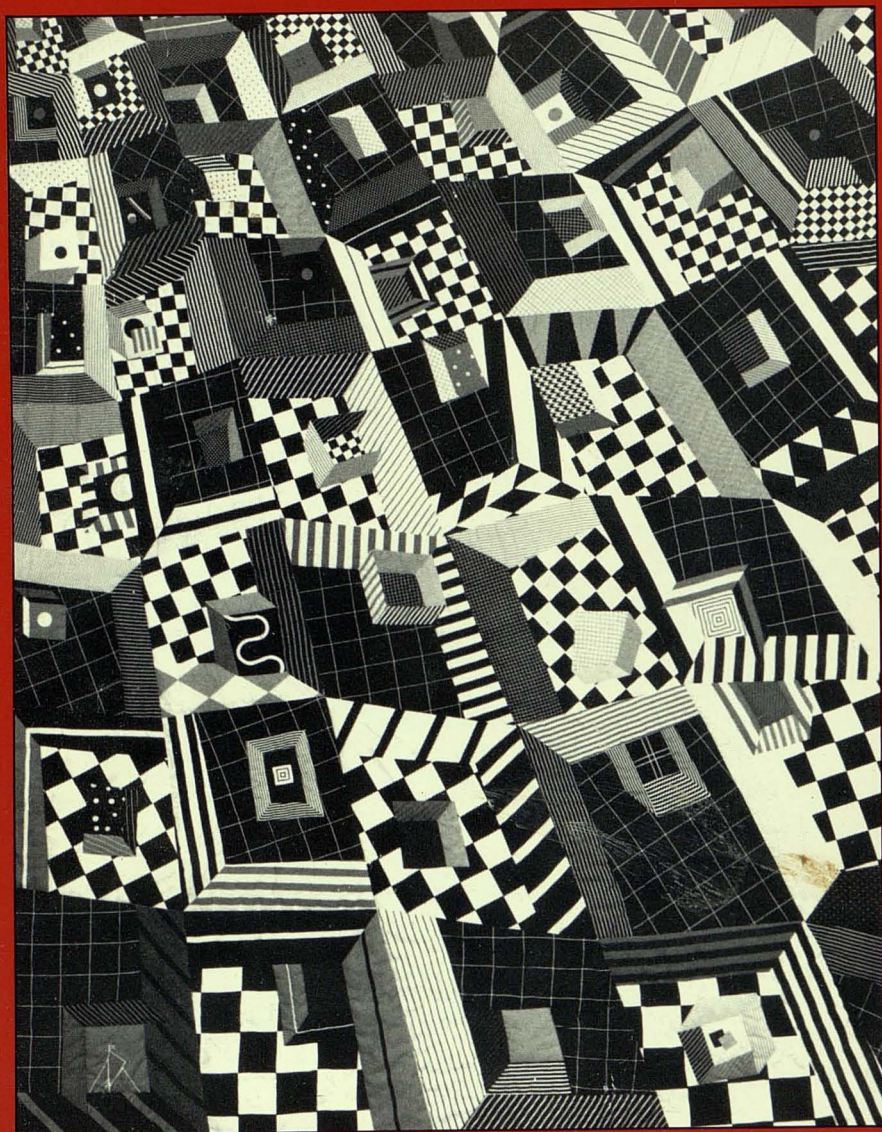


**sinister wisdom 36**



**Surviving Psychiatric Assault &  
Creating Emotional Well-Being  
In Our Communities**



## Sinister Wisdom 36 Winter 1988/89

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# A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

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Surviving Psychiatric Assault &  
Creating Emotional Well-Being in Our Communities

Writing the introduction for this issue has been harder than any other. The material is difficult, painful; the issues are complex; a large number of lesbians participated in selection, editing and kibitzing. I have friends and ex-lovers who were locked up; I have friends and ex-lovers who are therapists, ex-therapists and anti-therapists. They all had valuable things to say. During production, I dreamt frequently that I was locked up again; that the mental institutions were left standing while the coffee-shops where inmates planned our rebellions were razed. It was hard to keep perspective on how personal the political can/should/does get; how politically to interpret personal experience. I hope my libra nature and the work of the other lesbians involved have been successful in creating an issue that bears witness, offers analysis and criticism, gives hope and suggestions, sparks dialogue.

