quiet. “Everyone keeps something back.”

I hugged my shoulders and coughed into the thinning pipe smoke.

“I don't think you need therapy,” the doctor chuckled, rising to usher me out of his office, sending me back to a life full of feelings I had no idea how to hold.

Virginia Harris

Spirals and Butterflies



66 X 66 inches. All cotton. Batik and natural print. Air-lite polyester batting. The pattern is called Lightning. Machine pieced, hand quilted. 1992.

This quilt pushed my sense of “order;” an order imposed by society, pushed my internalization of the ways things “should be.” These two prints were not consciously chosen to push the limits of my “order,” they came together more for their similarities, the differences in movements of these two prints added excitement.

Art in the Embassies Program, Geneva, Switzerland and Malawi.

Lenore Chinn

Affirmations



Affirmations, 36 x 48" acrylic on canvas, ©1996
(Painting of Jean Weisinger)

Affirmations reflects an amalgamation of cultural experiences, perspectives and aesthetics. The ethnic and cultural artifacts in this cross-cultural fusion of traditional and modern textural contrasts link identity and imagery. Created as a double portrait of African-American photographer Jean Weisinger, this work celebrates, honors and acknowledges the strength and power of women artists of color.

Rooted in human rights advocacy, my positive and provocative images restore cultural difference to center stage. Employing an Asian aesthetic of sparseness and clarity with clearly delineated crisp lines, subtle luminosity and negative space, *Affirmations* is the latest in a continuing series exploring multicultural themes.

Lisa Castro-Smyth

The Song You Know by Heart

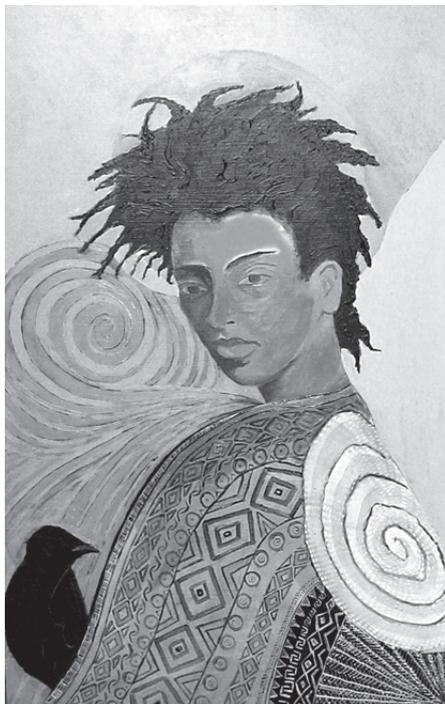
The song you know by heart

*I want to write a poem
that could feed you
maíz for your hunger
meat and onion
con tortilla*

*warmth
to hold you safe*

my voice to call you home

*my arms will be the song
you know by heart.*



“Spiral Woman,” by
Verlena L. Johnson

Lisa Castro-Smyth

“Teach me the old names of things”

“Teach me the old names of things”

I want to know how to speak my avó’s land.

Because pão

is not bread

and queijo

not cheese.

I know these things

But do not know

*how to name the birds, the clouds, and the dance
of that mountain*

*that makes my mama cry when she is close to it
and cry when she is far away*

O mar salgado

*surrounds the islands,
different from*

*any other salty ocean near
any other place.*

My tongue,

eager but clumsy,

hums but does not sing

as you play fado,

upon longing guitarra,

and I catch familiar lines:

...meu Portugal

minha rua....

vila franca...

lips grasp

for a music

that I remember but do not understand

except by watching my mother’s tears

except by feeling

saltwater inside my throat.

Sandy Tate

Interview with Annie Soper November 7, 2006

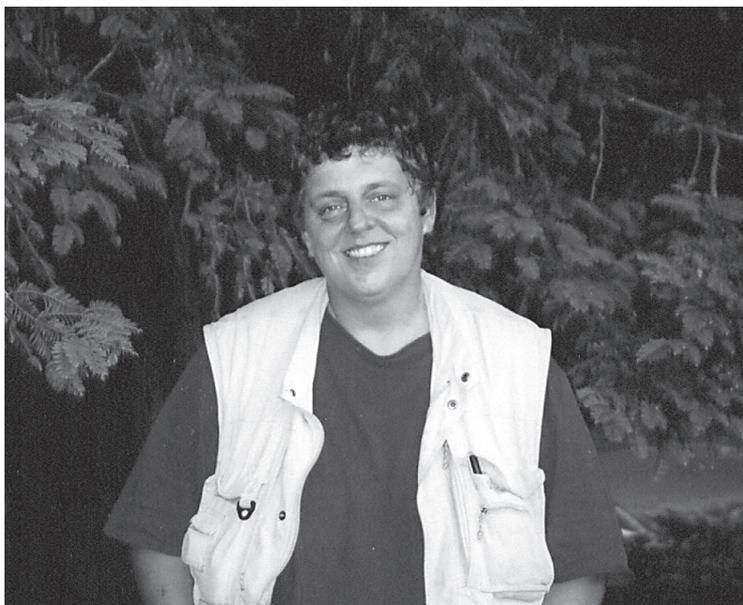


Photo of Annie Soper by Sandy Tate.

Sandy: Annie, you've done such a variety of things. I would like to find out about some of them. Recently, you mentioned that you had a moving business. How did that come about?

Annie: Since I came to California I've done a lot of different jobs and I've always had a woodworking business, but I've never turned down any other work, especially if I could help my friends out. As part of my construction business. I'd move to places where I could get work and fix houses up and stay in the area. I was in my twenties and carefree. I moved from Mendocino County to Sonoma County, and down to San Francisco, and further to Los Angeles, or up to Seattle. I had a truck and I helped many friends move. I gathered a lot of moving material and had women help me pack friends up, and it just seemed natural to continue in that line of work. Then the California Public Utilities Commission decided that they were going to regulate movers and it became illegal to advertise in the local paper. I enjoyed going around the country and exploring places. I've moved people to some really interesting places in the United States. I had no place that I

called home. I think it helped me settle down a lot too because I knew I wasn't going to be going to college and going to Europe, so the moving business helped get the wanderlust out of my system. I was dyslexic (before they discovered that word), and my mother was told by a fourth grade teacher that I'd never learn to read, so I made up my mind that if I couldn't learn to read I'd have to learn a trade.

Sandy: Fortunately, they were wrong and you read very well. You're very generous. If anyone needs help you're right there. Today, you're going to take a friend in a convalescent home out for ice cream. It seems to me that you love doing for people. Where did you get that kind of ethic?

Annie: From both my mom and dad I got an incredible work ethic. My mom had been an officer in the military and my dad was a lifer in the army. When they married my mom retired but didn't like staying home and raising a family. I got the work ethic from my mom. She was a school teacher for 27 years, and my dad had various jobs including running a service station near our small town in the Pine Barrons in southern New Jersey. I always remember my parents going to work. My mom had done her part in the military and been stationed in a number of places in Europe towards the end of World War II, and once she had a house and family she decided she wasn't going to move again. I can't call myself a military brat because I went to the same school from the time I started school until I graduated. It was the same school my mom taught in, so I never got a note sent home about the damage I was doing in class. I heard about it at lunch time. My sister and I walked to school, while my mother went to school by herself, because that was her alone time and she valued it. At the time I didn't get it, but now I get the 'alone time' part. My mother also brought sick kids from her classes homework at their homes. One of the kids didn't believe he was going to die because as long as the teacher brought him homework, he was going to live to be going back to school. I think I got a lot of that from her.

Sandy: Do you consider yourself working class?

Annie: Very much so. If somebody's on strike at a company I don't cross the line. I learned that from my mom who went without a phone for two months because employees of the local phone company were on strike. And I respect that.

Sandy: So your mother was a positive influence in your life?

Annie: Yes. The first book that I remember her reading to me was Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring." Mom was a conservationist before I knew what the word was and an environmentalist before the word was coined. She had seen a lot of what had happened in Europe during the war and that

affected her profoundly. My Grandma-at-home helped raise me and was another positive influence. She came to live with us because my mother worked outside the home. My grandparents were deaf so I learned sign language to communicate.

Sandy: You are so open, honest and ‘out there’. I find it refreshing and unusual. Where did you get that from? Was it from your parents or did you just evolve into that?

Annie: I think I evolved into it because I spent a number of decades living as a hermit just really isolating.

Sandy: Was that deliberate?

Annie: Yes, I grew up in Jackson Township, New Jersey, the largest township in the U.S. but went to a really small school, and I had the social skills of someone who came from a small town without a lot of experience, and I left home the day after I graduated from high school at age 16. I came out to California and worked in Fort Bragg for Louisiana Pacific as a choker, which is a person who puts the cable around the log to take it out of the forest. I was so young I had no idea how dangerous the job was, or how stupid I was for taking it and I stayed there for two years. When I learned what the logging companies were doing to our landscape with their major clear cutting in the seventies. I decided never to work for them again.

I also worked part time as an apprentice for a cabinet maker which I’d been doing since I was very young. Both my grandpa and my dad were woodworkers. During my early school years I only had to attend school about 3 hours a day and the rest of the time I liked being productive. I was tall for my age, 5’ 9” and had free time. From the time I was eleven years old I got odd jobs around town. Everybody who hired me set an example of the work ethic that rubbed off on me. I got to be really creative and had on-the-job training.

I joined a wilderness guide group named ‘Rites of Passage’, and did some fasting and soul searching out in the environment in Death Valley. It was minimalist camping because they don’t believe in bringing a lot of supplies with you. It put me in a new direction and reoriented my compass so that I wanted to travel and leave the least mark on the environment. Once I started learning more and more about the environmental movement through different people like Judi Bari and Bonnie Raitt and other local women in Mendocino, I started being responsible in the cabinet-making shop I was working in. I asked the owner if we could find out where the wood we’re buying comes from. I was apprenticing with a master craftsman in his eighties who was open to asking that. Shortly after graduating my apprenticeship I started my own company.

Sandy: When did you discover you were Lesbian? And when did you come out?

Annie: I was in a relationship before I knew what the word was. I realized that the way girls looked at boys and felt about teen idols of the day was not how I felt. I wasn't aware of the feelings I was feeling, but I found out 20 years later, the two girls in school that I was attracted to were also Lesbians. That Lesbian radar was working in ninth grade. I never had the slightest attraction to males. When I was 9 and my sister was 6, as we were laying out in a field looking up and making pictures out of clouds while our parents were fighting, we swore to each other we were never going to have children. And I never had that biological mother instinct to have children.

Sandy: So you're a lifelong Lesbian.

Annie: Lifelong Lesbian. At 17 years I had my first Lesbian relationship in Mendocino, California, and we were partners until a motorcycle accident separated us in 1982. But it wasn't until 1979 when we were at the Women's March in Washington, that I connected the word Lesbian with what was actually happening in my life at the time and my loving women. I've been one of the Lesbians that have been sending in my donations and receiving Lesbian Connection since the first issue, which I'm very proud of. Of late, I haven't been to a lot of events because of my health, but I've loved going to women's festivals. When Lesbians talk about coming out, I don't really feel like I have a coming out date because I've always been out. I've never been closeted. On every construction crew I've been *the woman or the Lesbian*. Usually I'm accepted for who I am.

Sandy: What other ways have you earned money besides woodworking, logging and moving?

Annie: Before my brain injury I used to think that the name of my next company would be "I Show Up," just because I'll show up. I've removed deceased animals from under people's homes, I've relocated animals who've been trapped in houses, I've sealed up homes and barns that were invaded by bats and built other homes on the outside that the bats much prefer. I've washed dishes, apprenticed at a number of trades and graduated to Journeyman and Master Cabinet Maker, and never had a contractor's license because I've always had enough work.

I recycle wood that people throw away and have collected so much that one year I made 62 cutting boards. I won second place at the Sonoma County Fair by entering some of my woodwork, and my self confidence in my skill level went way up. I don't have the fine motor skills that I once had but the joy that I have in creating things leads to what people see as my being spiritual.

I worked for the California Department of Forestry, earned a CDF certificate and was a firefighter for awhile and enjoyed fighting fires, but not being part of medical assisting. In 1994 I became involved in working at Pole Mountain Lookout and had found my niche, being an isolationist. My mother joked, saying it was the only job she ever knew of where I worked well with others. It was one of the first times where I wasn't working for a corporation or a nonprofit; I was working for my community 3 days on and 3 days off and loved it.

Sandy: You're reliable, ethical, you do good work and you show up.

Annie: Yeah, and if I don't know how to do it I'll get somebody for you that does and I'll stay there and learn how myself. I've done that for a number of women, just showing up and being there with them while the guy comes and repairs an appliance, just because they don't feel comfortable knowing whether the guy is gonna overcharge them or replace a part with the right one.

I've rebuilt vehicles as a hobby. I had a 1958 pickup truck. I prefer vehicles that I work on pre 1965, pre fuel injection and pre-fanciness. I think it's important to educate ourselves about how things work. Anything mechanical fascinates me.

Sandy: In a recent email you said, "I'm much more than a survivor; I thrive."

Annie: I've never liked the term 'survivor'. Rape survivor is part of my past history as is cancer survivor. I just love life. Survivor seems like a limiting word to me, and thriving seems like I'm open to the universe instead of trying to protect myself and just survive. Surviving seems like it takes an incredible amount of energy and thriving is opening my arms to the universe, being in the moment and growing and feeling that sunshine on you. Take it all in. Just receive.

Sandy: You seem like a very spiritual person.

Annie: To be how I am out in the desert or the mountains or some place where I find great solitude with the earth, under the redwoods or sitting at the coast watching the sunset; all of those things are great spiritual moments for me. I find great joy in the sun coming up every day even though when I go to sleep I doubt it will. And it does!

Sandy: How does your brain injury affect your life?

Annie: I belong to a group called ABIS (Acquired Brain Injured Students), many of whom lost their occupations. I've been lucky in that I remember how to be a woodworker, although I don't have the fine motor dexterity anymore. But my biggest problem has been I can't get hired be-

cause of insurance that won't cover my brain injury, even though I still have skills. I can take on some small jobs and that's been at times an education of what my abilities are, and a real confidence builder. I was the first woman to receive the Stanley Tools Gold Hammer of Merit for industrial arts wood-working in high school in New Jersey.

Sandy: Do you like music?

Annie: I love jazz, classical and women's music. Because of my hearing problem I prefer instrumental music. I lost the ability to read music or play a musical instrument. I've made musical instruments—guitars, drums and dulcimers. I also had the pleasure of making three small harps, and I dream of one day making a full-size harp.

Sandy: You genuinely like people, don't you?

Annie: I like to compliment people and also like to do favors for others. It instills a sense of pride and friendship. I want to laugh as much as I can and smile at every person while making eye contact. I'd like to be remembered as a person who gave a friendly smile when someone needed it, that's good enough for me. My lifelong goal is to be the best friend I can be. I try to live in the moment and be prepared.

Marva C. Edwards

Ever Wait

*Ever wait
For morning
To enter a room/
A day?*

*Ever wait
For the sun to
Peek in your window?*

*Morning comes
Whispering thru the window
The birds begin their songs.
The quietness of life
At its first breath,
Present finally.*

*After a long night of despair
Morning reminds me
That the light
Is always coming
At the end of
A dark night.*

*The light will come/
And I have faith
And know that grace,
When the morning comes.*

Marva C. Edwards

I Listen

*I listen for your voice
Riding the wind
On quiet winter mornings.*

*Your voice is
A ray of sunlight moving thru
The starkness
Of yet
Another
Gray
Day.*

Susan Hawthorne

Patriarchal Grammar

*A way of knowing that all you know
is all there is to know*

*A way of speaking so that everyone
else knows to remain silent*

*A way of being that lets you walk through life
oblivious to the pain of others*

*A way of making asymmetric war
against the powerless*

*A way of using your body as a weapon
and then calling it love*

Verlena Johnson

Sister Outsider: In Memory of Audre Lorde



Sister Outsider: In Memory of Audre Lorde. Graphite 10" x 8," 1992 by Verlena Johnson

In 1990 Audre Lorde came to Madison, Wisconsin when I was a student at UW-Madison. While she was visiting the university, she asked if there was a Black lesbian organization in town. There was – BLISS (Black Lesbians in Search of Self). We held a dinner in her honor and she spent time talking with us. I remember her being kind. “Sister Outsider” depicts me gazing into a mirror and seeing Lorde gazing back.

Jean Taylor

International Lesbian Day: October 8

The first time I heard about a special day for lesbians was at the Lesbian Conference in Melbourne in 1990 when a young dyke stood up at the closing plenary session and announced that lesbians at a conference in South America had designated 8 October as International Lesbian Day (ILD). Although years before the very radical Women's Department of the Australian Union of Students had promoted 1983 as the 'International Year of the Lesbian,' none of us in Melbourne had ever heard about such an exciting concept as ILD before. So nearer the date, and on a roll from the highly successful Lesbian Festival and Conference we'd just organised in January, some of us got together to celebrate our first ILD.

As the headline story by an unnamed member of the editorial collective in the first issue of the local lesbian newspaper *Labrys*, 5 November 1990, explained: "As lesbians we need to find each other. We need venues and events where we can all meet and receive affirmation of our identity as lesbians and have our sexuality totally accepted. INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN DAY (ILD) is such an event. It is public affirmation of our acceptance of ourselves and each other as full, visible members of the wider community and as lesbians."

ILD was not only an opportunity to promote lesbian visibility and solidarity, it also provided a forum for discussion and an exchange of lesbian information as well as the chance to entertain ourselves. As such, we wanted a show of out lesbians on the streets, a public rally, entertainment, stalls, dancing and whatever else we could come up with.

Can you imagine lesbians taking over the City Square in Melbourne on a Saturday afternoon? Lesbians of all ages, shapes, sizes...about 200 or so lesbian wimyn were there to publicly celebrate our visibility and to affirm our contribution...It was exciting, fun, strengthening and gave me an overwhelming sense of belonging and pride.

The rally began with me speaking of our involvement as lesbians in the wimyns movement and how it is just being recognised and publicly affirmed. Luan then spoke about the herstory of the city square and apologised to the Koori wimyn for standing on their land as the city square is an ancient burial ground and belongs to the Aboriginal people.

NICE GIRLS DON'T SPIT then declared themselves as a lesbian band, thanked the lesbian and homosexual contingent of the police force for their

support of us and then gave us a fantastic performance that included everyone. Their version of *Pretty Woman* changed to read *Dirty Lesos...* had everyone laughing and dancing, an amazing sight in the city square.

We then went on a march resplendent with banners proclaiming 'Lesbians are Lovely' and 'Lesbians Standing Strong.' The general theme during the march was that there is a lesbian in every family, your mother, sister, daughter, grandmother, child or unborn child, and that we have and will continue to exist throughout all time.

There were many other lesbian events happening round the actual date itself. I was performing in a play with Amazon Theatre called 'Spot the Dyke.' I was a member of a C-R group for lesbians over 40 talking about ageism, and I was also one of the organisers of the forthcoming LesFest in January 1991, amongst other lesbian things. So the closest we could get to the day itself was 13 October, 1990, for the lesbian market day at the Collingwood Town Hall, with market stalls, the Aboriginal trio of musicians, 'Tiddas', speakers, skits by 'Voice of the Heart' and readings by performance poets 'Tongue and Groove' during the afternoon. This was followed by a lesbian dance that evening with the bands Olive and Molly, Sleight of Hand and Little Sister.

The ILD rally was held in the City Square the following Saturday, 20 October. There were not a great many of us but those of us who were there felt empowered to be openly on the streets and in public spaces holding the banners for everyone to see, including 'Lesbians Are Everywhere,' as we marched round the city in like-minded and enthusiastic lesbian company.

The following year, 1991, even though many of us were busy rehearsing for the first Women's Circus end of year show, Amazon Theatre were making a video of their latest play, *Dykes of Our Restless Daze* and some of us were also organising the next National 10/40 Conference (for lesbians and heterosexual feminists over 40), we went a bit more upmarket and celebrated ILD with a Lesbian dance at the San Remo Ballroom on the evening of 4 October with two womyn's bands, Franz Tram and Little Sister, providing the dance music.

The following day, 5 October, we held another rally in the City Square with speakers on a range of subjects including the need for safe sex and the use of dental dams. I wrote a longish 'Lesbian Poem for International Lesbian Day 1991' especially for this auspicious occasion which ended with these words:

'we'll go on the march
then we'll go home

and we won't forget
 that we were here
 yesterday
 and today
 and here tomorrow because
 we're here to stay
 there's no stopping us
 now
 as we rise up in our strong
 and beautiful bodies
 to claim our place
 as lesbians
 freely loving lesbians
 every time
 every place
 everywhere
 lesbians'

This was followed by the usual march round the city streets chanting 'we're here and we're queer and we're not going shopping'.

At the beginning of October 1992, I had not only fallen and broken my coccyx during rehearsals for the Women's Circus show, I was rehearsing with Amazon Theatre for *Undercover*, a lesbian mystery, and my own one-womyn show, *Matri-Spiral Descent*. On top of all this, I was one of the organisers of the Lesbian Festival 1992, and we had decided to open the LesFest '92 with the third ILD rally and march at 12 noon in the City Square on 10 October 1992. I introduced the speakers and performers and others spoke on the open mike.

As I put it in the local lesbian magazine *Lesbiana* no 9 November 1992:

'I didn't quite manage to go on the march, but I was at the ILD rally with around 150 other lesbians, where we listened to speeches from Kate and Luan, songs from Elizabeth and an open mike for comments from the crowd. I do enjoy being able to say the word lesbian over a PA in the City Square. I came away feeling quite reaffirmed and encouraged by this most public event on the lesbian calendar.'

I would like to be able to say that here in Melbourne we have celebrated ILD in a similarly public and affirming way every year since then. But this has not been the case at all. On the contrary. After three full-on years of ILD activities there was no more energy and interest as well as money to fund any more of these events so there have been no regularly organised ILD

activities in Melbourne for a number of years now. However, when I think about it, between rehearsing for the end-of-year Women's Circus show, and everything else going on in our community, was it any wonder? I was actually arriving in Perth, Western Australia, for the National Lesbian Conference and Festival, *The Journey Home* on 8 October 1993. In 1984 I was again in rehearsals with Amazon Theatre for a play about breast cancer, *Della*, performing in yet another Women's Circus show and organising a 25 anniversary celebration of the Women's Liberation Movement in Melbourne. And so on. It was so full-on during the 1990s that lesbians in Melbourne, quite frankly, didn't have the time nor the inclination to organise one more lesbian event, however significant and affirming it was.

However, ILD has since caught on interstate and several activities, mainly lesbian dances, have continued to be organised in most capital cities on or around 8 October for years now. For example, Lesbians Incorporated in Sydney still traditionally presents their grants to lesbians at a function on 8 October to commemorate ILD. Even in Melbourne, there was an ILD dance held on 8 October 2005 as part of the Lesbian Health Across the Lifespan Conference sponsored and organised by the Lesbian Cancer Support Group. More recently here in Oz there have been attempts to find out the origins of ILD. What prompted lesbians to choose 8 October as a day of significance to us? Are there other places round the world that know about ILD and do they too celebrate on 8 October? A web site: <http://www.nrg.com.au/~wow/ILD.html> poses almost as many questions as it answers but does give a timeline of probable connections. If any or all of these questions can be answered, we Downunder would be mightily interested to hear the answers to this mystery that so captured our imaginations here sixteen years ago.

We might not be up to organising a big event nor waving banners nor willing to find the time to celebrate this important day on our lesbian calendar these days in Melbourne, but I have, however, always written ILD down in my diary every year as a reminder. It still gives me a thrill to see those initials written down, knowing what they stand for. And every now and then on 8 October when my friends and I greet each other with those significant words: 'Happy International Lesbian Day' I feel connected all over again to myself, my community and that international lesbian sisterhood we hold so dear.

Editor's Note: Please send information about International Lesbian Day events in your area to fran@sonic.net.

Sandra Tignor

Welcome, Ye Comely Daughters of Africa

Welcome ye comely daughters of Africa, descendents of conquering queens and proud princesses. For it is here you can begin to quench your thirst for empowerment, succor your scarred souls, refortify your armory to continue the struggle for liberation, and renew your spirits in the ambiance of exchange and connection.

Come, feast your eyes upon rich, rainbow hues of ebony, mahogany, teak and golden ivory. Your ears will be softly assaulted by the alto'd voices of your sisters rising and falling in the cadence of debate and discussion. Rejoice in the strength of their softness and pleasure in their perfumes.

For it is here in these halls and chambers you may experience the force of collective sisterhood, view the leadership of transplanted dark-hued feminism and lead or follow as is your need.

Written to welcome African-Heritaged women to conferences and gatherings.

Shaba Barnes

Combating Ageism An Organization or a Movement



Photo of Shaba Barnes by Keli Enzweiler

I was feeling pleased with our successes, and proud of our accomplishments when I noticed a dropped stitch beginning to unravel. Another way of saying it is, I found that the words of inclusiveness in much of OLOC's printed material exclude some of our most productive and concerned members of our Lesbian community.

As a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, the only organization of its kind in the world that I know of so far, I have always been proud of its work and purpose. It is an organization founded for Lesbians 60 years old and older. The organization was created to help identify and

educate others around issues of ageism and other oppressions and to create opportunities for Lesbians over a certain age to get together with their peers and celebrate their lives. It seemed like a noble endeavor, it was something that would improve the quality of life for everyone eventually. It was an instrument put in place to serve Lesbians and feminists especially as they got old.

In our process of meetings, discussing and educating others and ourselves we learned that many Lesbians are victims of internalized ageism; some of them are within our ranks. Internalized ageism is the act of being old and an ageist (discrimination against the old and often middle aged) and not realizing it, denying it or feeling that those feelings are justified based on the accepted norms. An example would be someone who refuses to tell her age or subtracts a few years off her age; those individuals who are afraid of aging or see negative connotations for being as old as she is, and prefer the hype offered by our youth oriented society. This is false evidence appearing real or FEAR; She is in denial by discounting the truth or importance of sharing her present age fully. One way that we in OLOC have learned to combat this is by identifying ourselves with our name and age when writing or speaking in public. By sharing our age we let others know that this is how old we are and we are proud to be this age. Ageism is entrenched in every facet of our society; it often requires hours of Consciousness Raising just to realize ageist remarks and ways to challenge them.

This pivotal point in Herstory that we are now approaching is the first wave of Graying Americans reaching the retirement age; many are coming out of the closet so fast that closeted is now a verb, as well as a noun. We are living longer, healthier, more productive lives. The numbers are swelling with Baby Boomers; many Lesbians and feminists are now approaching 60. Some are newly retired, and some like the energizer, never missing a beat continue working in their chosen profession; some start a new career, travel or just look forward to enjoying the fruits of their labor. They are questioning the status quo and what has been built in the LGBT community. Baby Boomers are not the only ones, but younger women-loving-women and feminists are also saying, "Don't exclude me. This is what society has done for many years, now you, my sister, are telling me that I cannot belong because I am not old enough." How are we going to respond? What is fair, reasonable and right?

I receive emails regularly from Lesbians who are mostly in their 50s. They usually begins with a request for more information on how can they join. When they learn that OLOC is for Lesbians 60 and over, the tone of

the conversation sometimes turns into a confrontation. The conversations are interesting and remind me when I was making a similar analogy under the same circumstances to a Lesbian over 60. I remember in the mid 1980s saying “The issues and the politics are just as vital for me as for those over 60, that I feel 60; I am a victim of ageism.” I always remembered to respect the viewpoint of the founders and since 60 was the age that was agreed upon I was content to work within that structure or as implied, start an organization to meet my needs.

It was during the planning for the First West Coast Conference in Southern California in 1987, I thought it was the best thing since Ice Cream. Although I was only 51 or 52 years old, I took it upon myself to spread the news, to find Old Lesbians. Since many were invisible to me, except for those in my circle, I attended a luncheon by and for Lesbians in a swanky hotel in Hollywood. Always the optimist, I thought, surely I would find some Lesbians over 60 there or friends or partners of Lesbians that age.

Everyone at the luncheon was very friendly. I was given the microphone to make my short announcement. I shared the name, purpose, dates, and location of the Conference and asked if everyone would do me the honor of giving me referrals of those who may qualify so we may invite them. I also distributed flyers to share with Lesbians over 60 years old and their partners. We were inviting them to celebrate our lives together. The audience were Lesbians who appeared to be in their 30s to early 50s. The response was surprising and disappointing. I heard many denials and a few giggles. “No, I do not know any Lesbians over 60,” or “May I come? I would like to meet an Old Lesbian with money,” and other remarks such as that. I was appalled. I could not believe what I was hearing. But I was not giving up. I then began asking around in my place of business. I asked people I came in daily contact with if they knew any Lesbians over 60. One person that I asked referred me to a coworker whose partner was over 60 years old and retired. When I asked her if she knew anyone who may be in that age group and Lesbian, she quickly denied being Lesbian or of knowing any Lesbians. I was an out Lesbian and I did not consider that someone may be threatened by me outing them. The task that I thought was a piece of cake was crumbling.

Here we are now 19 years later and being accused by some of being ageist and exclusive ourselves. What happened? What if we had noticed the dropped stitch sooner? What would we have done? Is it wrong to invite only Lesbians 60 and over as members? Is it wrong to want to enjoy the company of those whom we consider our peers? It is ironic that there are some of us who experienced ageism years ago who are now demanding membership.

What does a member do that a supporter does not? Both the supporter and member are always encouraged to do the obvious: challenge, confront ageism, and speak in favor of the old Lesbian making decisions for herself. A supporter or Lesbian under 60 years of age is invited to attend the Gatherings if she comes with her partner who is 60 or over. Or, she may come as a companion of or caregiver for a participant. At our last Gathering, we had many Local Lesbians in their 50s working alongside of older Lesbians as volunteers. Your age qualifies you for membership.

Many changes have been made since those early days. I realize that working to change the negative attitudes directed against Old Lesbians has gone from an organizational level to a movement. The thoughts of addressing ageism by young and old are spilling over everywhere. There are several over 40 Lesbian Groups that I know of and a few over 50 groups. I am sure there are many more. I am referring to completely independent groups that are not a part of OLOC, although OLOC does have some local groups around the country. What I am witnessing today has surpassed my greatest expectation. Lesbians in their 50s and younger are questioning our rights to limit inclusiveness to OLOC to Lesbians 60 years old or older. This is becoming more frequent and the debates more challenging from Lesbians and women in all walks of life. Our continued response is we exist to fight ageism and to recognize the contributions, lives, needs, activities, and abilities of Lesbians who are often ignored or treated as invisible in their own communities, or in the communities where they worked and dedicated much time and talent. Membership is now confined to Lesbians 60 years old and older, or after your 59th birthday.

We, each of us collectively, have so much to share and give. If one way does not work for us, we will try another. We have opportunities waiting. We are sisters after all. Reach out and befriend an Old Lesbian in your community. Show that we care for each other and with the improved changes we desire for others, we shall benefit ourselves as well. After all, you are the Mothers and Daughters of civilization.

OLOC is an organization like other organizations, with a make up of purpose, policies and a system of its own that the body of members support. A Movement does not belong to any one group; it is strengthened by race consciousness and it is usually a large group that is the most visible within that movement unless or until it is integrated into an even larger movement. Within a movement, each person or small group of people participates as her level of interest dictates. We become a part by an action that leads to success for the movement. It could be letter writing, marching, attending

meetings and taking action on many other levels. Ageism and aging, an organization in the early 1990s grew into a movement in the 21st century, with the growth of collective consciousness. We are in the midst of a movement that needs the support of everyone to confront Ageism and its many negative relatives of ism's from our individual point of reference.

It occurred to me one day to view this age thing differently. Instead of under 60 versus 60 and over, I decided to explore by decades. I remember being 51 and told that I was not old enough. I had 9 years to go. I respected the decision made by vote and stayed around to support them with needs that I could fulfill. My experiences were making me look at my age. I was no longer as popular. I received less and less invitations. The job market was less plentiful. When I ventured into a Lesbian Night Club, I found myself ignored more and more. It was like I became invisible. During my 60s, I did have many changes in my life. There was retirement and searching for a place to live in a Lesbian Community, relocating, and relocating again. I cannot leave out the health issues, becoming a full time caregiver, challenging financial loss and finally, getting the hang of the aging process and what I could expect from my changing body. I created new goals, restructured my environment and my life; I presently celebrate the temporary. I am in my 71st year now. I am feeling more positive, more directed and confident. I am constantly learning of the vast communities of Lesbians, and their rapid growth. During each decade some issues were greater than during another decade. There was so much going on that I find it beneficial for me to deal with the present issues that are often broken down into decades, and into smaller more workable groups. This is less creating more. When we create smaller groups, we create many more working groups; more small working groups with same ideas and goals generate stronger results and greater productivity. This type of growth is indicative of our strength, the feminine power that we all have and express in unique ways. This power will be defined as we recognize and respect each other more, as we unite to correct our basic needs.

I had been active in the Civil Rights Movement and in NOW. 1986 was my first experience as an activist for Old Lesbians and I had a lot to learn. Learning and sharing the works of prominent women in the movement validated all that I experienced as a Lesbian under 60, active in a Lesbian over 60 activity. I was fortunate enough to have a mentor who was admired by many, and she gave me the confidence I needed to continue my involvement in this cause.

Organizations are not so flexible. As an organization we can create policy, procedures and an endless array of documents. As a movement, OLOC is

proud that we have a vested interest in being on the cutting edge, in taking on the task of confronting Ageism.

A movement is an idea that is embraced during a certain period in history. You cannot sit at home doing nothing and share your belief in the movement to be a part of it. You can sit at home making phone calls and flyers, writing brochures and announcements, sharing with others the most effective moves in supporting the movement. It is a series of combined actions, many combining or overlapping another. No dues are collected unless you become part of an action plan that needs to raise funds.

But no one can set up guidelines for how a movement will be played out. I remember when Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. were barely on speaking terms. Their passion was deep in their demands for equality, yet their actions and beliefs were almost opposite. Eventually, they were able to rise above those differences for the good of the people. This synergistic effect was good for everyone. The women's movement that was very much a part of this consciousness grew out of the efforts of this work.

What I am witnessing today are those among us, who like many of us in the 60s and 70s, will not be silent; Lesbians, and women who speak to the concerns in their hearts and minds. With the coming wave of more old Lesbians/women than ever on the face of the planet earth, it will take a movement to meet those needs. From the four corners of the earth, Women loving Women and feminists are recognizing their strength and controlling their destinies.

Each woman still has much to give, whether we/she realizes it or not. For time immemorial we give of ourselves, it is our nature to give to such basics as raising grandchildren, working full time, being caregivers, and volunteering; our contributions to the arts are phenomenal. We are giving on physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental levels as laywomen and professionals. We give from that root mother within us, that Divine Feminine that calls us to nurture and support others. It is time to open our hearts to offer, to share, to understand and reciprocate with recognition of the needs of the old, hopes, and desires; we ask you for your support, your voice and gifts of your own in our quest to erase ageism in the LGBT Community and society at large. Acting positively on the most insignificant opportunity can make great differences in the quality of life for others near and far. Listen well to each other with the openness that's deserved. Let's discard the value judgments, by allowing acceptance and grace to flow throughout our various struggles; expect respect and openness that encourages healthy growth among us all.

For this no organization is needed. What is needed is that collective thought, that collective push that propels us to unite our energy into a forceful synergy and stand as so many women have done in the past, together and on purpose. We could offer our support to a community project, write letters to our elected representatives, and there are all sorts of groups and organizations to join. Monitor and respond to ageist propaganda in our healthcare, media, in our political arena, in our social life, in our home at every opportunity. There is much to do and each of us has an important part to play. I recommend that we continue to address our own ageist behavior and the behavior of those around us; use the opportunity when you come together with friends and associates to have discussions on finding ways to challenge ageism.

OLOC makes their own greeting cards because there are so many ageist cards or lack of favorable cards for older people in the stores. Learn more about OLOC by purchasing our Newsletter or visiting our website: www.oloc.org. If you are an artist, share a poster, a card, artwork designed with OLOC in mind. Support our sacred space and time with each other. Become part of the movement by becoming active on a project of your own creation. There are many organizations and materials to help you if you need it. Speak up in your classes about the need for others to support this effort. Question leaders in your community; ask how they will help to improve the quality of life for the LGBT community. Never allow anyone to crush your dreams. Be mindful when you hear someone say, “She does not look her age at all.” Sure she does, she is who she is and that is her age. Ageism is not our only oppression. We still have a menu of others. Racism, Sexism, Classism and the other entire range of isms is still alive and hanging around. We just found a new ism in our old age.

Combating Ageism. Is it an Organization or a Movement? There is work for each of us, in one or both. One may be better suited to our situation than the other. We have a choice. Which one do you choose?

Shaba Barnes, Co-Director

National Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

age 71

Shaba may be contacted at smokeyb2196@msn.com or www.oloc.org.

Patricia Kimura

Mother

*You have come to bring us succor, soup
 You say to me
 "Tell me that you had to do it this way"
 The soup you bring
 beans, soy beans, natto
 The food my father ate
 the food you hated
 and learned to eat
 Foul, slimy
 food now made into soup.
 Familiar, warm, I drink it in.
 I wrap my arms around your neck
 and whisper
 "I had to do it this way"
 I kiss your cheek
 And now I begin*

I. Abandon

*My mother, hours old,
 was found beneath a set of palms
 in the heat and blistering dust*

*Your mother whispered the lie
 "Shikata ganai, it cannot be helped..."
 shaking her head to parry devils
 "The baby has died."*

*Beneath the palms, along the roadside
 You lay still
 Never uttering a sound
 A natal pact, made inside, to hide from ghosts, obake,
 to end a curse
 meant for
 your mother.*

*I wonder if
 The ocean wind traveled lightly over grass and sand
 to clear the dust from your newborn face*

*I do not know how long you waited
wrapped in an old white rice sack*

If curious bees touched your ears

*If you could hear the waves, laughing, fearless
pounding warnings on the beach*

*I do not know
You never say*

*Your eyes only lighten
with the story of
rescue.*

II. Rescue

*Your scent
dense, clotted, mixed with brine
travels the clearing trades*

*A scent
unfamiliar to me*

*I want to taste the salt of it
Pull it in
I lift my head
Licking the warm sea air*

*She lets me lead
Our wagon is empty
No heavy tins of water and fresh made tofu
or stacks of burnt cut cane
or piles of cloth and rolls of thread*

*She lets me lead
I pull us closer*

*I stop and shake at these blinders
Searching to find you
Fear and curiosity struggle and mix
A few more steps*

*The smell of devils
still surrounds you
I snuffle closer*

My breath warns them away

*I whisper in your ear
“Never trust secrets, never trust lies
Always keep secrets, always keep lies.*

These are wards against devils”

III. Return

*Reeds of wavering white incense
dance and swirl
becoming large single puffs
as you clap
once, twice, three times*

*Your glasses slip as you lower your head
and fall asleep*

~

*Through whispered words,
hands lifted you up*

*Was the air hot, dry?
Trade winds rough against your skin?*

*A woman’s voice, not your mother’s,
loud,
a rehearsed incantation
“Ah so sad, I have lost my baby
But look, Charlie, here she is, this is my baby.”*

*Did he look at you
his hooves stammering in the heat?
Did he tell you not to speak?
“Not yet, not yet.”*

*Did you know what to say?
Told secrets in the womb
When to recite the words*

*This woman's hands, not your mother's,
pinched at your feet*

"Now" he whispered "now"

*"Mama
Come find me."*

IV. Beginning

*You say "It will rain soon."
Your eyes peering through the jalousies
past the flat and pointed roofs
that shape our neighborhood
to the curving flanks of the Waianae Range
that rim this dry Waipahu plain*

*The mountains harbor clouds that turn
and curl in a particular way
I cannot read
But you say
"Let's get the laundry off the line."*

~

*Your voice, what did it sound like?
Did you keep your part of the bargain?
Did you cast the right words to spell the curse
meant for your mother?*

*You remembered the horse, your friend long after
your mother
disappeared*

*"Ah Charlie" you would say and clap your hands in delight
your hair white
as you would tell the story*

*I could feel his soft brown skin
under your tiny hands
The moist snuffles on your thick black hair
as your fingers wrote silent messages on his cheeks*

*Did you know your mother would be waiting for you?
Standing by the road
Waiting for you to be delivered again*

*I do not know
You never say*

~

*The smell of rain drifts in,
as thick wet red dust slides
from the mango leaves.*

We carry in the laundry.

Anita Cornwell

Quotes from *Black Lesbian in White America*



Photo of Anita Cornwell by Tee Corinne. Tee A. Corinne Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries.

“...if there’s ever to be a true revolution for the liberation of womyn, Lesbians will have to make it.” p. 119

“We sisters must save ourselves. The Sisterhood is Powerful. So Power to the Sisterhood!” p. 114

“...if we want a new, egalitarian society, we are going to have to join together with womyn of all races and build it ourselves, plank by plank and brick by brick.” p. 29

Lenn Keller

Welcome To the 21st Century: A Feminist Butch is Not An Oxymoron



Self-Portrait by Lenn Keller

Coming into your gender identity is a complex process that can for some happen over night, take years, a lifetime, or maybe never happen. But, looking back over my life, I can see why it was particularly difficult for me to claim being butch when I first came out as a lesbian. It was in the beginning of my career as a young dyke back in the mid-seventies, that I quickly learned that butches and femmes were personae non-grata in the lesbian feminist community.

The year that I “came out of the closet,” the gay liberation and women’s movements were then about five years old. I was a bohemian, black, single mom with a three year old daughter trying my best to be straight, and failing miserably at it. I was living in a building right off Lake Michigan on the northside of Chicago that was full of hippies and other assorted weirdos. I worked at an educational publishing company, and hung out with jazz musicians and artists. I had become involved with an eastern religion, and was just ending a year of celibacy, and going through the classic angst and confusion that preceded coming out back in those days.

I had been a tomboy all my life – feeling more masculine than a lot of boys I knew and having secret crushes on girls. I hoped my impending queerness was something I'd grow out of, wake up one day and be a nice, normal straight lady. Talk about fantasies. I thought because I enjoyed hanging out with guys, that there was hope for me. Being a pervert, on top of being a failed (i.e. non feminine) female, was something I just couldn't quite face.

From time to time, I made half hearted attempts at complying with compulsory heterosexuality. I took myself through excruciating gyrations in an effort to adequately perform my assigned gender role.

I'd do ludicrous things like pretend to like a guy who hung out with a guy who was hanging out with the girl that I wanted to be near.