The call for submissions stated a dual intent: one, to provide a forum for women who have suffered psychiatric assault both in mental institutions and within the wider framework of any form of psychiatric therapy. And two, to ask and answer questions about "sanity/craziness," "appropriate behavior," the nature of healing, the creation of values within our lesbian communities.

We received a tremendous volume of writing by women who had been locked up or abused within therapy relationships. These women are generally invisible on a day to day, meeting to concert level. The last things we are likely to know about them (about each other) are that they got locked up, what happened to them there and how they live with that experience in a daily way.

We have included as much of this writing as we have room for. Much of it has been edited — condensed, excerpted, re-formatted. Nothing was edited without the author's consent, and whenever possible, participation. There is a wide range of opinion about the usefulness of labeling ("diagnosis"), drugs, different forms of

therapies. The opinions of the authors don't necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorial dykes.

I have believed for a long time that a radical analysis of what's called madness has to be a major cornerstone of lesbian theory. Every woman, of every age, color, class, ability, is threatened by the existence of mental institutions. The place they "put you away" when you "go crazy" — or when you "misbehave," refuse to acknowledge male authority. Women are encouraged, more and more, to seek "professional help" in order *not* to go crazy. Why the idea of "losing control" is threatening deserves a paper itself — groups who have very little power are afraid of losing what privileges they have, police each other to avoid retaliation from their enemies, retreat from a world clearly out of control by projecting the perfect self-image. Still, almost every woman I have ever met has a secret belief that she is just on the edge of madness, that there is some deep, crazy part within her, that she must be on guard constantly against "losing control" — of her temper, of her appetite, of her sexuality, of her feelings, of her ambition, of her secret fantasies, of her mind.

What is "crazy" of course changes from culture to culture, between classes, over time. It is evident that governments and men have a tremendous stake in defining what is and isn't real, what can and can't be allowed. Though we know this, we haven't successfully incorporated it into our personal and political lives.

As lesbians, we know what it means to be called "sick," "deviant," "unnatural." Books and articles have been written about how social control works — how labeling independent women "crazy" keeps the majority of women in line. Separated, isolated, paid less, little or nothing for our work in and out of the home, threatened with rape, incest, ostracization; trivialized, slighted, ridiculed; romanticized, idealized, sentimentalized — we get stuck between cycles of outrage and fear of brutalization.

Next to the physical war against women (incest, battering, rape within the family and on the street), there is the psychological war — the war against women's minds. For centuries institutionalized religion has been the most effective agent of the state in defining and enforcing "appropriate" behavior for women by class. Where religion has lost some power or credibility in the 19th and 20th centuries, psychology has stepped in to control how women



behave.

I like to think this is women's liberation 101 — but it's insidious. For instance, I don't remember the phrase "dysfunctional family" falling so easily off so many womyn's lips five years ago. It seems to me that as the women's and lesbian movements developed a radical analysis of the family — and as more and more child abuse and incest was uncovered — something had to be done to re-establish the "natural goodness of family life." Somewhere along the line we stopped saying *every* family is a dysfunctional family because the family is where women get fucked. Instead we started saying, *my* family was dysfunctional, individualizing the experience and holding out hope that somewhere there *is* a happy mom-pop-kids sitting around the thanksgiving turkey middle-class-family that lesbians can use as a role model for lesbian families. Now we share with other survivors of dysfunctional families endless stories of disappointment and endless hope for repair. Our sense of outrage on behalf of ourselves and all women is dulled.

I hear a story of a young Black woman who cannot be convinced she doesn't smell bad; she scrubs her armpits with steel wool. She has been sent to a rich, white therapist. I hear stories of lesbians who put glass in their vaginas. They're in therapy. I hear stories of teenage girls who can't believe they're thin enough even though they're starving. They're in therapy. I know talented, smart, engaging womyn who don't believe they can do anything, who don't feel they can be effective. They're in therapy.

When we hate ourselves we think we should be cut, mutilated, starved. We no longer seem to see these as social patterns but as individual problems. What has stopped us in our tracks and has us wandering from therapist to guru to astrologers and back, caught up in perpetually getting our shit together? Why aren't bulimics radicalized and picketing Nutri Systems? Why aren't womyn pulling deodorants off shelves? What happened to study groups, to action groups, to rape speak-outs, to spray painters and saboteurs? Women are the majority of psychosurgery's victims, shock therapy is coming back as a treatment of choice — why aren't there monthly (annual?) demonstrations at state mental hospitals? Why aren't all the feminist therapists, who say they are concerned with a radical analysis and new forms of

healing, refusing to use the diagnostic labeling system that gives power to the system? What happened to the spirit of rebellion? Did it have an unhappy childhood, does it need bodywork?