A few years prior, when I was a teenage runaway, black political activist in NYC, I tried hanging with the “cultural crowd,” sporting the geles, bubbas and lappas with the best of the sistahs. But being a lifelong tomboy, I lapsed into wearing my geles with my t-shirts and Levis, and that didn't go over too big. So, I gave up on that scene and adopted my bohemian, eastern hippy “unisex” look.

By the time I was 21, I was just plain exhausted by the whole trying to be straight thing, and bursting at the seams. I was having recurring erotic dreams about women almost every night. The sexuality in the dreams was tame, yet powerful. Beautiful women would be kissing my forehead, and I would often wake up pretty heated up. The next morning I'd be thinking, “Okay, girlfriend, I believe you've got something to deal with here.”

Inching up on dealing with my sexuality, I engaged in covert conversations with my “straight” girl friends, where I'd try to be nonchalant, talk about Anais Nin, and ask them their views on bisexuality, hoping they'd say they thought it was cool. Despite the fact I lived in the city, I didn't know a single lesbian. I was completely isolated, and desperate for knowledge. Finally one day, I was walking downtown on State Street, when I saw two extremely gorgeous young black women gazing into each other's eyes and holding hands. A voice screamed in my head, “Yes! This is it. This is beautiful. This is right. This is who I am!” In that moment, I made the decision to come out.

Not long after that, I was browsing in Kroch's & Brentano's bookstore, when I came across a copy of *Sappho Was A Right On Woman*. After paging through it a few minutes, I knew I had to have it, so I took it up to the counter and endured the embarrassment of having the clerk think I was a lesbian. I couldn't get home fast enough to dig into it. I'm sure I stayed up half the night reading. At first, I kept it hidden in my dresser drawer, so that

my friends wouldn't see it if they dropped by. And soon, emboldened by what I was reading, I simply didn't care.

That book became my bible — it validated and affirmed me in ways that I had been desperately needing all of my life, and confirmed so much that I had thought about and wrestled with in my isolation. I dispensed with my bohemian, hippy unisex look, and proudly donned my flannel shirt, Levis and Frye boots, so the dykes about town, wherever they were could easily spot me. Everyone at work was shocked.

Things started happening real fast after that. I was tight with this cool black sistah who also worked at the publishing company. She was always going on about a girl cousin of hers that she said I should meet because she thought we had a lot in common. I didn't get it, but finally, the cousin who had been living in Colorado or somewhere, returned home. One day after work, my friend dropped by my apartment with her cousin, and I could not believe my eyes. Here was this foxy, chocolate brown sister with a big, wild Afro, and huge magnetic eyes. She was fine. She was very feminine and had a bohemian style. She wore bright red lipstick and had on a sexy dress. She was irreverent, brainy, witty, eccentric, sexy and flamboyant. I was immediately smitten.

I had a brief conversation with the cousin, during which I did my best to impress her with my knowledge about an esoteric jazz musician that was coming to town. I could tell she liked me, and she invited me to come over for lunch the following week. I accepted without hesitation. She lived about ten minutes from where I worked, so it was convenient for me to visit her during my lunch hour. The first time we had lunch, she made delicious grilled cheese sandwiches. We took them up to her bedroom to eat, and I was so turned on I could barely contain myself. I still wasn't sure if she was a lesbian, but sitting on her bed, we talked about everything, and I discovered that she too was a feminist. When she went downstairs to get us something to drink, I noticed a book laying on her bed. It was *Our Bodies, Our Selves, 1st Edition*. I picked it up, and it was open to the chapter on lesbians. Green light — taking this for a sign, I decided to make my move.

For reasons unknown to me, I felt completely confident in pursuing her. It didn't matter that I'd never been with a woman before. A couple days later, after a little nervous procrastination, I mailed her a sexy cryptic note asking for a real date. She wrote back a witty reply accepting. Sparks began to fly, and soon we were going out to the movies, for picnics and concerts. She took me out bar hopping, and gave me a tour of the bars in the city — what a mind blower that was to see all the different kinds of dykes and

scenes. She was a book junkie like myself and turned me on to lots of books including, Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation*, Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*, and the *Red Stockings Manifesto*. She was seductive and impossibly flirtatious. Being with her was incredibly exciting and inspired in me feelings that I had been trying to suppress since sixth grade, when I used to do dumb things like, run up to girls I had crushes on and punch them in the arm, or smack them on the butt. But, this time, I didn't have to suppress what I wanted to do, because I knew with every fiber of my being that all she wanted was for me to touch her.

It was weird too, because though we would have never said it, I was definitely masculine and she feminine. None of us dykes knew what to do with that kind of reality then, because our concepts of femininity and masculinity were associated with heterosexuality, and with traits that we had rejected, and considered undesirable. The ideal dyke back then was a perfect blending of the two energies. So, those of us who were considerably left or right of center, did the best we could to meet the prescribed standards of "politically correct" feminist dyke appearance and behavior. Despite what we would've said about it then, the yin/yang energy between us was unmistakable. And on a certain level we were forced to acknowledge it, but we just couldn't take the butch/femme thing seriously. To us it was a joke. There simply was no permission for us within the context of our "community" to claim those identities, and as a result, we were unable to express our true natures or deepest erotic yearnings.

A few of the typical things we heard about butch/femme was that it was counter-revolutionary and backwards — that all the butches and femmes were old timey lesbians who didn't know any better, and that butch/femme was nothing more than a ridiculous imitation of heterosexist gender roles. What P.C. feminist dyke in her right mind would want to perpetuate that? Besides, much of what I'd heard about what a butch was supposed to be was also negative — they looked too much like men, were macho, controlling, domineering, were sexist, gruff, uncommunicative, emotionally inaccessible, into car mechanics, motorcycles, and football, and couldn't cook etc. Not being able to relate that, I concluded I couldn't possibly be a butch. What a femme was supposed to be wasn't sounding all that great either. Femmes were supposed to be passive, sexually submissive, manipulative sell outs, who were not to be trusted. They wore lipstick, long hair, heels, nails and dresses only to gain special favor with sexist men and the butches who acted like those men.

It didn't occur to me and most of my peers who had been informed by that kind of thinking, that a feminist dyke could actually enjoy or be em-

powered by appropriating and performing codes of femininity and masculinity for personal expression and to signal desire for another woman. Nor did it occur to us that the terms, “femininity” and “masculinity” could possibly be neutral energies – neither good or bad, and unattached to biological sex. But, in our zealous haste to dispense with anything that even remotely resembled “the heterosexual model,” we were unable to see the butch/femme dynamic’s core erotic drive and separate it from the patriarchal social construction of heterosexuality. We were also unable to consider the possibility that the butch/femme dynamic could be an authentic, universal, erotic dynamic expressed between two lesbians or bisexual women, based on the exchange of and attraction to complementary sexual desires.

But, from time to time, I did get these little inklings that something wasn’t quite right. Take for example the time my first girlfriend and I were on a lesbian and gay speaker’s bureau gig at a local high school, and a teenage boy in the class asked me if I was the guy, and she the girl. Of course, being there to educate folk in the most P.C. fashion possible, I said, no, that we weren’t into playing roles, which was true, and that we were both women and in an equal relationship. But, I did feel a little busted, because I knew that what I was saying wasn’t the complete story. What else could I say? I didn’t know how to talk about who we were, and the not knowing haunted me for years.

And then there was the time that another girlfriend, a feminine white dyke, went with me to a card party in San Francisco. Everyone was gathered in the kitchen, and much to our surprise, was filled with butch and femme, mostly interracial couples our own age, in their twenties and thirties. Most of the butches were seated at the two tables, slamming down cards, cursing and laughing, and the femmes were either getting them food and drinks, or sitting on the side lines talking to each other or just watching. Though we ourselves were an interracial and for all practical purposes, butch/femme couple, we took in the scene, and gave each other one of those meaningful looks that said, “What the hell is this?” I knew a few of the folks there from around town, and one of the butches who was seated at the table greeted me. She looked me and my girlfriend up and down, and then asked me, “So, Keller, what’s your story?” What she meant was, did I identify as a butch. Surveying the room again, I looked at her, smiled and said in a somewhat superior tone, “No, I’m not into that. We’re not into roles.” She kind of laughed and rolled her eyes, and looked at me like “Yeah, whatever. You’ll figure it out.”

It took me almost two decades to figure out that butches and femmes were a valid minority within a minority, and that what I had seen in the

kitchen that day was a version of butch/femme that didn't work for me, and that I could be a butch in a butch/femme relationship that was radically conscious and feminist.

In the meanwhile, I was sexually active, having a number of intense and deeply intimate relationships with women who were all more feminine than myself, and almost all of whom were strong lesbian feminists. Still, I spent many confused and agonizing years suppressing my true gender identity and sexuality. Only in retrospect have I been able to see how much damage was done, and how much was sacrificed in those relationships by not being able to fully acknowledge and claim the true nature of who we each were and what we really desired with each other.

During the “sex positive” environment of the 80s, the heavily prescriptive 70s standards started loosening their hold. And those of us who had been suppressing identities not previously sanctioned in the dyke community began tentatively to express them. The “lipstick” lesbian phenomenon showed up, which I saw more as a career move, than an expression of authentic femme gender identity. I saw myself and other butches starting to gravitate more toward the women who were being emboldened by the whole “lipstick lesbian” thing and expressing their “femininity” in ways that few of them would have previously dared. Stuff was shaking on other fronts too, which also added fuel to our awakening. Lesbian feminist writers, cultural workers and activists from all over the country, like Joan Nestle, Leslie Feinberg, Jewelle Gomez, Amber Hollibaugh, Joanne Loulan, Margaret Sloan Hunter and many others who were challenging a lot of the assumptions that many of us had so readily accepted in the previous decade about gender identity.

By the mid nineties, clubs and other cultural events in the Bay Area had started to spring up, where butches and femmes of all generations could be seen out parading in full regalia. Butches sporting short cropped hair cuts, suits, ties, and femmes in dresses, makeup and heels. Not that these presentations and performances were mandatory or required to be butch/femme, but it sure was fun and liberating to finally be able to camp it up and to blatantly signal our desires.

So, ever the late bloomer, in the late nineties, out I came again — this time as a proud butch. I attended the Femme Conference in '98, and that was incredibly inspiring. The discussions that ensued from that event really lit me up, and things were definitely starting to come together for me. Embracing butch/femme has been since then a continuing process of becoming conscious of the ways that as lesbians and bisexual women, we've all inter-

nalized sexism, misogyny, and homophobia. What a wonderful thing it's been to discover, that I am still a lesbian feminist, albeit a reformed one, and this time, giving myself full permission to relate to the people I want, and in the ways that I want.

Being so much more my authentic self today, owning my butchness is exhilarating and empowering. Claiming my butchness, honoring and acknowledging it, I feel more attractive than I've ever felt in my whole life. I love being butch for a femme who appreciates it, wants it — gets it. Thankfully, I finally did figure it out that I am butch, and that to be a butch and a feminist is not an oxymoron — that I can be in a butch/femme relationship that is not sexist, misogynist or homophobic. I fully accept myself now as the femme loving butch that I've always been. It's great to be alive in the 21st century.

Morgan Gwenwald

“Hello There, Remember, Love”

I met her on the campus of a small liberal arts college in the far south. It was my first wild year away from home and I took great advantage of that safe and contained environment. I had a girlfriend or two, off and on. There was the woman I knew from high school, also enrolled there, and the Michigan hitchhiker crashing on campus, and the budding poet, and a world of possibilities strolling across the campus green every day. If pressed I would have admitted that I went to the first women’s conference held on that campus to cruise rather than for any feminist activity. I wasn’t even all that out, but then actions speak louder than words don’t they?

That was the year it all started to shift. And Ivy was a big part of it.

Kate and I rolled out of bed, late on Saturday morning, fortified ourselves with coffee and strolled to the conference. There was a large gathering of women in the main conference hall. An animated woman stood lecturing on the stage. There seemed to be a lot of off-campus women in the group. I have no idea what the topic of the workshop was, and probably didn’t know then either.

I saw her standing on the other side of the room, leaning against the wall. She was thin, sinewy, with roughly cut hair. A faded black t-shirt framed her angular face. I melted at the statement she made. A lesbian James Dean, a miraculous apparition in the early 70s. The energy around her sparked as she stood non-apologetically, a finger hooked in her jeans pocket.

In the go-around she said she worked in a nursery, in a nearby county. Perfect.

There was some silly getting to know you (and yourself) exercise. It necessitated partnering up. No one claimed her. I didn’t know then, how threatening a butch woman could be to a group of middle-class women. I casually approached her and asked if she needed a partner. She smiled and said yes. I suggested we go outside, to enjoy the sunshine and get a little fresh air. I grabbed a copy of the exercise handout as we left the room.

We sprawled out on the grass with the list of questions we were supposed to share spread between us. After the second or third CR type question, I asked her if she didn’t think it was pretty lame, and did she want to get lunch?

She did. So I snuck her into the campus cafeteria, something I had become expert at with the hitchhiker. I filled up a glass with local fresh

orange juice. She told me her uncle owned a small orange grove and described how the sucker branches had to be cut off the orange trees. By the end of lunch she had offered to show me her tomato garden and we were off in her VW Beetle.

I met her dad, who had settled in Florida years back after driving horses into the state. Her great aunt was also there in the rough hewn, unpainted shack. She pumped us some water in her kitchen, as she said pointedly to us, “you’re witches, aren’t you? You don’t need no dirty men,” and it wasn’t a put down. And they both had accents that reminded me of cockney, their roots went that deep. Her mother had died some years back after being institutionalized for most of Ivy’s life. She showed me her garden, I admired it, and her family.

When she returned me to campus I gathered up a sleeping bag and we snuck up on the roof of the music building. We spent the night talking and making love. In the morning when the workmen showed up to work on the roofing, using the handy ladder we had found the night before, they laughed at us. Caught. They were casual about it, then I realized they thought she was a guy. Of course.

On her next trip she brought me Boone’s Farm Apple Wine and a bag of pistachios. She told me about her experiences as a teacher in the Peace Corps, in the Returned Volunteers, and cutting cane in the Venceremos Brigade. I was entranced, I was touched. I knew about Cuba, having grown up in Miami, but she showed me another side. And besides being a Marxist she was a feminist. A relative had turned her in when she got back from Cuba, and she couldn’t teach any more.

So she was learning landscaping. And kept a small revolver in her car. She said it was her way out, if things didn’t get better. An old college friend had sent her the money for the conference.

Later that year we headed off to May Day in DC together, but didn’t get further than Atlanta, totally stoned and crashing at a friend of hers, who was married with a kid. The husband clamped earphones on my head and blew my mind with Firestone Theater, the voices and sounds moving through my brain, across that vast space, my head. We made love naked on her friend’s fur coat spread on the floor.

Ivy made it easy. She was loving, she was a teacher, she knew a lot. She was a walking example of the best of what we tried to do in those days. And it came from her experience. Me, it came from my mind and my heart. I could never claim the roads she had known, but I sang in the chorus, and became a feminist as well.

I moved back to Tallahassee and embraced the feminist community, at least many of the women in it. I lived in a women's group house near campus, helped found a women's bookstore, taught photography in the women's center, organized events and joined a collective. Along the way I had the most amazing non-monogamous time possible. But that would be another story.

Within the next year, Ivy moved out of my life. I am sad to admit we had an angry parting, and it was my fault. She thought I should leave college and do real political work. I wanted to keep hiding out in that privileged place, suspended in time, dreaming of better worlds. I was not willing to take the kinds of risks she did, I couldn't keep up with her.



"Clouds," by Francesca Roccaforte.

Francesca Roccaforte

Dancing the Tarantella

*Dancing the tarantella on the black sweltering street in the city of
San Francisco*

*Pridefully strolling, the paesanas pound the ground like the beat of
goat hooves*

ascending the craggy hills of our motherland, Italia

*Olive skinned fac'ia bella, redheaded daughters, garlic breathed,
spicy tomato-sauced,*

sesame-seeded, lovely fem'mina

Sorellas of Napoli, Sicilia, Calabria and Toscana

Link arms and do the tarantella

Rejoicing in the melodic sounds of our homeland

June, 1992

This poem was inspired by a march of several members of BASIL (Bay Area Sicilian Italian Lesbians), a group of women who meet once monthly to celebrate their culture via food, exchange of family stories, and lesbian pride. This year Giovanna, the co-founder and Mama of BASIL, Lynn, Annette, Teresa, Denise, Mary, Vincenza, Rosemary, Tina, Lucille, and myself marched through the streets of San Francisco singing, dancing, throwing pasta at the throngs of onlookers and merrymakers.

The crowds just loved us as we held our BASIL banner, sweat dripping down our faces from the heat of the day. Denise and Tina started dancing the tarantella and a few of us started clapping and laughing as I was shooting video and still film of this precious moment. We all got into this high energy and it was just a blast! Most of us were wearing black, the national color of Italians and I was wearing a tee shirt that said "Italian Girls Best in the World, Little Italy, NYC". I was wearing a tassel of red, white and green I brought from Little Italy. At first, I was wearing the tassel around my waist like a Middle Eastern dancer. Then I took it off and had it on a string and started waving at the crowds, giving them a mock blessing from the High Priestess of Southern Italian America! It was all great fun with Italian humor.

Cheryl J. Moore

A Winter Poem

*This morning the sun rises cold out of the ocean,
Lighting the shore streets and houses
Bound in new snow and a white breeze.
Random traffic animates the scene
As I watch for ocean spray.
Winter has been a bare sorrow,
Reading a few books, writing solitude.
No one comes to my room
So I scan the ocean for natural effect
That changes with my moods.
I am bereft in my element.
I cannot write of her
Or reason with clarity.
I wake, I breathe, I go to sleep.
I say yes to aloneness and without meaning
And her absence is an emptiness
That pervades my soul.
I pray only to bear the pain
As days beat on me.
The ocean does not matter,
But marks the ceaseless hour,
And light slowly passes
As I sit here and there.
She was my peace and joy,
Now a cry I cannot make
And the loss is a part of me,
Immeasurable separation.*

Cheryl J. Moore

Writing Desire

I want to write again – I am going crazy with it. All my letters and journals don't relieve the desire. Writing is an urgency; a loud voice. Perhaps it is a longing for words. I love words, especially ones new to me. What does mitigate mean? I am dying with the pressure I feel – the urge to create. I have nurtured and developed this urgency by writing poetry for over twenty-five years. Perhaps my neural pathways are engraved or embedded with the urge to write.

When I do not write I am lost and self-conscious. Then I feel that something is wrong with me, and I cannot shake the feeling. Not writing causes a fallacy of thought, and I strongly believe the illusion that something is very wrong. I become uneasy with living and myself, and this affects every area of my thinking. In my own way I am like Kafka, who didn't feel well. It's pretty bad. I seem to be losing my sanity when I don't write, because writing balances a force of energy within that insists on itself one way or a miserable other. The energy is constant, waking and sleeping.

I have dreamed about writing; the motion of language, and other dreams are little stories that seem to have structure and meaning. Writing does give my life undeniable meaning. I look at my days as being a narrative that will have a purposeful ending. The narrative quality develops after many years of imaginative writing. It becomes a philosophy within. That is the wonderful thing about writing poetry.

I have to be careful not to explain the thought to myself or to analyze it. Too many poets explain their philosophy and the explanation is dead on arrival and virtually unreadable. It's said that poets cannot write prose, perhaps because the poet analyzes her ineffable philosophy.

I also do not want to know how many poems I've written, because an artificial period is made that, for me, stops the flow of poetry. Some things are best left unknown.

When I am able to write, it is like driving across California's Mojave Desert in spring. All is well in a profusion of Joshua trees and sagebrush. I write the road's way to Boron and past Edwards Air Force Base that once was a happy place. A poem is the beauty of the floral and spectacular desert. I miss the Mojave Desert and I am always trying to express my grief. I'm writing my love of Edwards, nearly fifty years ago.

My heart never left the desert. I suppose I'll not see it again, but now I can write as I wanted to out west. Edwards and the Mojave were the end of my childhood, and poetry, my difficult maturity twenty-one years later.

SDiane Adamz-Bogus

Colossus of the Pacific: “La Mujer Y La Osa”

I. (1)
*Eurekan trails snake Southward down California’s stocking foot
Tracing the guises and symbols of La Mujer, sculpting her masks
and phenomenon,
Flowing—blazing—below nacreous, yellow-blue-red cumulus skies,
full and striated
Above the spoken rise of Mount Shasta to the spiritual crests of San
Bernadino.
La Mujer sweeps down and over sainted cities: Santa Rosa, San
Rafael, San Francisco,
San Jose...Santa Cruz where rosaries are prayed in archetypical
mission of remembrance....
Where statues of Fremont and Sutter, and busts of Naglee and Muir
pose in her stead
Weathered molecules of her blood and flesh squeezed into the iron
fabric of history.
They are proof of La Mujer as creator and creation, the flagrant signs
of her sapiens veil over reality.
Her stories chronicle the City of Angels where she once fed grapes to
dinosaurs beside Jurassic palms.*

(2)
*Her hair, veins on the map from Sacramento to San Diego, Pelican to
Imperial Beach...
Her face, a hallowed full moon, a bosom-born sunset, incandescent,
illusionary.
She is sole eveangel of exiles and artists, of children, the unsaved,
and the incarnate.
She inhabits culverts, rivers, aqueducts, undulates in shallows, in
deeper fathoms where goddess myths are born.
There young whales remember the song of coral-clay sung alike to
krill and moray.
Our Lady of Connection, Inspirator of every bridge’s span whose
steps measure and link
Blazing, dry Blythe (where last fall her feet) and the Pacific tides
where oft she bathes.
Like Egypt’s Nut, or the smile at Half Moon Bay she arches over the
distances and joins the entire state.
Immense is she, our Western Lady, palpable essence of this land,
both Alta and Baja California, and Sister to Miss Liberty.*

(3)

*Her winds unbalance gliding pelicans that follow gulping her balm
Low, they cruise her breezes, sweetly calling her name (as do small
fish they catch).*

*Pipers, terns, gulls and starlings, centurions twittering in code to the
knowing tortoises below.*

*All keep her hallowed secrets in their winged spirals of flight, a
formation: helix and versa vice.*

*Otters search beneath the whispering waves for messages dropped
in the fog:*

*A briny wisp, a tasty scrap, flotsam and jetsam of the electric eel....
In seasons, she disrobes, re-dresses behind a cloud, a ritual change
of habit*

*Then uncustomary crow at seaside, makes his own her omniscient
eyes.*

*Proud as mountains eagles, transcontinental as doves, crow cries
news of change*

*"All. All. All." from treetops, he alerts. "Es ella. Es ella. It's she that
comes!"*

*She passes, as comet, as shooting star, a stranger on the pier—
sometimes as hurricane.*

II.

(4)

*Her gusts rattle wailing branches, grapefruit thuds heavy against
the earth.*

*Clothed now as goddess, She rotates the zodiac and advances the
Equinox,*

*And who but her stellar companion awakens, falling West, growl-
ing their playful test:*

*"Who awakens, Polaris?" Says La Osa "Who but that Golden
Being—One that I have not forgot,*

*One I have not long seen." La Osa yawns wide and large, showing
teeth for every county.*

*Says La Mujer—her ever reply—"Who hears the windblown mantra
of the name some do not speak?"*

*"Who knows the amigas' journey and knows the Song of the Land
(which can never weep...)*

"Who wakes again to sing again, "¡Yo soy!" La Osa now joins in.

*Bound as one are they (as we) La Osa trundles constant at the
Lady's side, both communal as a tribe,*

*Grizzled belly swaying, great mouth huffing, they stamp monumen-
tal covering cities in a stride.*

(5)

*Mighty steps like the Sasquatch, their footprints never fade, they churl
the living rivers,*

And hollow out the bays

*Rarely claimed, unclearly seen, this awesome pair—but Earth quakes
where they step,*

the Lady and the Bear.

*In miscreant seasons the Lady brings early summer/fall; La Osa inhabits
winter/spring, avalanches, she stalls while melting mountain snow and
tossing stony hail. So the Lady dances in the hard sloppy rains*

and both delight in raising the grapes at Napa.

Before them cavort white impatiens like Mexicans Zapata freed

Grasshoppers race like quick geckos under the rough tumbleweed.

Hummingbirds from the North, eager, too, zip to the lowlands South

Scouting the route for the Lady's swallow entourage

*They ride inviolable currents—sacred lines between then and now—the
paths*

*Where the La Mujer y La Osa do walk—from ancient times to these days
modern.*

(6)

*Tall Lilies of the Nile, slender lavender, and squat sage, strain upward—a
vision quest..*

*But the Redwoods, posted like sentries, greet La Mujer, eye to eye from
Mendocino to Monterey.*

*Natal palms splay, offer La Osa fatted dates, shade from temperamental
sun and rain.*

*La Osa's breath makes faint hosts of golden poppies, and frightens the
frisky quail.*

*Her pungent breath meanders beneath the mottled wings of a dog-faced
butterfly*

(Whom La Mujer prefers to the Monarch, rare firefly or the lucky ladybug).

*At Santa Cruz, and at Santa Monica—on one leg stands a sand piper,
alert, vigilant.*

*And, so too, listening are the Central Valley vacas: heifers and indolent
bulls, flicking tender ears*

*As anxious as expectant mothers... searching the pasture's air, nostrils
moist, tails fanning*

*The message received is sent by smell to valley campesinos, who kneel
and kiss the furrowed soil,*

clawed by La Osa.

(7)

*It is La Osa who has partitioned the almond groves, excavated aque-
ducts, worked*

*the strawberry fields. She who has shaken the limes and oranges from
 the grower's trees
 She has given strength to the bending migrant, crouched among the
 lettuce heads, or pulling
 tomatoes from the vine.
 It is she who has rippled the Mojave into O so neat sand dunes, wrestled
 the Joshua Tree into form.
 Oh so big, Osa rears, dwarfing imagination, her growl a landside sound
 Inside cavernous jaws that hold the jabber of the city—morning 'til the
 sun goes down.
 Garbage trucks grunting, crashing bottles in the Tenderloin, roaring
 gangs in L.A.,
 Raucous crowds at Grauman's Theatre like the exodus to Burning Man.
 Her grizzly's bellow blows Sesnas quietly into port, and harmonizes with
 jumbo jets.
 Commuter trains screech the rails, barrel over bumping tracks, La Osa's
 favorite accompaniment
 (so the schedule rarely fails —except when the Cal Bears clash)*

(8)

*La Osa yawns a grizzly's gargantuan yawn, rears like the Kodiak,
 And bears down like a Polar on our iced over streams of thought.
 We know her common likeness; we keep her near but far, on a t-
 shirt here, a mascot there,
 in the window of a store
 See there in the forest, Smokey warding off a blaze, while Pooh and
 Yogi (in her place)
 pursue our banality.
 "¡ Yo soy!" says she like the Metatron, "I am!" again says she,
 Hailing us as would a trapper's horn, to look around and see.
 Auto horns, possessed by demons of rush and speed, grind in
 congested streams
 It is La Osa who blocks the freeway, protecting us with delay,
 patrols the roads and bridges,
 splitting the grid-locked spaces.
 Above the smog and stoppage, wreathed by the highest clouds the
 Lady, lays rainbows
 Florescent cable end to end, of the great middle coast between
 Arizona and Oregon.*

III.

(9)

*The embarcadero winds out before her, so too the Great Highway,
 She touches cottage spots, B&Bs, big hotels and little lone cafes....*

*A cosmic roll call of diners within who're deceased but never gone:
John Muir, Jack London, Herb Caen and César Chavez, it grows ever
long*

*Billy De Frank, Harvey Milk, Julia Morgan, Mary Austin and Madam
Winchester*

*Some who chat are transplanted seekers like sojourning, Ida Wells....
They eat the whole enchilada, drink Napa's fruit of the vine
Remembering blues festivals, black-tie politics, parades and uncivil
wars.*

*The gold rush is old news, slavery and annexation, too
Even the victory of the Union Pacific, that linked a divided nation
here to there*

*Is a social history that they tell but none speak of La Mujer or La Osa,
the bear.*

(10)

*But La Mujer is kind, towering over petty gossip, reconstructions and lies
Over battles, turning points, squabbles and the false vote of "ayes!"
She forgives us as rain rebirths the burned forest, saying, "I am-Yo soy-I
am."*

*As she passes, "All. All. All!" comes again the message from the crow
Whose flight she follows with omnipresent eyes, radical falling bird
Over the heads and into the lives of the people down below:
Pushing tomorrow's generation a girl-woman in frills and a bow;
Huddled in doorways bundles of shame their homes from night to night
Crowded masses at the bus stop trying to coerce the day
As do the fast moving financiers, abogados and hurried store front jefes*

(11)

*At the freeway edge, rags and tatters mendicants lift cardboard pleas
For money, for food, for work, for transformational grace
Mothers behind grocery carts filled with food and toddlers, bless
themselves*

*Men on bikes, long ago caballeros, ride toward casual destinies
Lost farmers call out, "Oranges!" "Strawberries!" "Fresh Cherries!"
Flea market traders spread velvetine art, flags, oils and rugs at her feet
Who has no product, incense or rings, offers stoplight window wash
and a dirty hand*

*At Venice Beach the stage-less act, the musical sing, trumpet, drum,
the tireless dance*

*La Mujer succors the faith of the lost, leaves wrapped food atop the
corner stand*

Strengthens the social worker who shelters the fleeing mother, crying,

"I am. Yo soy. I am."

(12)

Here, then a graspable legend leaning against street realities
 La Mujer y La Osa—hidden in plain sight—assert their Will to be
 When can the silence be broken, the plain-glorious truth be reprised?
 Right now in California, everywhere the titans find our eyes.
 See fixed there, a Lady with a Bear upon the state's seal
 See them gigantes magnificos, spear in hand, o'er looking Sutter's
 Mill
 No Minerva Roman goddess or Amazon of the Greeks
 Nor Indian fighter, explorer nor conquistador or gold-seeking leech
 But like Nzinga of Africa, Parvati or Kali, she is Founder Spirit in...
 California and La Osa, there on the flag, is her constellar friend.

IV. (13)

Forced to exist as concoction, as myth from afar
 As symbol and as archetype instead of a once-living woman—
 This Golden Queen and her North Star—
 O Muse, O Essence abiding in this land once and evermore
 You rule the destiny of this place in the smallest pod or seed
 Your breath upon the feathered bird or in the ocean spray bears
 The true spirit, true idea, truth and memory, do speak eternally
 Yet who but La Osa and the mindful, ever speak your name?
 Califia, I do, once. Califia, twice. Califia, and thrice again.
 Namesake of California, Miss Liberty's sistertwin (embodied forever
 in the waters and wind).

(14)

The days of her arrival shift like sun from under the clouds
 Gnarly kelp and grassy seaweed float evidence that she is there
 Lounging upon the waves as upon her shoulders does her hair
 Which peeks from beneath her helmet, in shadow like a fin.
 She evens out the coast line, stops the waves at the rocks
 She inspires the sea cows singing atop the jutting mount
 She aligns the fine horizon with her wand-like warrior's spear.
 Endless coast she stretches it from here to there to here
 The ocean rises, rushes, falls, swirls and claps for all the sound of
 her name
 Califia, once. Califia, twice. Califia, yet and trice again.

(15)

Dog-walkers, skate-boarders, walkers, cyclists, joggers, surfers— the
 scene

Children with pails and balls laugh aloud, run about and scream
 Strolling sweethearts clasp hands, pause to wonder looking to the sea
 As she confers upon them the right to love in their timeless hug and kiss.
 Such gifts she brings to elders and teens, to those in the middle stretch
 Any who come upon the beach to find treasure within reach:
 The powdered sand dollar, magical shells, smoothed stones and glass
 Mystic driftwood, her own art, and healing in the very air
 Though not gold nuggets nor Spanish doubloons, nor fated jewels to wear
 To each soul blue, black, white, or brown like whale kind under the sea
 She sings in the great conch shell, “Yo soy—Califia—I am everywhere!”

(16)

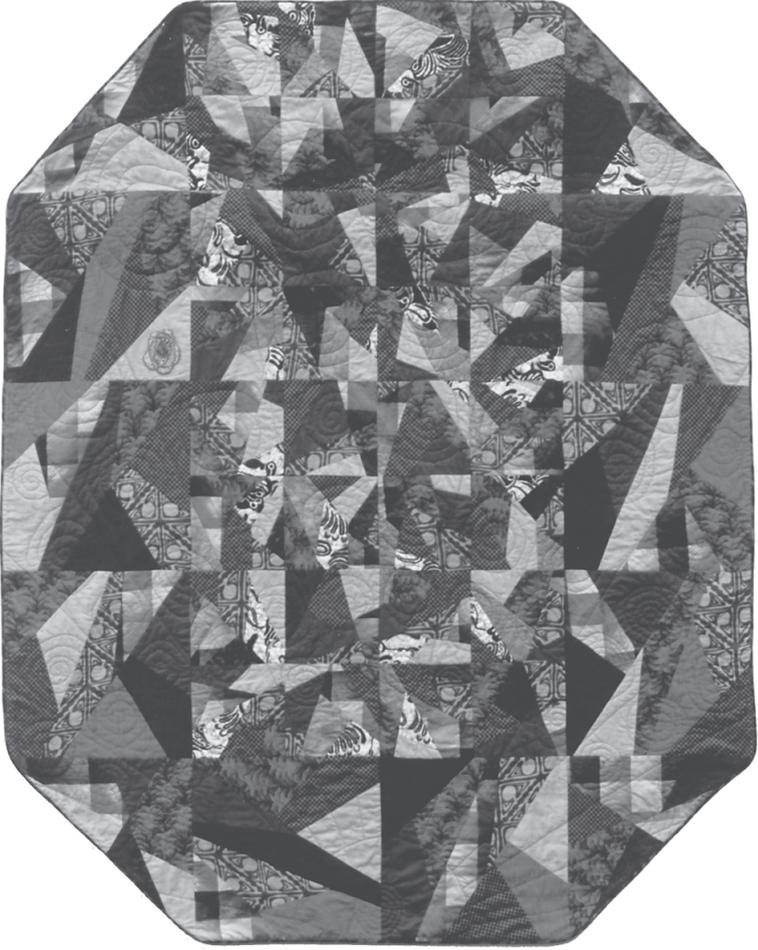
Rearing, the invincible La Osa, suddenly hugs the wind,
 Drinks from the Pacific enormity, turns back to the stars (tracks
 fading from the sand)...
 Back to Ursa Major, bright above the earth where she takes our
 newly collected dreams
 Of peace, and health and of being ourselves.
 “Yo soy,” sings La Osa the mantra, “Yo soy; All be well.”
 With smiling heart, the Lady watches her go and waving, she wades
 way out to see...
 La Osa’s first step onto the Lady’s rainbow, the next out of reality.
 In the wake, of the Lady and the Bear prone surfers stroke in their
 foamless hem
 They rise and squat o’er the pregnant swells to get one moment alone
 Inside the spiraling vortex, of La Mujer’s ancestral, spiritual home.
 Where, in the hallowed vacuum, they hear, her eternal song: “I am.
 Yo soy. I am!”

(17)

The arching funnel, a paradise, a cathedral for our long beached prayers
 A cornucopia where she has caught each prayer—all along the way.
 Out and out beyond the bays, she ripples the restive sea
 A Force to call Most Anything in this coliseum
 The ceaseless waves are promises that she intends to keep.
 One by one sent to the shore, old ones to the deep.
 Laughing dolphins skitter aft, sailboats trail her breeze
 Bold swimmers seek her out as it’s their only Fate....
 They follow Califia’s colossal wading steps,
 Outward and onward, and over the miniature Golden Gate.

Virginia Harris

Random V



44.5 inches X 56 inches. Machine pieced and quilted, hand beading. Warm and Natural batting. 1996

The blocks in this quilt were cut at “random”. Each group of blocks has eight different fabrics and eight different shapes. No block has more than one of each of the fabrics. The quilt changed shape when the blocks were arranged randomly.

This series offers many opportunities to explore the meaning of random. Sometimes it is very ordered, sometimes the exact opposite. This quilt has both — the “order” of the colors, the “dis-order” of the piecing.

Alix Greenwood

The Pit

(1)

*Shall I go back
To the point of no return?
To that hallway
Where, silently, still,
Choice and consequence roar?
To that moment when,
In electric glare,
She goes into their room,
And he into mine?*

*Ssh, he says, ssh, ssh,
Don't wake your mother.*

And I am quiet.

*My world opens beneath me.
I fall in.*

*Countless baffling terrors are born -
Down escalators, somersaults -
The awful darkness below;
The big chandelier at the local theatre -
Any great object that looms above.*

*As I fall in,
Belief, sensation, memory,
Flinch back and flee,
Far away and further,
Far from the pit where I lie.
They struggle on, lost, rootless.*

*They know:
That speech is not allowed;
That ill will can hide behind any face;
That horror can break the surface at any time,
And they must be always braced for it;
That life's promise is empty;
That they are missing something,*

*They don't know what,
 But always, uncertain, must pretend,
 And not be found out:
 That, somehow, comprehension slipped
 From their hands
 Into others, a secret key;
 That knowledge and its authority
 Do not belong to them
 And, self-doubting, over and over,
 They defer and submit.*

*So: shall I make that journey back?
 Trace the clues of grief and loss?*

*Will I still be there,
 Small, unprotected,
 In a bed, in a darkened room?*

*Will I, grown-up now,
 Switch on the light,
 Tear back his concealments,
 Declare: he knew, he did, he took;
 And gather me up,
 Take me in my arms,
 And rescue me away?*

*Or, fearful, will I fall again,
 Into the past,
 Where I wait for the door to open,
 And the worst to come?*

(2)
*I want to sink into life
 Like honey melting through toast,
 Moist and sweet,
 Like rain plumping the earth,
 Like twilight settling in the air;
 Fill all the atoms of my being,
 Like crickets singing the song of the night.*

*There is no pit to fall into.
 My cells are not terrible expanses
 Where I might tumble endlessly in horror.
 The universe is neither abyss nor precipice.*

*I'll fall as mist falls,
As darkness, as sleep,
Into the places I left:
Blood and bones, liver, gut, knees, toes,
Sickness, fear, exhaustion.
I'll fall, over and over,
Into my days as I live them,
Each ravage, each constraint;
And dance like fish
Through every current of joy.*

*I won't abandon myself again.
I'll meet myself
In the great fields of life
Where my fullness will be tested.
I'll not be silent
In the face of wrong,
Or harsh when I can be kind,
Nor sacrifice myself on anybody's altar.*

*When I fall, I'll fall
Guiltless and necessary;
As the dew, as the storm,
As equinox light.*

Matu Feliciano

You Moved Your Heart in My Direction

*I can love a woman of integrity
 One who reaches deep into my soul
 She does wanna know who I am
 An unselfish woman
 Her passion running as deep as her soul
 They are one
 She is not afraid to look you in the eyes
 Searching them for her equal
 She is a woman that is respected
 She is loved for her kindness
 And words of wisdom
 She loves because that's all there is
 In a world that teaches treachery, deceit, and gossip
 When she speaks it is never to destroy your reputation, she has
 your back
 When she looks you in your eyes, they are not blank, empty, and hollow
 Her motive is not just to get you in bed
 Only to screw your mind
 This woman is not a power monger
 She is not the counterpart to the males she complains about
 I see you
 I know that when there is one like you
 There are more like you
 This Poem is for you
 You light my heart
 You refresh my being
 You with an honest heart
 With your eyes that lust of life
 With your lips
 With your touch
 With your sense of justice
 You have touched my mind
 You have given unselfishly
 I will give to you
 It is the way of our hearts
 This Poem is for you*

Joan Annsfire

Before Moving On

*We pass in awkward silence,
beams buckle under the tense weight of our footsteps
pieces of plaster shake loose
and rattle around the failing structure
that has been our home,*

its walls now too precarious to provide shelter.

*Alone at the kitchen table, I replay your stories,
tales of street confrontations, police and picket signs
the 70s recreated but in this version we win,*

we include everyone and finally get it right.

*We would have jobs, but survive on our activism,
time together to build a new world,
simple plans made
when time seemed infinite
and words were all we needed
to set our dreams in motion,*

these days we are always learning.

*We talk at each other
like two drunks at a bar
our words fall like raindrops on a drum
a hollow monologue of sound and rhythm,*

each of us mesmerized by her own voice.

*You gather your things, I bide my time,
stay away on the day you move out
come back to unfilled spaces,*

my life, a marker for objects no longer there.

*I move forward slowly,
push down days like oars push back water
the wake behind me closes and disappears;*

*treacherous current pulls me
toward a waterfall crashing down a canyon,*

I have nothing left to hold on to.

*Each day I grow stronger,
circle around you in elliptical motion
a spiral where each rotation takes me back
yet yields a bit more distance,*

there is still so much I need to remember.

*The love never ran out
but like a stream of spilled mercury
shattered into millions of tiny silver beads;
we continue as the same substance in a new form;*

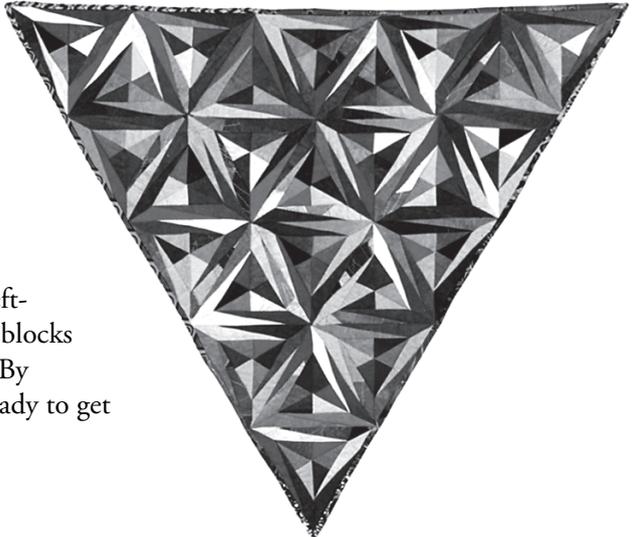
boundless and irretrievable.

Virginia Harris

Scrap Attack IV

33 inches X 37 inches.
All cotton. Paper
pieced, machine
quilted. Warm and
Natural[®] batting.
Original design.
2005

The combination
of Cherrywood[™]
fabric scraps and left-
over paper piecing blocks
yielded this quilt. By
number 4, I was ready to get
on to other things.



Mona Oikawa

Manitoba Winter

*Wishful desire for a woman's breath returns.
Weekly rendezvous, 10 p.m., beyond the perimeter.
Yearning fulfilled forestalled until light disappears.
The cold clear Manitoba night cannot come too soon.
Lust cuts across the flatline of past retreats.
Somewhere in a prairie town where an ever crimson sky outlasts
wavering sun.*

Mona Oikawa

Cooper Street

*Dawn in Ottawa
Heart breaks at first light.
Sleep has not come by your side.
Emptiness
Your words cut like a knife, wound my heart.
Aching
Speech falters.
Words caught in my throat.
My healing heart, my healing words
Need comfort halfway, need healing words, need healing comfort
halfway.*



"Self-Portrait," by Mona Oikawa

Octavia Butler

Writing Science Fiction



Octavia Butler (1947 – 2006)
Photo by Jean Weisinger

I'm a 53-year-old writer who can remember being a 10-year-old writer and who expects someday to be an 80-year-old writer. I'm also comfortably asocial — a hermit in the middle of Seattle — a pessimist if I'm not careful, a feminist, a Black, a former Baptist, an oil-and-water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty, and drive.

I've had eleven novels published so far: *Patternmaster*, *Mind of My Mind*, *Survivor*, *Kindred*, *Wild Seed*, *Clay's Ark*, *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, *Imago*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Parable of the Talents* as well as a collection of my shorter work, entitled *Bloodchild*. I've also had short stories published in anthologies and magazines. One, "Speech Sounds," won a Hugo Award as best short story of 1984. Another, "Bloodchild," won both the 1985 Hugo and the 1984 Nebula awards as best novelette. My most recent novel *Parable of the Talents* won the 1999 Nebula for Best Novel.

Morningstar Vancil

My Immigration Story

Morningstar Vancil identifies as Two-Spirit, Butch and an ally to all LGBT people. She was born in Cavite, the Philippines and her family ancestry is Asian (Filipino), Native American and Negritos (African).

In 1983, she held the rank of an Airborne Commander in the Philippine Marines. After the assassination of Benito Aquino in 1983 and the start of the popular uprising now called People Power, she realized that her position, as a de-activated officer, was tenuous. She and her family decided that she would have to flee her home country to resist the Marcos administrations' policy of civil disturbance and use of the military to quell citizen dissent.

As she prepared to leave the Philippines, it became obvious that she could not be "herself" and successfully complete the application and interview process at the American Embassy. Her travel agent gave her words of advice that proved useful. She was told to "wear a dress" and to "try to pass" as feminine because her normal dress and carriage would brand her as "gay." She was also told that if she seemed "gay" she would not be allowed to emigrate.

Following this advice, Ms. Vancil was subjected to a number of interviews, including one during which she was repeatedly asked if she was "gay." Her own morals would not allow her to lie but her interviewer's biases allowed for some subterfuge. Her answer: "Well, I'm a Mormon. What do you think?" satisfied the interviewer and this subject, at least for a while, was dropped.

Although she and her family believed that she held dual citizenship, due to an American father and a Kansas adoption that was completed when she was twelve years old, the paperwork that was accepted by the American Embassy was not accepted once she arrived in the U.S. As a result, her only recourse to avoid being forcibly deported was to apply for "political asylum." Her claim that she would be re-activated by the Philippines Marines and forced to bear arms against her country-people by a military dictator was honored and she was granted asylum in 1984.

Once in the U.S, she continued to be subjected to oppression. Her status as an émigré was used by her family to discourage her from exhibiting any "lesbian" inclinations. One of the requirements of her emigration had been that a sponsor, in her case her step-father, took financial and legal responsibility for her for a period of years. This gave her parents inordinate power over her behavior and, coupled with her adopted religion, she embarked on a strenuous program of denial. By claiming that she would be deported if she acted out any of her sexual desires, her family and the society at large effectively placed her back in the closet.

Lola Lai Jong

**Excerpt from
“Dedicated to the Children”**

*We Are the Children of War
Our Hearts
Bear the Scars
Of the Cruelty
Done to Our Parents
And to the Generations
Before Them*

*We Were the Balm
Our Innocence
Soothed and Healed
The Places
Where the Flesh
Of Their Minds
Was Scraped Raw
Bleeding*

*We
Sometimes Disbelieved
Their Seldom Whispered Stories
Lost in Troubled Silence
Their Words Quickly Vaporizing
Even as Memory and Pain
Could Not*

*Can We Children of War
Soothe and Heal
The Scars In Our Hearts?*

*Can We Children of War
Break the Silences?*

*Do We Children of War
Dare To Reach for The Balm
Of Our Own Innocence?*

*Do We Children of War
Know We Deserve to?*

Lola Lai Jong

Faith

*On the first day of January
1989
Sun fills the room
In my home
Midwest Chicago
Lake Michigan Shore*

*My friend, Donna
Has invited me to her home
To celebrate Kwanzaa*

*Today, the custom of Kwanzaa
Celebrates*

Imani Faith

*I call my parents to wish them
“Happy New Year”
And ask my ma how to
Say “faith” in Cantonese
“Sheun yun” she replies*

*Later, my ma calls me back, saying
“I looked up the word in
The Chinese-English dictionary”
Quickly, I jot down what she tells me*

*“Sheun sum—**believe from the heart***

*Sheun lai—**believe (depend on) you***

*Jung sup—**honor***

*Sheun jung sup—**believe in honor***

*Sheun say yeuk—**give one’s faith***

*Sheun yun—**believe in people”***

Imani Sheun yun Faith

©1989



Photo of Lola Lai Jong by Diane Pfile.

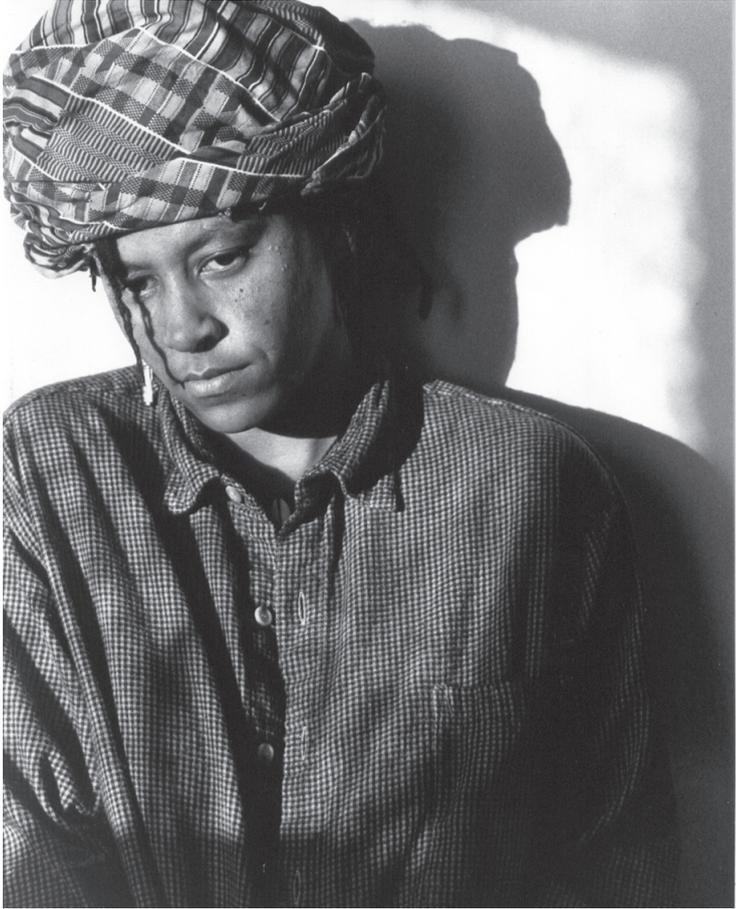
Kathleen Allen

For Bobbi

*women have been loving women
since flint first struck stone
there in the brilliant burst of light
you stood alone
lanky like a new pony
solid as Ali
I watched you dance a thousand times
in my mind so free
your arm across my shoulder
your hand tucked in mine
let the music begin at once
let the stars control the tide
I feel your warmth against me
as we move as one
don't ever let the music stop
no never, not till we are done
first one step
then another
your lips coming so close to mine
that if asked to speak
I could only stutter
round the dance floor of my mind we go
we take our time with each other
for we to know
know that I always loved you and perhaps
always will
but just don't ever let the music stop
don't ever let us stand still*

Jean Weisinger

Photography: An Act of Love



Self-Portrait: The Power/Pain of Knowing ©1991

I take photographs not only to document these times and the lives of those who cross my path, but also to express myself. Photography is a passion born within me, a necessity that is not governed by monetary payment. It has become part of the progress toward freedom and love. Photographing is an act of love and a gift to share.

My work is a way I give back to my sisters and to the universe. Sometimes when I'm photographing women, especially women of African descent, I feel like I'm under a spell – I feel like a spirit walking among the women, unseen, and this enables me to capture the true spirits of their hearts.

Sasha Churchill

Untitled

*It was all an illusion
When I came to the conclusion
I might be loved
From my beginning
The year 1983
The world has too much
For a young girl to see
So as we add a new millennium
It brings upon me the heartache
And responsibility
Of an adult life
To live alone
For lust lies in our peers
Disappointment has been proven by our parents
And education is overrated
In a society built on conformity and capitalism
Lust or love?
Poverty over greed?
Friend or foe?
As I travel down the repetitive path of the unknown
I await love
But in the end greed exceeds me
For I have not evolved from human instinct
Then my friends have become my enemies
Tragedy unaware to the blessed.*

Batya Weinbaum

Reflections On Lesbian Feminism as Inspiration

While selling Femspecs and wearable art at the Oakland National Women's Studies Association meetings, I had the opportunity to meet Fran Day. We did a trade, and appreciated each other's work. Later she contacted me and kindly invited me to write for this issue. I responded and said I was editing a novel in which women take over the Old City of Jerusalem to put an end to the males' cycles of on-going aggression and war. Would she consider an excerpt?

She suggested perhaps that such a novel excerpt would fare better in the Utopian issue, and sent me those guidelines as well. My hope is to publish an excerpt in each. Consider this the first one. Yes, the novel is utopian (hadn't thought about that—I was just writing what came). But while revising, I had been musing to myself, perhaps this novel which is a spoof on Zionism is outdated. The legends that propel it come from another era, the era of the spontaneous combustion that created the women's lands. The in jokes will be missed. Those who weren't around at the inception of lesbian feminism won't get it. A dying breed, we are, literally.

Now I am again enjoying a respite on HOWL, the women's land with which I have had the most affinity over the years, having lived in Vermont when it was formed. I have come here before to reinforce my roots in these values and to write. Perhaps some of the earlier drafts of this were created here as well, or in the studio over the Daily Bread Restaurant and Bakery in Richmond that has since been converted in to an expensive yuppie Italian restaurant. I came here this time the week of the outbreak of the 2006 Israel/Lebanon war. While this novel is set in a different historical period, it does seem to be that men, who consider lack of aggression a weakness, dominate the situation. Hence if one considers that aggression can beget only more aggression, perhaps leaving the solution of the Middle East to men is perhaps a recipe for the world coming to an end.

So come with me if you will, into what was conceived as a lesbian feminist solution to the situation. Amongst the readership of Sinister Wisdom might be enough women to appreciate the spirit in which it was created.

Mirages and Nightmares: *in the mad hotel*

Outside, rockets previously used to launch large-scale attacks on settlements in the Galilee were discompassionately thrown into the sea. The soldiers were so desperate for women's energy that they were behaving irrationally. Meanwhile, Sasha watched Haya sleep beside her. Haya's obsession, her

hairbrush, was lying next to Sasha on the oriental cover draping the nightstand. Sasha realized the Middle East was perched precariously upon a powder keg of history, which most people, including herself, knew very little about. We could shout from abroad, Sasha thought as she rolled over, or come temporarily to do support work to ameliorate the situation. Sasha watched Haya breathing, not wanting to disturb, not wanting to tell her that nuclear capabilities had been found out...in this waking dream, beneath this waking dream, moved a sea of images possessing a reality all its own...

SASHA'S MAGNUM OPUS

1.

They made love again, when Haya woke up on their piles of carpets that felt like tapestries on which birds shimmered—turquoise peacocks lifting golden feathers with green feet, carrying roses in their beaks. This time it had started innocently, still half in jest, half in sleep, with an unconscious toe curling over another one—hooking unhooking. Then on the way to the bath haughtily Haya resumed their arguing. She pointed out that the Zionists burnt houses in Arab countries so they could say migrations for Jews to Israel in the 50s was from anti-Semitism. Sasha, stepping into the water, rubbing herself with magnolia oil, threw her hair back, dropping a royal blue towel, saying, “Nonsense, that is senseless. How would anybody know?” “It came out in their memoirs,” Haya persisted when Sasha got out again dripping wet. As Haya did so, Sasha wrapped their two bodies both close this time in a thick purple towel fresh from the shelf. “Let’s not talk about politics now,” Sasha persisted herself, and open-mouthed, she kissed her.

2.

Haya consented. They were still in their luxurious bed in their apartment in the center of the renovated women’s quarters. Haya had thought at first as a pre-women’s liberation anti-Zionist that the two of them had better stay away from such a hotly-contested location. But Sasha had felt very differently. Haya was now thankful to Sasha since they had moved in to their prime spot when women from all over had been doing so, over Haya’s own protestation. This placed them both in the thick of things, closer to the pivotal action of the historic take over. Even in times of revolution, in terms of real estate, the slogan remains...location location location.

Sasha asked her lover, “Do you want your hairbrush?” Asleep, relaxed, satisfaction rising from within, she lay back between the deep blue satin sheets. When she spoke, Sasha found her lover’s voice as much of a teaser as her finely

groping finger. Haya started thinking out loud, combing down her long brown hair, remembering all the details of the initial women's revolt that had seized the old city of Jerusalem, the goddess almost giving it to them. "We need to have some kind of initiation ceremony so all the women coming in from all over the world don't go back to men," Haya reflected now. "The retreat to the recently-shed masculine might seem more attractive, safer, when things get really rough. Some women might repress their memories of recent oppression; they might have positive reunification fantasies."

"Don't bother me with all this, you *nudnik*. I'm sleeping." Sasha knew it was better not to engage the mighty and lofty strategist Haya in realistic conversation when she got into one of her long politically-inspired moods, still largely speculation.

"You're not sleeping," Haya said rightly. "You just don't want to help me make my strategy at five a.m."

"Make it three and that's right," Sasha feigned snoring, shoving her full naked back to Haya. Inwardly, silently, Sasha pictured their souls intertwining, hovering outside the gates of the city, dancing between olive tree and moon over the nearest mountain. Inside she wanted to nurture that inner starseed galactic feeling where Haya's fingers had most recently been exploring her.

"No, seriously Sasha." Sasha felt Haya's again probing finger, sketching along the curve of her broad hip from just below the knee and up to her waist. Soon Sasha felt Haya caressing her, the probing finger sliding downwards from the hip towards her center and soon waves emanated from a divinely sparked fingertip. As Sasha turned over on her back to receive, she could see moonlight running through the back of Haya's hand. "Is your name Weitzwoman or not?" Haya taunted, ruthlessly pulling all the bedcovers off to embrace her. Sasha pulled the shed covers back up over the both of them, and buried herself under, relishing the feel of satin across her body as Haya went down to give her more intense, increased pleasure.

"Let's get Nan Bergdaughter to consult with us—" Haya prodded.

"The one who changed her name when she got tenure? Nan? She's a sell-out," answered Sasha bitterly. "Into western philosophy, even though she changed her name. What can she do?" This was Sasha's response to Haya's idea of the morning. Nan had been dealing with the Middle East categorically, abstractly as machine-professors do, not from a feeling place, not on a heartbeat. Sasha knew gyrating around a machine led to such a thing as a scud missile too.

Sasha could tell that Haya had been brushing her hair for too long, as brushing her hair expanded her mind like this. The soothing quality of the stroking allowed her to close her eyes and imagine all the rest. Her fantasies

continued. “Well, let’s develop meals of meatless food, and have everybody dress in the garments of the goddess.” This was before the intellectuals insisted on the ban on national decorative costume. “And take them into sites of the ancient temples,” Haya continued, “and re-celebrate feasts from before the Romans. All these women have come for the call to get away from male oppression. We need a religion to make them strong. Not just to get away from something, but to bind them into something positive.”

Being an American, “No,” Sasha said. “You don’t consciously develop a religion to cohere a sense of nationalism.” She knew her statement would provoke a fight.

As always, Haya laughed at Sasha’s political naiveté, though she enjoyed her obvious giving herself over to unlimited pleasures in bed. But then, ever since Sasha had been showing up from the States doing journalism, hadn’t she seemed young and naïve? The others had said of her, who was she trying to deceive? Haya drew Sasha close, and again they made love.

Haya began to imagine new capitals they would create with flags and national women’s emblems—military uniforms, and other paraphernalia. As the two women sallied forth over Jerusalem practically naked like Lady Godiva galloping on, they would re-invent women’s tradition gradually, as European countries had re-invested theirs at the growth of fascism. Left to her own reverie, sensing Sasha settling into dreaming, Haya went on trying to calculate how to mobilize other women to come from the outside. Each of her lover’s vertebrae she touched, she would imagine another way to stabilize their victory. They would reprint Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *Women’s Bible*, deleting the anti-Semitic references...reconnect with the daughters of *Allah*; *Manah*, allotted fate, Goddess of Destiny; *Al-Uzza*, the most mighty; Venus, the morning star, and *Al-Lat*. According to the latter’s rules, there would be no bloodshed. All animals and plant life would be honored. Isn’t this what feminist vegetarianism was about? Together in a spirit of internationalism they had traced the Arab roots. There would be no trees felled, like at the early fight of the American women’s music festivals when tree-cutters protested about damage done to the woods. And they needed mottoes. Haya’s dream-mind raced as she lovingly traced her sleeping lover’s spine, thinking to herself, and a national day, processions and marches. Haya too was now sleeping, slipping into dream, dreaming of sports, moon maidens from the Greek games and sunbearers building fires for everyone. They needed rituals, gatherings, costumes.

3.

Haya had a definite way of empowering other women to act with her dream-like active imagination. When the sun traversed through its zodia-

cal orb and finished a year, the women revived the cult of Isis along its original premises. They re-initiated women into priesthood, and embroidered a range of animals on the garments in various colors. Soon all the inhabitants of the Old City were wearing the initiate's Olympian robes. They shook tambourines, and sang at least three times a day. Women had one month a year when they had their Army of Love service. During this time, they had to surround the city if need be, or participate in international diplomacy to negotiate with the Arab male or Jewish male states outside the city's gates. This gave women a month of complete vulnerability away from girlfriends and family yearly, to be subliminally impressed with the national cult-like importance of Jerusalem as a women's city. This cult was historically important; internationally, the goddess of service in the Army of Love brought it home to them. No machines. No machine world. Theirs was a city of heart. The third day each month was celebrated with a show of rites—a sacred meal. This was given out free, humbling everyone in appreciation. Women served the food in front of the mural painted at the old Western Wall remnant. They revived holiday after holiday, every fertility day they could unearth.

4.

When Haya and Sasha needed more inspiration than their own imaginations, to concoct those rites, they snuck out to visit a musicology professor in the Barbara Streisand Building at Hebrew University. She was one of those women opposed to the women who had taken over the Old City, undermining and underscoring success at assimilation. Obviously not having had the deep imaginative pleasure of sex with a woman partner, as all the women living together within the walls of the Old City did, this machine-professor had said that what they were doing was inauthentic, a blatant distortion of scholarly research. She was unaware of the dream mind that opened between and amongst the other women. She could only scoff, "ripe with inaccuracies!" and draw herself up in a huff. To this, Sasha and Haya answered, hypnotized in the professor's office, they didn't really mind if their vision was inaccurate about women's history as long as the vision worked to galvanize others. They were pragmatists. Practicalists, the media dubbed them. The machine-professor's voice sifted around the two of them like a coil when she talked. For example, once the two women had gone to ask the professor for precise descriptions of the thousand instruments the Queen of Sheba had brought with her from Egypt when she came to marry Solomon in the Bible. "No, no, no," the professor had said, enveloping them and

absorbing them with her speaking, accusing the women of looking for a lost paradise in order to restore something that had never existed. Sasha and Haya held onto each other and nodded their heads in agreement, while the professor lauded forth. She insisted: the only point had been the harp was good, and Solomon had been bad, doing a lot of no-no's, not that there was something special and significant about women's ancient instruments that wreaked destruction and brought his house down. But didn't they destroy his kingdom with music? The women persisted. Sasha and Haya thought having such an instrument might do them some good. The machine-professor shut her gold-bound leather book. She looked up. "You have a certain bias, quite frankly," the expert musicologist condemned them.

"No," said Haya righteously, getting up to brush down her long brown hair. "We have an eager quest to know. Which is usually considered good. I went to Oxford. I know." Haya stood still, enraptured in the scholar's office, cape pulled tightly shut at the neck, her long hair billowing out around her. "And," she went on "it is necessary to defend our kingdom."

"Your kingdom," the professor declared, "is our Jerusalem. Now please, leave me. I have to prepare my Purim costume. I am going as Queen Esther. And by the way," she scoffed as they exited, "don't you mean queendom? Historical, my foot."

The thought of this fastidious scholar with silver hair dancing or even walking through the streets in an Esther costume seemed absurd to Sasha. But she had grown up in a country where only kids wore costumes, so she didn't point this out. She knew things were different in Israel. After all, maybe it was Sasha's own Americanism that couldn't quite fathom this professor appearing as Esther properly. To her Purim meant simply dressed as blond queens, as little girls—no drunken brawls, dancing in the streets, adults going wild at public parties. They left the apoplectic professor alone in her office smoking cigarettes. "Blasphemous, blasphemous, everything they are saying and doing is utterly blasphemous. They should learn to evaluate sources more accurately. I will blast them in print," the professor was muttering under her breath when they left, "kill them with book reviews if they ever publish anything like this." As they left they heard her swear to use every weapon she could to stop their work....What they really liked about her was her moustache.

5.

On the way back laughing, enjoying each other like this, Haya and Sasha took advantage of their time out and took a bus to the country. They lay together under the olive trees on the ground after Haya had spread her

cape down, and appreciated the air. They tiptoed around *kibbutzim* with concerts in the dining halls on concert grands. Hand in hand with Sasha, Haya rattled on about how the old Zionists had brought everything with them from Europe, not expecting to like anything that was here. Listening to a Brahms piano concert, Sasha thought Haya's view on Zionists was harsh as usual. But she blinked, and blinked again holding onto Haya thinking she saw some Palestinian being beaten beneath them. Silently she decided it was one of her mirages, one of her nightmares, depending on whether it was day or night she was in. The bus came. They got back on.

6.

On the bus ride, Haya jealously began to probe Sasha about her involvement with the folksinger. But Sasha clammed up, saying she didn't want to talk. Of course the issue brought up Leah saying, "I won't tell you about my politics, you will laugh at me, like you did on the beach." Sasha remembered that moonlit night, the lap of the waves on the shore at Tel Aviv, the folksinger saying the Palestinians were taking jobs from everyone. The night of their first date. As the bus passed the Milk and Honey Café, one of their old haunts, memories of winter nights there with the folksinger came back. Sasha turned away from Haya's incessant verbal probing.

"She is up for national folk hero, you know," Haya interrupted Sasha's inner memory.

"So everything is political with you, that's the only reason you want to know?"

"We need—"

"—official holidays, ceremonies, symbols, heroes, I know, but does this mean we have to rat on our lovers?"

"Look," Haya insisted, in her German/Egyptian accent. "She is up for folk hero because of the song she does 'Let's Liberate Women's Sexuality.' But I said that because I knew you, maybe we could find out more about where she was coming from politically. We don't want to set a bad precedent with this award."

Sasha crushed herself to the bus window counting the blocks 'til they got off, remembering in that relationship how politics had become an obstacle, something that had come between she and Leah back then.

Chrystos

While There's Still

While There's Still
an edge to the parking lot
you can hear the orange gold
songs of autumn birds
bursting into dawn in an uneven
ragged line of untrimmed trees

You could

lean out

over the railing

which keeps you from it

& despite everything

breathe in the beauty

for Merle Woo

Reprinted from *Fire Power* by Chrystos (Press Gang Publishers, 1995)
with permission from the author.



Photo of Chrystos by Jean Weisinger.

Merle Woo

Yellow Woman Speaks

*Shadow becomes real; follower becomes leader;
mouse becomes sorcerer—*

*In a red sky, a darker beast lies waiting,
her teeth, once hidden, now unsheathed swords.*

Yellow woman, a revolutionary, speaks:

*“They have mutilated our genitals, but I will restore them;
I will render our shames and praise them,
Our beauties, our mothers:
Those young Chinese whores on displays in barracoons;
the domestics in soiled aprons;
the miners, loggers, railroad workers
holed up in Truckee in winters.
I will create armies of their descendants.*

*And I will expose the lies and ridicule
the impotence of those who have called us
chink
yellow-livered
slanted cunts
exotic
in order to abuse and exploit us.
And I will destroy them.”*

*Abrasive teacher, incisive comedienne,
Painted Lady, dark domestic—
Sweep minds’ attics; burnish our senses;
keep house, make love, wreak vengeance.*

Reprinted with permission from the poet from *Yellow Woman Speaks: Selected Poems: Expanded Edition* by Merle Woo. Radical Women Publications, 2003.



Photo of Merle Woo by Jean Weisinger

Lovel Waiters

Daisies

I know I saw her. Not only did I see her, I smelled her. Her perfume mixed with her honey brown skin and her pores allowed her own scent to blend with the scent of lilacs, cinnamon and daisies which permeated the air and lingered for quite a while. No, it wasn't a very well known scent, but it was her scent.

Like I said I know I saw her, maybe out of the corner of my eye, across the way in the midst of strangers. But then again, perhaps she was a very good figment of my imagination one of my better and most memorable fantasies, Yeah, like most women whether they readily admit it or not, I have fantasies, good ones. But, somehow I don't think this was a fantasy.

Excuse me for rambling, but I was sitting at a window seat in a very well known restaurant in Hillcrest dining alone. I had wanted to be in a room full of people, full of laughter accompanied by the sound of sparkling water being poured into empty glasses, restaurant silverware clanging against plates by hungry people - who anxiously sipped the house soup or crunched on crisp green salad, topped with the dressing of choice. Yes, this was my kind of restaurant - a restaurant which is busy and filled with noise. In fact the nosier and busier a restaurant is the better I like it. Why? Most people like good food, a certain ambiance and like it or not we don't mind a good restaurant or movie line and waiting for a good table and good food. If I go to a restaurant and it's quiet then I think this must either a. not be a good place, or b. it's late and I am the last person to eat, but that is another story.

So, I'm sitting at the window, enjoy a rather large wine glass of Merlot when I got this scent that just floated through the air and entered my nostrils suddenly. The scent of Daisies - a scent worn by a woman that I was passionately in love with "Barbara." Oh Barbara, what a woman. She could touch every single nerve I have. If I was having a bad day or a good day, Barbara was capable of finding and touching the right nerve and having a profound effect on my emotions. Many times Barbara could cause me to either be very happy to very pissed in a matter of minutes - before her I was pretty easy going. No drama, no madness — just took each day as it came. But I met Barbara in a cooking class. We struck up a very lively conversation almost adversarial because I like onions in my food and she thinks onions not only leave a bad taste in the mouth but if you are "swapping spit" a term she loved to use to annoy me, in her words "why taste onions if you didn't order any with your food?"

When Barbara and I were together, almost every night Barbara took long baths, she hated showers - she believed bath tubs were invented for the pleasure of relaxing and soaking the skin in all kinds of oils and scented soaps and soak she did. I used to sit on the toilet seat or stand in the bathroom door way and just wait for the chance to wash that woman's back - knowing and waiting for her to turn around and pull me in the tub with her. My clothes got soaked many a night behind Barbara's baths. After our wonderful baths, I relished the thought of toweling Barbara off and she me - she then took particular delight and pleasure in dabbing herself in all the right places with her "secret sensuous" toilet water and sprays. She spritzed and sprayed and dabbed and I watched and waited. As I recall she used a different scent depending on the occasion. When she finished bathing she added another scent before we went out to dinner or a movie.

I had not seen that woman in over two years, why would that scent be in the air? Tonight, in this restaurant?

In the midst of me trying to focus around the room for this vision of Barbara, the waitress who was waiting on my section came over and asked "Is everything ok? Are you ready to order or you need more time?"

Instead of looking at my menu and replying, I decided to do a very silly thing, I stood up and leaned into her and started to "sniff" her. Why? She wasn't Barbara, she didn't even resemble Barbara, but I had to start sniffing somewhere, so I might as well start with her. Well needless to say, my waitress was not pleased at my gesture and promptly screamed at me to move away from her immediately, which I did with embarrassment, while everyone around me turned to witness this occurrence.

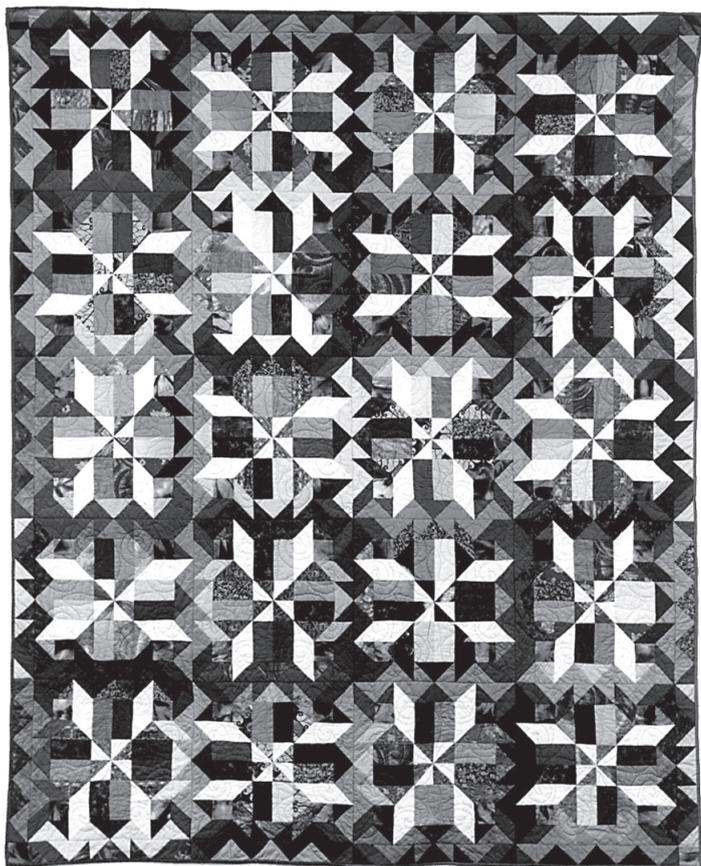
In an effort to correct my behavior, I told the waitress, "I'm sorry I didn't hear you, I was night dreaming and thought I was outside, in the middle of a field of daisies, see they were higher than any daisies I have ever seen and I leaned over to get a better whiff. Sorry, I meant no harm, yes I am ready to order."

Instead of taking my order - she left in a hurry!

I sat down, composed myself and decided it was best for me to leave via a side exit quickly. As I rose from my seat another glass of merlot was placed on my table. I glanced up ready to say "No, I didn't order another glass of wine," when I heard a sexy voice say, "Don't leave. I thought you would never notice the daisy fragrance I'm wearing, glad you like it. Here's another glass of Merlot, this time it's on me. I may be a waitress for a few hours here at night and I have a day job but I still have time for interesting women like you. Are you now ready to order?"

Virginia Harris

Star Box



66 inches X 81 inches. Cotton and silk. Machine pieced and quilted. Warm and Natural™ batting. Pattern is unfolded origami star box. 1998

The color scheme for this quilt resulted from random placement of colors in another quilt. Every other block was rotated 90° in order to get more interest where the blocks intersect.

Natasha Carthew

Through Bars

*Through bars
she sits silent
silent sitting
watching cracks of possibility
crumble past
fast through an open window
in limbo
sitting silent
a bed
a table
a tiny spoon
through bars
the stars are muted
silenced by a watchful eye
she is no use to this
a terrible year
the sit and watch and wait
she sits silent
dreaming
through bars.*

alison

Untitled

*she is a tired woman eyes tired, feet tired
legs longing for stillness, shoulders to no longer be encumbered*

*she lifts, reaches, pulls opens and closes doors and other objects
she bends kneels stands waits
her tired mind thinking of home as her back aches*

*she waits and waits under fluorescent lights for the food she has never
seen grow as she thinks of returning, being all to herself in water she
is so tired she thinks only of a bath*

*and she waits
hat drawn, strings tied she waits for the large raptor that she will
leap onto and fly she waits fingertips dripping, eyelids drooping,
face sagging she waits in the office the store and for the bus
she staggers down the street, skirts trailing through puddles of newly
collected rain*

*she crawls across cities and highways, over bridges and mountains, then
next to the ocean and into the waves
she lays on the floor of the ocean,
tastes, fills, then rises up
round and glowing*

Win Weston

The Photo Shoot

I walked through the women's craft fair. Tables were filled with paintings, ceramics, knitted scarves, soaps, flower-covered books of poetry, cat toys filled with homegrown catnip, and lots more. My senses were overloaded by the sight of all the goods, and, of course, the attractive women everywhere. The scent of food and the sounds of women musicians followed me as I drifted through the room.

Noticing some friends at the OLOC information table (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) I wandered over to greet them. The table had pamphlets with information about OLOC - its mission statement, copies of the newsletter *The Reporter*, a poster with photos of some of the members, and a book of women's stories from the Herstory Project. And they were selling greeting cards. I picked up a card. On it was the image of Jo, with her hair dyed lavender. She was lying on a carpet of bright green grass, unclad but adorned with a few strategically placed yellow, orange and crimson leaves.

I was delighted to see the card, for I had taken the original photograph. Flipping the card over I saw my name with the photo credit. As I looked at the card I remembered how the OLOC card project had begun.

OLOC is a national organization of lesbians age 60 and older committed to confronting ageism and making our presence a visible force in the women's movement. We were having a brainstorming meeting at a neighborhood coffee shop when someone suggested we do a calendar of old lesbians, like the British women calendar girls had done. We threw ideas back and forth about what we might do for each month. One suggestion was to have a naked woman surrounded by fall leaves, for October, of course. The calendar idea was later traded for greeting cards because of the longer shelf life. A professional photographer donated her skills and we were off and running.

Old lesbians must have been hungry for respectful depictions of themselves. The project did so well that the costs involved were quickly covered, and a second series of cards was begun. This time the photos were in color. The images were great and were well received. But there was no photo of Lady October rolling in the leaves, so I called Jo and asked if she would be willing to pose. She readily agreed. The challenge was finding a secluded place in the city to do the photo shoot. I told Jo that I had a friend in the

suburbs with a big yard surrounded by many trees and bushes. “It will be perfect. I’ll ask her if we can use her yard.” Roz was excited and said she’d be happy to let us use the yard. I remembered later that I hadn’t told her exactly what kind of photos I was planning to take.

So we were all set to go, but then the October weather was uncooperative, with cold and rainy days. Soon all the leaves would be gone, or the air temperatures would be too cold. The first day after the rain stopped I called Jo. The sun was not shining, but at least the day was brighter and the leaves were at peak color. We decided to do it. When I called Roz to tell her we were on our way, she said: “Oh no! I have an appointment. I won’t be here!” She then continued: “But the house will be open. The plumber is coming.” She assured me that we could use the yard, even though she wouldn’t be home, but did say: “I’m so disappointed. I did want to be here when you came.”

Vinnie and I picked up Jo and headed for the “burbs.” The plumber’s truck was parked in Roz’s driveway. “What’s this?” Jo asked, pointing at the truck. “Roz is having some work done in the bathroom. That’s on the other side of the house. It won’t be a problem.” I blithely said. We went to the back yard. Yes, it was as big as I remembered, but not quite as secluded. Through a break in the brush we saw a recycle truck and heard it rumbling and screeching to a stop. A guy in an orange vest jumped down and threw stuff into the truck. At the far end of the yard in the other direction was a wood pile, with a neighbor’s house just behind it with large windows facing directly into Roz’s yard.

I waited until the truck left and then said: “OK. Let’s go!” Under an oak tree we found a patch of green grass. The ground was covered with brightly colored leaves. Jo had dyed her hair lavender for the occasion. She opened the raincoat she was wearing and dropped it onto the ground. Until that moment I hadn’t realized that she was wearing no other clothing. Jo found her spot on the ground. I climbed onto a bench and focused the camera. “Vinnie,” throw some leaves on Jo.” She gathered up a handful of leaves and scattered them. Jo looked great in the viewfinder. I snapped a photo. Then another, just to make sure. Jo took other poses, and I snapped more photos: Jo reclining on the bench; Jo peeking out from the v of the apple tree. I shot almost all of a roll of film.

I was ready to leave. I wanted to get out of there before someone came along or one of the neighbors called the police. Jo spotted an old ladder and wanted to climb up into the tree. “No! No! I don’t think that’s a good idea!” I found myself saying. I was wondering how I would explain to the

rescue squad and the police what the seventy-six year-old naked woman was doing up in the tree. “The ladder is wobbly,” I said, kicking at it and hurting my foot. “Let’s go take some pictures by the wood pile,” I pleaded. It took a bit of effort to talk Jo out of climbing the tree. We walked to the woodpile. I looked up at the window of the neighbor’s house and thought if anyone was in there, they would have a great view. As we started back toward Roz’s house I turned around to look - and froze. Was that a movement I saw through the glass?

Then, looking at Roz’s house, I was sure a curtain moved. Wasn’t that the kitchen? The kitchen sink is under the window. That was when I remembered the plumber. I was getting paranoid. Much to my relief Jo had put on her raincoat and we could leave.

When I called Roz later that night she said: “Oh, hi! I’m really sorry I missed the photo shoot.” Good, I thought. Nothing horrible has happened. “The neighbors didn’t say anything, did they?” “No, that old guy across the way was outside, but he hasn’t spoken to me in thirty-seven years.” She abruptly stopped speaking. There was a long silence. “What debauchery have you perpetrated in my back yard?” she asked icily. “Nothing. I just took some pictures of Jo.”

“And?”

“I just took some pictures of Jo on the grass.”

“And?”

“I just took some pictures of Jo on the grass with no clothes on.”

“No clothes on? Nothing? Nude?”

“Yea.”

There was another long silence. “Well, they never spoke to me anyway,” she said.

Stephanie Barnes

With an Orchid Tucked

*unobtrusive
behind her left ear
she sits thoughtful, staring
across the serene blue surface
I approach, she smiles
More so she gives me a lopsided grin
reaches up a solid arm, slips slender fingers
to embrace my wrist
as we walk away from sunset
I draw from her strength, taste
undertones of vanilla on her lips.*

P. E. MacDavid

Sgt. Dorothy

*She yawns and lays her book down for a bit
She focuses on breakfast of cold eggs and coffee
Cold pancakes and warm juice, she decides to let sit
Her comrades eat quickly and anything they see*

*She goes to her smelly room to read her book
Windows cracked and so dirty you can't see out
Blackened floor with mouse droppings, you'll even look
To see a dry, cracked mattress, rusted frame, mildew grout*

*No latch on the door and with fighting down the hall
She learns to ignore it as she thumbs the next page
A glance and a sigh as the roaches climb the wall
Alone and forgotten in this boarding house stage*

*Be hopeful, sweet Dorothy, this is not your plight
We veterans, still warriors, for you, my voice will fight*

jody jewdyke

An Interview with Lily Yuriko November 2006



Photo of Lily Yuriko by jody jewdyke.

Jody: Please tell us about yourself.

Lily: People often ask me if I was born a Lesbian. I don't think I was, but I never had a strong interest in boys and I was a tomboy. My mom would dress me in dresses but I always wanted pants. At age seven until eleven or twelve, I adored a friend of my sister's and she adored me, and when she got a boyfriend, I was crushed. She was eight years older than me.

I never owned a doll when I was a kid. No dolls in the house. Mostly played with boys growing up. I loved boxing with my older brother because I used to beat him up with my great left hook. (Laughs)

I come from a large family, with a very painful background. There were eight boys and four girls. Before the war, my mother gave birth to her first six children in Steveston, outside of Vancouver, B.C., Canada. There, the family lived in their own house and ran a hardware store that catered to mostly Japanese Canadian fishermen. She was pregnant with her seventh child when they were forcibly removed from their home and community.

They were sent 500 miles inland to Greenwood, a ghost mining town, where they were interned along with 1200 other Japanese Canadians. The last six children were born in the internment town. I was the last of them, born in 1948, at the Red Cross Outpost Hospital. My mother must have had plenty of angst and frustration during those times.

I was always a feisty kid and frustrated by the racism of growing up in a white dominated community. My outlet for frustration and anger at the injustice of being raised in an internment town, was sports. I think it's how I survived. I was fortunate that I was very good at sports, to the point that I would embarrass my brothers. Greenwood was a small town, only two miles long. One brother would beg me not to run. He was afraid I would embarrass him and all the boys by winning. In a race for boys only, I ran alongside the track and came in third.

I was born political. These early traumatic experiences shaped me and I will never be at peace if there are women or children being violated or hungry. I can't live with injustices in any way.

I'm 58 and sometimes when I think I want a break from politics, I realize I can't. Won't ever. I will always be active in some way maybe not always publicly, but with friends and allies who struggle with racism, classism, ableism, sexism, etc.

Jody: Can you say more about your work in the Lesbian community with Lesbians around these issues?

Lily: I would say I came out at 25 but not really out in the white way and I'll explain that. I'm 58 now, so it was very difficult coming from a Japanese Canadian community to be out, to come out, especially in my era. Racism was so intense then. First off the early Lesbian clubs I went to were dingy places, usually in basements where you often needed a password to get in. In those days, there were only two Asian women I remember at the nightclub. One was me, and the other was bisexual. And we were friends so I couldn't date her. I remember feeling really out of place and all the white women were dancing with each other and looked like they were having a great time and I just felt invisible. It reminded me of high school, where all the Japanese boys and the white boys would not dance with us. The upside of it was I got to dance with all the girls. (Laughter) So it's thanks to the boys of Greenwood that I'm a Lesbian.

I think it was in the early 80s I went to an "Unlearning Racism" workshop. That really changed a lot for me. I met two Japanese Canadian Lesbians there. Both of them were 20 yrs younger than me. And both of them I

had seen in the Japanese Canadian community. I knew them from the “Powell St. Festival”, which is a Japanese Canadian celebration that happens the first week of August in Vancouver and has been going for over 20 years. So I was elated when I met them. And so were they to meet me because they didn’t know there was somebody in the Lesbian community who was an older Japanese Canadian Lesbian. And we became friends after that, and still are the best of friends to this day.

I’m of two minds of the “Unlearning Racism” workshop. One I liked it because I met other women of colour who validated how I felt and we empowered each other. The difficult part was seeing some of my white friends on the other side who after taking the workshop didn’t become white allies. I chose not to continue a friendship with them. That was very painful.

Jody: Sounds very hard. So your life really changed with that workshop and sounds like there is a difference in who you choose as your friends from before and after the workshop.

Lily: Yes. Before I had several white friends and I did experience mostly covert racism with them, but at that time didn’t have the analysis or the confidence to call them on it. What “Unlearning Racism” did for me was help give me language about racism in a way that I thought might make, might help my white friends understand it. Might get it. And appreciate how racism affected me. I felt empowered from the workshop. And was very hopeful that my friends would learn from this workshop and be more supportive about racist issues. However, I was very disappointed that it didn’t work out that way. Whenever different situations arose, they dismissed them. And so I decided I can’t do this, can’t live like this anymore. I don’t want to be teaching unlearning racism 101 to white women who mostly have the privilege and access to resources to learn it themselves. And by the way, the library costs nothing. That was a hard time, hard decisions. It meant I had to let go of maybe some of my friends at the time. Even after I made that decision, I did contact them and try to talk about it and they were unable to move past their guilt and defensiveness.

Jody: How awful for you. Can you tell us more about some of the great organizing you did with Lesbians of Colour in the 80s and 90s?

Lily: I can’t remember exactly when it was, sometime in the 80s, several friends and I started a Lesbian of Colour group in Vancouver. This group came together because we felt there was no place for us in the white, mostly

middle class feminist groups at the time. I remember being really intimidated going to these groups, because I felt I didn't know enough about politics, and that I didn't place any value on my life experience and wisdom of dealing with social and political injustices. Whenever I brought up race and racism, they weren't interested in hearing about or talking about it. And the issue of being a separatist was not an easy choice for me. Because as a Lesbian of Colour, I felt we had to join forces with the men to combat racism. I didn't have the luxury or privilege that white Lesbians did. I still have a problem with it. It's a difficult dilemma for me. I feel that the Japanese Canadian community is very conservative and traditionally patriarchal, like most of our communities of origin are. And I hate it. I do. I hate it. But because of the racism we face, I feel torn in my alliances. And often white Lesbians have asked me, if you had the choice of fighting racism or homophobia, which one would you choose? And this makes me very angry because I shouldn't have to choose. If there were more white feminists who were allies, I wouldn't have to make this choice. I'm frustrated because I feel I have struggled or thought I had a united front with my white "sisters", and I do my best to support them in their issues. And sadly I didn't feel a lot of support from white Lesbians in "my" issue of racism.

Jody: How frustrating. Of course racism concerns us all and it is the responsibility of those of us with white skin privilege to do ongoing anti-racism work, and keep learning how to be strong allies. Sounds like the difficulty with separatism you mentioned had more to do with racism from those particular Lesbians, rather than separatism itself, since some of your work and experiences have been separatist, such as the Lesbian of Colour groups and events you have organised and participated in.

Lily: Yes, I hadn't thought about it that way. I want to say more about the Lesbian of Colour group we formed. We were together for about two years and I learnt a lot. The group included a mix of grass roots, working class dykes and middle class academics. From that experience, I realized that I am quite resistant to formal institutional education like university or academia because I felt it excluded a lot of people who didn't have the privilege to have this type of education. And that as feminists, if we want to include everybody then we should talk in a language everybody understands.

Another all Lesbian of Colour experience was playing with the first Lesbian of Colour softball team in the Mabel league (the Mabel league is a Vancouver Lesbian Softball league). One of the highlights in my athletic life

was going to the Amsterdam Gay Games with this team. It was so exciting! I didn't think I could be that excited about being a Lesbian. (Laughs) I was crying as I was waving my way into the stadium, which is unusual for me. The team stayed together about ten or so years. In my softball career, and I played for forty years, this team was like family to me. A functional one. (Laughing). When we were together, we used to laugh. We were one of the only teams in the league that didn't go out for a beer after the game. We went out for Asian food or something to eat. And what was neat was we could do our signals in Japanese or Chinese and the other team couldn't understand us. Sometimes, other teams would ask "Why do you need a Women of Colour team?" I would say "Well I know I can get to play, and also, why is it that you always mistake me for Paulina, who is Chinese, bald and I have hair and I'm twenty years older than her?" But they didn't get it. I was very sad when our team disbanded. It was great while it lasted.

Later, in 1989, I went to Santa Cruz to the Asian Pacific Lesbian Conference and it was one of the most empowering Lesbian events I've ever been to. It brought tears to my eyes to see so many Lesbians that looked like me. And I met two Japanese American lesbians there and we're still friends today. Out of that, two or three of us came back so inspired that we started that ALOV-Asian Lesbians of Vancouver. That group lasted maybe seven years. Those were very exciting times. We put on all sorts of different events, plays and readings by and for Women of Colour. After that I started really feeling deeply inside that if there are any Lesbian or feminist events, that we should be part of or included in them. Not 'invited'. Which unfortunately, a lot of white activist organizers used to say. "We should have invited you." As if to say Lesbians of Colour are an afterthought, if at all, and not the 'real' Lesbians.

Jody: Can you say more about that?

Lily: I became even more aware of racism. Whenever there are Lesbian events I would question why hardly any Lesbians of Colour would attend. To this day, I still see Lesbian events with all white keynote speakers, workshop presenters and performers. And it really pisses me off. It's important to me to speak out and say something about this and I do. However, if I criticize a Lesbian event, I feel I should also come up with some suggestions. At different times, I have talked with white Lesbian organizers about my concerns and offered to help to organize. I've also offered them contacts who are Lesbians of Colour and who are First Nations, who are eloquent

speakers, dynamic workshop presenters and powerful performers. There are so many talented Lesbians in our communities and I think it's long overdue that our vast diversity is better reflected.

I would like to see more Lesbians who at any level, especially grassroots, come together as a united front to fight all the social and political injustices going on not only in this country but in the world. There is still lots of work to be done. And I'm going to run for Prime Minister next year, or maybe against that son of a Bush. Kidding. (Laughter)

Another thing that bothers me in the Lesbian community has to do with counseling. I have never found any counselors that have cultural awareness and sensitivity to my struggles as a Lesbian of Colour. All my counselors have been white, mostly middle class, and I felt after years of therapy with some of them that they should have paid me for teaching them about racism. (Laughter) Lots of my Lesbian of Colour friends speak to this in that they are frustrated that they can't find a "safe" and comfortable place where their issues of racism are understood.

Jody: I know there is so much more to say, but we are running out of space. Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview. Is there anything you would like to add?

Lily: Since we took so long to finish this interview, I am now 59. (We both laugh) I just celebrated my birthday this past weekend and I am grateful that I have lots of loving, supportive Lesbian friends. And despite all the trials and tribulations in my life, I have no regrets. It's all made me who I am today.

Jody: And such a great Dyke you are! Thank you.

Lily: I am honoured to have this interview with you. It's the first time I've ever been interviewed for a Lesbian publication and that is especially thrilling. Arigato Gozaimasu.

Jody: You're welcome. Shalom.

Bea Lieberman

my body came back to me

my body came back

to me

in a dream

behind the locked door

and opened window

like flowers after frost

i breath

the young bulb

count its countless color

my body remembers

soft soil

after icy ground

the promise of sun

after shade

Bea Lieberman

the books are stacked

the books are stacked

upon the shelf-

and you

among them-

pressed dry

between the pages.

pictures and letters

of love

tucked tightly

into drawers

safely stuffed

into the dust

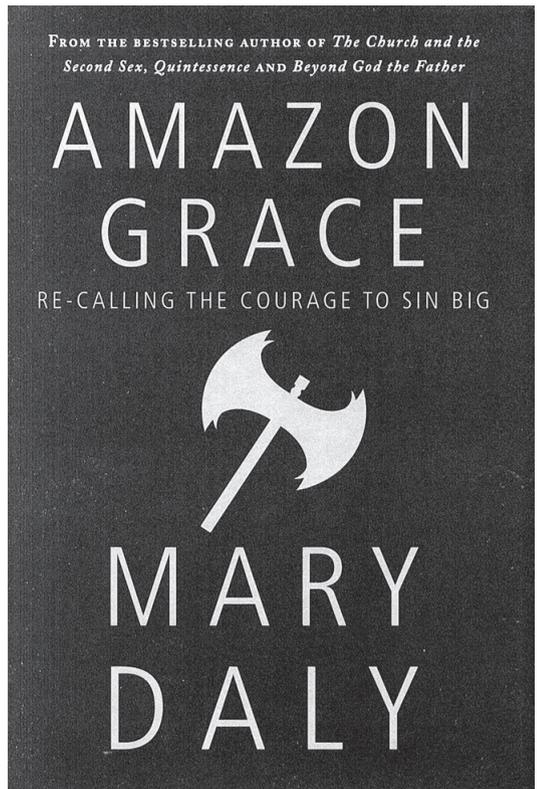
of days

Julie Enszer

Enter Mary Daly's World, Amazing and Graceful A Review of *Amazon Grace* by Mary Daly

In many ways, Mary Daly's life and work as a professor, scholar, and activist, mirror cultural changes over the past thirty-five years. Women like Daly, committed to resisting patriarchy and crafting an ethical alternative, can respond to patriarchy in the same ways over time and achieve different results. Daly's new book, *Amazon Grace*, documents some of this phenomenon as Daly experiences it, but most significantly *Amazon Grace* brings Daly's work into the contemporary political milieu. Daly exhorts women who, like her, want to end patriarchy to re-invest and "Re-Call" the "Courage to Sin Big."

In 1969, Mary Daly was fresh from completing her dual PhDs in philosophy and theology at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland and flush with the success of her first book, *The Church and the Second Sex*. She was teaching at the then-all-male school Boston College. The Boston College administration made plans during the academic (or as Daly would say "academented") year not to renew her teaching contract and thereby deny her tenure, but this was 1969 and Daly was a darling of the students she taught. The action of the administration prompted student protests and, ultimately, Daly was granted tenure in the summer of 1969. Thirty



years later, at the now dual-sex Boston College, a male student, prompted by the extreme right-wing Center for Individual Rights (CIR) in Washington, DC, challenged Daly's teaching methods. Daly's pedagogy, tested and refined through her thirty-three years of teaching, was to teach a single-sex theology classes for women and to tutor male students individually. As a result of the ruckus that the student created, Boston College administration forced Daly into retirement. Of the experience, Daly writes, to the chorus of "Yuk-Ducks" that populate this book during recitations of the effects of patriarchy in our world, "I could not understand immediately all that was happening. I Sensed that it had something in common with gang rape" (p. 75.) This time, there were no student protests.

Daly's experience with Boston College is only briefly re-counted in *Amazon Grace*, although it repeatedly made national news. Daly does not focus on her personal story; she has much more at stake in this book: piercing analysis of the current administration, her new ideas, a clarion call to womyn to resist phallogracy, and her crafting of new worlds for resistance. To enter the world of Mary Daly requires thoughtfulness, close attention, and a profound commitment to engage in her mind-bending work. The rewards are ample. Daly has many important roles: philosopher, theologian, Radical Elemental Feminist, political analyst, polemicist and mystic. *Amazon Grace* is an extension of all of these roles for Daly and a further expression of the philosophy and theology that have unfolded in her books over the lifetime of her work.

If you have not wandered through the Wicked Webs of the Hopping Hag, as Daly describes her books and herself respectively, a brief background on Daly's work is in order. Mary Daly began her scholarly work with scathing critiques of the Catholic church and its anti-feminist practices. Daly followed her debut with *Beyond God the Father* in 1973. Both of her first books are recognized as canonical feminist texts for the critique that they offer of Christianity and Catholicism. Daly's subsequent books articulated a new, ground-breaking feminist ideology/theology. Beginning with *Gyn/Ecology* in 1978, Daly wove a web of feminist ethics and theology that extended through *Pure Lust* in 1984 and *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, conjured in cahoots with Jane Caputi, in 1987. In 1992, Daly published her autobiography, *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage*, and most recently in 1998 she published *Quintessence: Realizing the Archaic Future*.

Amazon Grace extends the work that Daly did in *Quintessence*, and it extends all of Daly's work to define a Radical Feminist theology. *Amazon*

Grace further explores time/space travel, and it articulates and engages Daly's feminist utopia which we can access to gain perspective on the patriarchal, necrophilic world in which we find ourselves.

In *Amazon Grace* as in Daly's other books, Daly uses a variety of strategies to re-weave and re-call women to their natural state of liberation and empowerment. Daly resurrects feminist foresters, most significantly Matilda Joslyn Gage, a theologian from the late 1800s, to engage in dialogue and truth seeking. Daly's accounts of her discussions with Gage and what she draws from Gage are delightful. More delightful are the ways that Daly imbues life and meaning to animal familiars in the book. Her cat, Cottie, figures strongly into the book as a source of intelligence and insight for Daly. Similarly, the wolf Fenrir, Anowa's familiar, is an important character in the book.

Daly also re-visits the "Lost and Found Continent" in the simultaneous leaping ahead/looking back to the "Lost and Found Continent" which is positioned as both in the past and in the future. The "Lost and Found Continent" is the place where women not only live but also thrive outside of the phallocracy. Here Daly gathers Gynergy for her struggles in the current land, and here she engages in some of the most inspiring story telling and parable recitation. The women that Daly conjures in the "Lost and Found Continent" are delightful and reassuring. I can't be the only reader who wishes that Daly would write her next book about living in the land of the "Lost and Found Continent" exclusively with Annie and Anowa and the other women of the land re-counted more fully.

Daly continues the deconstruction and reconstruction of language in *Amazon Grace* a signature of her earlier work. She liberates language from the constraints of patriarchy and the necrophilic society in which we live, at least part-time. In her language project, Daly reveals that the sweetest word is liberty/freedom, something which she seems to have found in her forced retirement. At the end of the book, Daly reminds us that "we *can* stop it *Now*." That is we can end the necrophilic society now and move to the utopia of the Biophilic. Daly tells us by "Moving into an Expanding Here and Now, when/where we participate in the interconnectedness of all Biophilic be-ing. This is the unifying Living Presence which is at the core of the Integrity of the universe and is the Source of our power to Realize a True Future" (p. 226.)

For dedicated Daly devotees, *Amazon Grace* is a book to own and cherish. *Amazon Grace* is, in Daly's words, a "brief play time, re-creating our Gynergy to Survive and Overcome phallocracy's latest and perhaps ultimate

assault upon all Life” (p. 213.) For wimmin coming to Mary Daly’s work for the first time, *Amazon Grace* will open your mind and your heart to Daly’s ways of thinking and writing and make her philosophy relevant to life today. *Amazon Grace* also will whet your appetite for more Daly. I recommend you pick up *Gyn/Ecology* next and read forward. After you are done catching up with the world of Daly, let us Hop and Leap to the where/when that we can Sin Big, live outside of patriarchy, and embrace our Biophilic be-ings.

Daly, Mary. *Amazon Grace: Re-Calling the Courage to Sin Big*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Compiled by Lori L. Lake

Recent Nonfiction Resources Spotlighting Older Lesbians

Gay Old Girls ed. and interviews by Zsa Zsa Gershick, Alyson Books, 1998.

This collection of nine life stories can be seen as part of the larger project instituted by Joan Nestle and others to gather an oral history of lesbian life in America in the 20th century. Although some of the memories here stretch back to the 1920s, most date from the repressive postwar years and describe the difficulties of finding community - let alone lovers - when there were no safe, established meeting places for gay people. Many of the women interviewed ended up marrying men as a cover or to make their lives easier, while some married before they realized they were lesbian. Some stories end happily while there are others where women never found lasting love, or grew so discouraged that they stopped trying. The interviews offer an essential glimpse of a bleak past and spur on the struggle for civil rights.

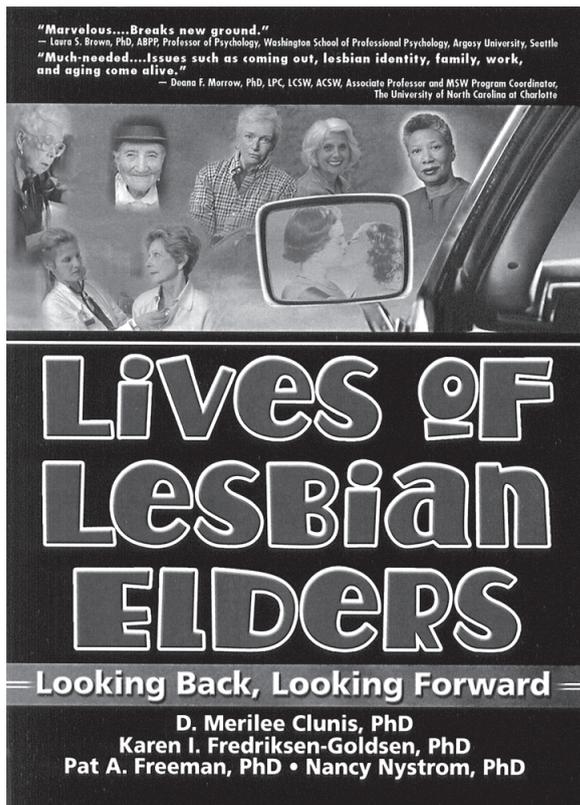
Lesbian Epiphanies: Women Coming Out in Later Life, by Karol L. Jensen, Haworth Press, 1999.

Exploring identity development and gender orientation, this book contains firsthand information about the experiences and difficulties of women who discover and reveal their newfound lesbian sexuality in later life. Extensive quotes from interviews of 42 lesbians and bisexuals who entered into heterosexual marriages and came out later. The book clearly illuminates how women came to realize their same-gender attractions and the barriers they faced, including negative attitudes toward lesbian women and the lack of strong role models.

This insightful book knocks down the sociological and psychological barriers that keep women from realizing or acknowledging their real sexual orientation and is also particularly helpful to guide therapists and counselors working with women who are dealing with these issues.

Lesbians at Midlife: The Creative Transition – An Anthology ed. by Barbara Sang, et al. Spinsters Ink, 1991.

While focusing mainly on the life transformation experienced by lesbians in their 40s and 50s, this thoughtful collection of 38 works ranging from research studies and practical advice to personal memoirs and poems will hold great appeal for lesbians of all ages. In Margaret Cruikshank's memoir piece, she describes how, at 48, she is finally comfortable with herself physically, psychologically, and spiritually, and how lesbianism has become just one element of a broadened sense of identity. Judith Bradford and Caitlin Ryan explore national survey data in a study of the health concerns of middle-aged lesbians. Marny Hall with Ann Gregory interviews nine lesbian couples to learn how these women juggle their professional and personal lives. The editors are psychotherapists, and the stories and memoirs they share give a wonderful glimpse into the lives of women in transition at midlife.



Lives of Lesbian Elders: Looking Back, Looking Forward by Merilee D. Clunis et al. Haworth Press, 2005.

This book illuminates the hopes, fears, issues, and concerns of lesbian women as they grow older. Based on interviews with 62 lesbians ranging in age from 55 to 95, this very special book provides an historical account of the shared experiences of a lesbian community so often invisible or ig-

nored in contemporary society, giving voice to their thoughts and feelings on a wide range of issues, including coming out, identity and the meaning of life, the role of family and personal relationships, work and retirement, adversity, and individual sources of strength and resilience. The book chronicles stories of courage, resilience, resourcefulness, pride, and independence, helps restore lesbian history that has been forgotten, distorted, or disregarded and provides the information necessary to meet the future needs of aging lesbians.

Midlife Lesbian Relationships: Friends, Lovers, Children, and Parents, ed. by Marcy R. Adelman, Ph.D. Haworth Press, 2000.

The book explores the rich world of lesbian relationships at midlife and provides insight into the challenges and solutions of middle age for lesbians, discussing friendships, dating and courtship, couple relationships and the key ingredients that strengthen and deepen them, parenting young children and the influence of lesbian midlife maturation on confidence and satisfaction in mothering, substance abuse and the road to recovery, the evolution of the bonds between these women and their biological families, what many lesbians in middle age go through when their parents pass away, including the easing of internalized homophobia.

Whistling Women: A Study of the Lives of Older Lesbians by Cheryl Claassen. Haworth Press, 2005.

Gain first-hand knowledge of how today's lesbians aged 60 and over survived the 20th century in this unique, candid collection of the life experiences of 44 lesbians between 62 and 82 years of age. This book explores memories and details about a diversity of perspectives—from growing up during the Depression and World War II, to retirement and old age at the height of the gay liberation movement. Also presents recollections of lesbian/mixed bars—some famous—starting in the 1930s, memories of the notorious Greenwich Village, the early development of lesbian social groups, and lesbian friendships with gay men. *Whistling Girls* identifies many of the organizations that cater specifically to older lesbians, such as OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) and SOL (Slightly Older Lesbians).

Contributors' Notes

SDiane Adamz-Bogus, long time contributor and friend to *Sinister Wisdom*, lives in San Jose, California. She is a professor of American literature, performance poet, and actor and author of fourteen books, among them *The Chant of the Women of Magdalena and Dykehands and Sutras Erotic and Lyric*. You can write her at P.O. Box 1268, San Jose, CA 95108 or SdianeAdamzbogus@Yahoo.com.

alison: i am a lesbian in my late twenties, living in portland, oregon. i grew up in west virginia, worked in a nursing home for years, and now in a women's shelter. i have done grass roots women's empowerment work, traveled around by foot, i write brief prose and poems, have never taken a college english class and don't know any rules. i am working class/self educated. working with women is what inspires me and gets me up in the morning.

Kathleen Allen is an inmate at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, New York, and a student in the Mercy College masters program in English literature. She is a writing tutor for the inmate students in the undergraduate program at Bedford Hills, sponsored by Marymount Manhattan College. Her poetry has been published in the *Hiram Poetry Review*.

Joan Annsfire lives in Berkeley California. Her work has appeared in various literary journals including *The SoMa Literary Review*, *The Harrington Lesbian Literary Quarterly*, *13th Moon*, *Bridges*, *the Evergreen Chronicles*, as well and a number of issues of *Sinister Wisdom*. Her anthology credits include "The Other side of the Postcard" edited by devorah major and two upcoming anthologies, "Identity Envy," edited by Jim Tushinski and Jim Van Buskirk and "Love Gone Wrong," edited by Marie Napierkowski.

Shaba A. Barnes has been a community activist most of her adult life. After moving to the West Coast in 1969 from New York City, Shaba joined the National Organization for Women and quickly became the secretary of the Los Angeles Chapter. She also joined the Feminist Theatre which was active doing guerrilla theatre or street theatre as well as performances at Universities in California. Shaba has been active in theater, acting, and pro-

ducing. She was instrumental in achieving Domestic Partner Rights for all members via the Lesbian and Gay Association at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Los Angeles. She is a CO-Director for Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), the only organization of its kind dedicated to combating Ageism; OLOC was founded by and for Lesbians over 60 years old. Shaba presently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her partner of 38 years. She enjoys poetry readings as she continues to seek avenues of expression by sharing insights on the spiritual and the power of being an Old Lesbian. She is still available to teach workshops and classes with a spiritual theme.

Stephanie Barnes is from Savannah, Georgia by way of a few military bases. She has been writing since she was nine and has most recently been published in *Antithesis Common*. Currently, she is working on self-publishing her first chapbook, as well as pursuing entrance into a MFA program.

Natasha Carthew is a young lesbian writer from Cornwall in the UK. She has been published in numerous National magazines, has won awards for poetry and has had three books of poetry published; her latest book *Flash Reckless* having been published by the internationally acclaimed lesbian/feminist publisher Onlywomen Press (www.onlywomenpress.com).

Natasha lives in the country with her girlfriend of ten years, where she is currently working on a new body of country poetry.

Lisabeth Amarante Castro-Smyth is a femme dyke of Azorian and Irish descent, born and raised in Califas. She has been singing fado for several years and writing for much longer. She loves cumbia, teatro callejero, and the ocean. Growing up, her mother instilled in her a great love of books, and her dad taught her to never ever cross a picket line.

Lenore Chinn began painting when she was growing up in San Francisco's Richmond district, focusing on portraiture to explore the super-realistic depiction of a wide spectrum of people of color, lesbians and same sex couples. Employing a coded iconography rooted in a lesbian/gay cultural perspective, these images fuse an Asian aesthetic of sparseness and clarity with visual narratives that counteract the "magic-truth rituals" of racial and gender construction. Chinn's inclusion in Harmony Hammond's "Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History," the first study of American lesbian visual artists, vastly expanded her national visibility. Her portraits documenting the historical evolution of San Francisco's queer community

challenge the social conventions that currently constitute the racialized order of things. The artist has been a founding member of Lesbians in the Visual Arts and Queer Cultural Center and is affiliated with the Asian American Women Artists Association. For more information visit:

<http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Chinn/ChinIndex.html>

Chrystos, writer and Native Rights activist, won the Audre Lorde International Poetry competition in 1994 and the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Action Foundation in 1995.

Sasha Churchill is a 23-year-old lesbian currently in prison.

Tee A. Corinne (1943 – 2006): A regular contributor to *Sinister Wisdom*, Tee Corinne's artwork has been identified with the journal since her cover and poster for issue #3 in 1977. This beloved photograph was selected for the cover of *Sinister Wisdom's* 30th Anniversary Celebration Issue. Tee was the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, and several poetry chapbooks. Her most recent book of art, *Intimacies: Photos by Tee A. Corinne*, published by Last Gasp of San Francisco, was a Lambda Literary Award finalist. A gifted and versatile artist, Tee worked with photography, line drawing, paint, sculpture, ceramics and printing, and she also published erotic fiction and poetry and reviews. Favorite cover artist for lesbian publisher Naiad, Corinne's work is found on bookshelves across the Lesbian Nation.

Anita Cornwell has been a professional writer for more than twenty years. Her second book, a novel for young adults, was published by New Seed Press in 1989/1990. Her first book, a collection of essays, was published in 1983 by Naiad Press. Her work has also appeared in such diverse publications as *Essence Magazine*, *Elegant Teen*, *New Directions for Women*, *Motherroot Journal*, *Negro Digest*, and *Phylon*, the Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture. She has also had work in eight anthologies, including *Revolutionary Tales* (Dell, 1995); *The Romantic Naiad* (1993); *We Are Everywhere* (Routledge, 1997); and *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader* (New York University Press, 2000). She has also self-published two chapbooks of prose poems, written several one-act plays, three full-length dramas, and is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, Inc. Born in South Carolina and educated in Pennsylvania, Cornwell is a graduate of Temple University where she majored in journalism and the social sciences. Before devoting full-time to writing, she worked as a caseworker for the Pennsylvania State

Department of Public Welfare, for the City of Philadelphia, and for the federal government.

Marva C. Edwards has been a lover of books since she was eight years old. She started writing poems in her diary at the age of twelve. Poems were the place she trusted to share herself. She now lives in San Francisco, California and has been working as a Community Activist and organizer for many years. Her day job has been as a Social Worker in the community mental health field for thirty plus years. Her volunteer work has included working as a Board Member for the Nia Collective, a community organization for the empowerment of Lesbians of African Descent but her first love and passion has always been words. And songs that find her.

Julie R. Enszer is a writer and lesbian activist based in University Park, Maryland. You can read more of her work at www.JulieREnszer.com.

Matu Feliciano, born in the South Bronx, is an activist living in the Bay Area. Passion is not just a fruit, it's what gives life its SALSON! We are the Chuchifrito connection to NewyorkRican dialog! Boricua viscionos. Mancha de Platano, is my other pen name. It means "the stain of the plantain" referring to the color of my skin. How it changes as the plantain grows sweeter, it gets darker. As in the darker the berry the sweeter the juice. I was called by this beautiful description when I was living on the Isla of Puerto Rico in 2003. So, I have taken this name with my writings.

Roxanna N. Fiamma: I was born in Denver, Colorado in 1943; Italian American (Olive Race), grew up working class. I came out as a Lesbian in the late 60s and as a Separatist in the mid 70s. I taught Physical Education in Denver until I retired in 1993. I live in northern California where I enjoy life with my Dear Companion Dog, Phaedra and Land-Mate, Fran.

Alix Greenwood: I am an english lesbian, white, middle-class, 44 years old; I came out at 25. I work as an organic gardener.

Morgan Gwenwald has been documenting the women's/lgbt community for most of her life, compiling thousands of images of events, actions and people along with a pioneering portfolio of lesbian erotic imagery. Since leaving New York City and moving upstate she has returned to her exploration of fine art photography, finding joy in those deep and complex creative experiences.

Virginia Harris: For many years my creative life was separate from my “real” life. I majored in chemistry in college and went on to get a master’s degree. For 12 or 13 years I worked in nuclear chemistry research and then on a dare changed careers to personnel (now called human resources). Chemistry and personnel were battle grounds that afforded little to no recognition for a job well done. I longed for passion and definition in my life. I found them in creativity — photography, writing and finally quilting and fabric art. Through art quilting I pushed away the substitutions I have lived by and this has given me the recognition I never got in the “real world”. One of my pieces was chosen for the permanent collection at the Renwick Gallery, part of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. In 2004 I received a Sister of Fire Award from the Women of Color Resource Center. Let’s hear it for passion!

Susan Hawthorne is a novelist, poet, theorist, aerialist, academic, activist and publisher. Her books include *The Falling Woman* (novel, 1992; reprinted 2003); *Bird* (poetry, 1999); and *Wild Politics* (non-fiction, 2002). Her books have won awards and been listed among the year’s best books on several occasions. Her latest book *The Butterfly Effect* (poetry, 2005) is a collection of poems about lesbian culture. Her poem “Strange Tractors” from *The Butterfly Effect* is included in the anthology *Best Australian Poems 2006*. In 1996, she was the Winner of a Hall of Fame Award, in The Rainbow Awards for her contribution to the Gay and Lesbian Community. Susan is also a member of the Coalition of Activist Lesbians and over the past four years she has written articles for numerous publications including for the *Journal of Hate Studies* on the torture of lesbians internationally. She is a Research Associate and supervisor of PhDs in Creative Writing at Victoria University, Melbourne. She is also a performer who combines aerials and text and in 2005, she was invited to perform *Eye of a Needle* at the 10th International Women’s Health Meeting in Delhi, India. She is the co-founder, with Renate Klein, of Spinifex Press. She is currently working on a new novel and another collection of poems.

jody jewdyke: proudly obvious big Jewish Dyke Separatist, 36, currently living and working in Vancouver, B.C. Canada. For now, I share my home with a wild and wonderful fat orange cat named Matza. Am passionate about Lesbian cultures and communities and am so appreciative for all the great Dykes then and now, near and far who help make our Lesbian dreams come true.

Verlena L. Johnson: I earned a Master's Degree in Afro-American Studies (Art History, 1996) from the University of Wisconsin — Madison and a Master's of Fine Arts Degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Sculpture, 2001). Over the past fifteen years, I have sought to express my personal thoughts and feelings in my art, as well as explore larger societal phenomena, such as oppression, race, gender and sexual identity. The style, subject-matter, and medium have varied, but the common threads that run through my work are questions about what it means to be an African American (Biracial) lesbian woman, particularly in a society that does not honor or value blackness, womaness or queerness. I define myself broadly as an artist and express myself in whichever media best lends itself to my ideas and mood. I have rejected many of the binary constructs that seem to permeate every aspect of the "art world," such as "fine art" versus "craft;" painter versus sculptor; artist versus art historian. See more of my artwork at <http://www.verlenasroom.com>

Lenn Keller is a black feminist butch. She is a photographer and filmmaker, and has been photographing for over two decades. Her work in photography includes many different genres, including documentary, editorial, fashion, landscape, portraiture and promotional work for artists, musicians, writers etc. She is a cultural activist, and her eclectic spirituality along with a life long predilection to look beyond the surface of things informs her work. She is currently working on numerous projects including a portrait series of "gender queer" people. To view her work go to her website: www.lennkeller.com.

Patricia Kimura was born and raised in Hawai'i. She now lives in rural Western Massachusetts where she writes poems about the history and lives of ordinary people, particularly the people of Hawai'i. She has previously had work published in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Runes*.

Lola Lai Jong: A 57-year-old Chicago-based Scorpio tungjee* mother carpenter networker wordsmith. * Cantonese word which could mean female same sex love.

Lori L. Lake, author of lesbian fiction and freelance reviewer for *Midwest Book Review*, Golden Crown Literary Society's *The Crown*, *The Independent Gay Writer*, and *Just About Write*.

Bea Lieberman: I am... mother, teacher of children, folksinger, life-long poet, lover of high mountains,...member of Mothertongue Feminist Theatre Collective, a link in a long line of dedicated idealists and great skeptics.

P. E. MacDavid: I have been writing poetry since the early 80s. I have been stricken with Multiple Sclerosis and disabled a few years ago. I've served in the military and have advanced to management in administration. This has taught me the inner discipline and persistence to continue pursuing my passion for writing. I have been engaged in a full time status in creating poems that I find is such a need in my community. I've taken several self-learning work-studies (because of the inability to go to classes). I'm still looking forward to an MFA. I've had a few poems published in literary magazines/journals. This includes: *Love's Chance Magazine*, *Jersey Gaze*, and *Sinister Wisdom* and in exhibition at the Northwest Culture Council.

Cheryl J. Moore: I began writing poetry in 1980 after being hospitalized for anxiety and I believe poetry saved my life. My manuscript is called "Waterpaths" and I have written three lesbian short stories, the second of which was published in *Sinister Wisdom* #49. Other publications include *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Sojourner*, *The River*, and *Sensations Magazine*. I haven't written enough yet about my black and lesbian consciousness. "A Winter Poem" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2005.

Nancy Nau grew up in Southern California, where she earned two Master's degrees, both in Fine Arts, taught for a living and raised three children. Then Nau moved to Minnesota where she worked in pastoral care, penned two poetry books, and three children's books and where she is earning her doctorate in education and the arts (ABD – all but the dissertation). Now that Nau is living in northern California, she states that she "...recollects in tranquility..." and at last, has enough time to paint, write, and submit her work to publishers.

Mona Oikawa is a Toronto-based writer, teacher, and researcher. She is Assistant Professor of Social Science in the Atkinson Faculty at York University and Coordinator of the Certificate in Anti-Racist Research and Practice, and the Race, Ethnicity, Indigeneity Program. Her book *Cartographies of Violence: Women, Memory and the Subject(s) of the "Internment"* is forthcoming from the University of Toronto Press.

Robin Reinach is a New Yorker, with an MFA from Columbia University. Her work appears regularly in literary journals, and she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Francesca Roccaforte is a San Francisco Bay Area award winning poet /writer, photographer, and documentary filmmaker. Her work has been published in "Hey Paesan", "Curaggia", "Milvia Street Journal," "Voices of Italian America" and SF Women Against Rape Poetry Chap Book. You can view more of her work at www.rocknfranny.com

Sandy Tate is a working class, Jewish Dyke Separatist. She opened Feminist Horizons, the first Lesbian Feminist gift store in the U.S., in 1977 in Los Angeles. As a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), she continues to pierce the veil of ageism that renders old women invisible.

Jean Taylor was born in 1944 and is a radical lesbian feminist writer and political activist based in Melbourne, Australia where she also does tai chi and is an active member of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives collective. In between her political and writing commitments, she also knits, exhibits art work and enjoys the company of her grandchildren.

Sandra Tignor, age 69, hails from Los Angeles. Born in Washington, D. C. she migrated to California in 1961 to live freely and fully as a lesbian. She has been involved with a number of organizations: Uptown Gay and Lesbian Alliance, United Lesbians of African Heritage (Co-founder), Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.

Morningstar Vancil: I am Filipino by birth but Two Spirit by soul.

Level Waiters is a Lesbian poet and writer of fiction, nonfiction and erotic material. She lives and writes in San Diego, California.

Batya Weinbaum is the founding editor and editor in chief of Femspec, a feminist speculative journal. She has written psychoanalytic theory about women's liberation and socialism, work place relations, and oral history with women in Israel as well as Jungian explorations of islands of women and Amazons, and contemporary science fiction. She has published poetry, fic-

tion and theory widely as well as numerous reviews, and is working on a play now as well as painting from goddess archetypes and finishing the novel excerpted here.

Jean Weisinger is a self-taught African American photographer based in Oakland, California. She has traveled to Africa, Cuba, India, Mexico, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe and throughout the United States. She has exhibited in one person and selected group exhibitions in the United States, Cuba, Africa and India. Her photographs have been published in numerous films, books, and a wide range of publications as well as posters, post cards and calendars. Her photographs are in collections throughout the world.

Win Weston is a spinner of tales and a teller of stories. She is a life-long resident of Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has performed at: Vulva Riot, Amazon Book Store Cooperative, Patrick's Cabaret, Celebrate Yourself!, and OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) National Gathering held in Minneapolis. Her short stories have been read on these radio stations: WTIP, Grand Marais, MN, KFAI, Minneapolis, MN. In addition to writing she is an artist and photographer. She is also a sustaining member of Spiderwimmin, a womyn's ritual group celebrating the year's quarter days.

Merle Woo, born to a Chinese Korean family, is a socialist feminist, lesbian and unionist. She fights as a teacher, activist and poet for these causes. Her essays, stories and poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies including *This Bridge Called My Back by Radical Women of Color*, *Plexus*, *Asian American Journey*, *Breaking Silence*, and *The Freedom Socialist*. A selection of her poems, entitled *Yellow Woman Speaks*, was published by Radical Women Publications (rwseattle@mindspring.com).

Books Received

Heavier Than Air: Stories. By Nona Caspers. University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.

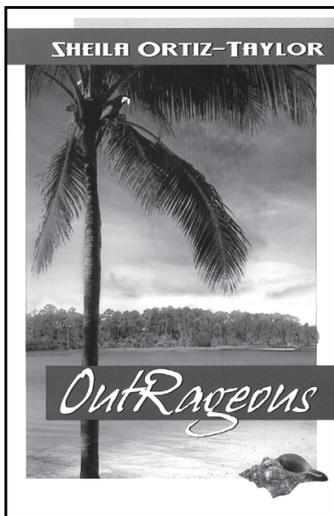
Conversations with Audre Lorde. Joan Wylie Hall (Editor). University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

The Butterfly Effect. By Susan Hawthorne. Spinifex, 2005.

“Lesbians in East Asia: Diversity, Identities, and Resistance.” Diana Khor and Saori Kamano (Guest Editors). *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Volume 10, Numbers 3/4). Harrington Park Press, 2006.

Sweet Creek. Lee Lynch. Bold Strokes Books, 2006.

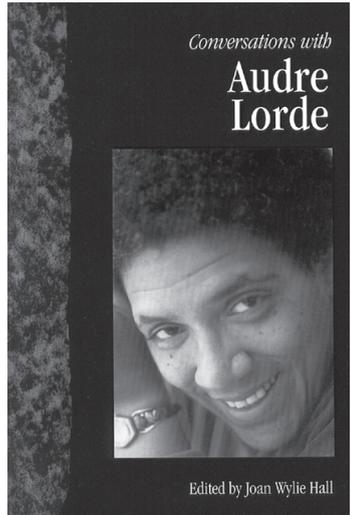
OutRageous. Sheila Ortiz-Taylor. Spinsters Ink, 2006.



“Lesbian Communities: Festivals, RVs, and the Internet.” Esther Rothblum and Penny Sablove (Editors). *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Volume 9, Numbers 1/2, 2005.

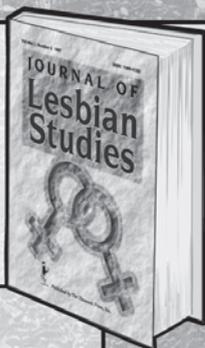
Harrington Lesbian Literary Quarterly. (Volume 7, Number 2, 2006). Judith P. Stelboun. (Editor).

Tee Corinne is the representative artist for this issue which includes her essay “Picturing Cancer in Our Lives” and sixteen of her photographs.



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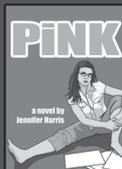
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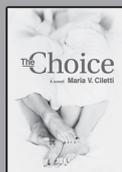
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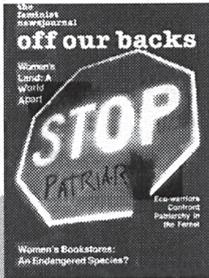
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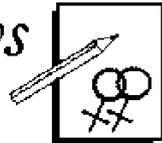
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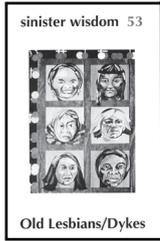
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#73 *Utopia*

Due: July 1, 2007

Editor: Fran Day

Hopes for a Utopian Lesbian Universe. Dreams of an ideal world. Yearnings for something “beyond what is now called possible” (Audre Lorde).

Send material for #73 only to fran@sonic.net or Fran Day, P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473.

#74 *Activism Latina Lesbian Style!*

Due: October 1, 2007

Guest Editor: Juanita Ramos

Chicana/Latina/Latin American lesbians living all over the world are invited to submit material. We want to know how our sisters define what lesbian activism means to them in whatever way they see fit. Details at www.sinisterwisdom.org.

Send material for #74 only to: Juanita Ramos, P. O. Box 678 W.V.S., Binghamton, NY 13905-0678. Email: companeras1994@yahoo.com

#75 *Theme to be announced*

Due: February 1, 2008

Editor: Fran Day: fran@sonic.net

#76 *Lesbian Theories/Lesbian Controversies*

Due June 1, 2008

Guest Editor: Julie Enszer

Theory is an analysis of a set of facts in relationship to one another. Theory simultaneously reflects and shapes our lives. *Sinister Wisdom* has always been a place for Lesbian theories to be created, expanded, evaluated, and discussed. What are the theories that are driving our lives today? What conditions in our lives do we need to think about, analyze and share with one another? What are the controversies within the Lesbian communities today? What controversies are spoken? What controversies are unspoken? How are we working to understand, share, and celebrate the controversies among us? Creative explorations of Lesbian Theories and Lesbian Controversies are sought for this theme issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. The guest editor is interested in current theories and controversies about Lesbian separatism, contemporary Lesbian culture, patriarchy, Lesbian identity, and Lesbian life. Especially welcome are submissions that challenge, incite, connect, and create new theories and new controversies as well as collaborative submissions by multiple writers, artists, activists, and thinkers.

Send manuscripts for #76 only to Julie R. Enszer, 6910 Wells Parkway, University Park, MD 20782 with SASE for response or email JREnszer@aol.com