Therapy. When we talk about institutions, and traditional male psychiatry which teaches women to "accept our place," it's relatively easy to maintain a rigorous criticism. But there are hundreds (thousands?) of lesbian therapists practicing what many of them believe is an alternative to traditional woman-hating psychiatry. This issue has two articles that are highly critical of the infusion of psychotherapeutic values and models into the lesbian community. Some of the other contributors are therapists, but they have either written about their own experiences of psychiatric assault or their participation in it. We didn't get work from lesbian therapists on radical analyses of healing relationships.

It may be that all therapy relationships, by virtue of both their content and form, de-politicize, pacify and condition womyn to accept hierarchical models and individual solutions. It may be that believing therapy can fix us is akin to believing the nuclear family can be salvaged if only we can find the correct terminology for it, or a professional authority who will give us the answer. Although well-intentioned, it may be that feminist therapists are colluding with the reactionary trends of the '80s.

On the other hand, women I love and respect, with whom I have shared two decades of political work, argument, analysis, have become therapists and social workers\*. Many are lesbians who found themselves no longer physically able to hold careers as carpenters or mechanics, who now work with recovering

---

\* The majority of the womyn I know who have become therapists are working class. Many folks believe that therapy is an indulgence of the middle class, that working class people don't have the time or money to sit around talking about what their mothers did to them when they were three. In the Bay Area, at least, there are numerous working class and lesbian of color therapists, and many working class womyn who make going to therapy a priority, as well as low and no-fee clinics for lesbians. Poor and working class womyn remain more likely to get locked up in state institutions. One of the major questions about class and therapy is how therapy takes white middle- and upper-class behaviors as the norm, and uses that norm to make working class people and people of color feel "deviant" for having different class and community values. Is the proliferation of therapists and therapy-goers in working class and minority communities more evidence that they are being politically chilled out, or that they're taking their emotional well-being in their own hands? Or both?



addicts, gay and lesbian teenagers, lesbians who have been stuck inside cycles of welfare and state institutions all their lives. While I believe that womyn will never begin to be free until we give up on romantic love and stop going to therapy, there is a part of me that hopes anyone determined to get therapy has the good fortune to find a healing relationship with lesbians like my friends.

It's clear that other things motivate lesbians to go into therapy (as healers and seekers) besides having given up on political activism. Therapists say that they can provide us with new analyses of social dynamics — I haven't seen a lot of evidence of this, but I believe it's possible. Right now, we (mostly) depend on therapists to interrupt behavior which we can't handle within our friendship networks. We don't have many ways to deal with lesbians who hit or slash or break the windows of their/our houses, who call us names when we want to talk to them, who say they're ready to kill themselves, who sit alone for weeks staring out the window. As long as we are not prepared for the days (or months) when some dyke can't "keep a grip" anymore, we will all rely on therapists to take care of "inconvenient," threatening or unendurable behavior.

And it's also clear that introspection and self-awareness are not luxuries, but part of a full and productive life. We — lesbian therapists and the rest of the lesbian community — need to find ways to explore our depths outside of the fifty minute hour. I'd like to see consciousness-raising groups make a comeback. I'd like to see groups of ex-inmates form to share information\*, support, encouragement, without "professional guidance." I'd like to see forums on mental health in which therapists and the rest of us participate as equal members.

More dream circles, more picnics. More talking, more writing, more issues like this one, where we can show each other not only our center, but our farthest edge.

---

\*Women working in the madness movement (in WAPA—Women Against Psychiatric Abuse, and *Madness Network News*, among others) have been here all along. They have done tremendous ground-breaking work on these issues, and are still offering support networks in some places. It has often seemed as if other women's, feminist and lesbian groups feared getting too close to "those crazies."

---

## Notes on the Themes

**#37. Open.** As well as providing space for material that hasn't fit our theme issues, we plan to publish papers on Lesbian Theory that were presented at the 1988 NWSA Conference in Minneapolis, and possibly some work from the 3rd International Women's Book Fair in Montreal. Due out in March/April.

**#38. Italian-American Lesbians.** Guest edited by Rose Romano: "What does it mean to be an Italian-American Lesbian?"

There's an Italian-American culture, distinct from the Italian as well as the American, yet many non-Italians don't seem to have noticed—including some Lesbians, who make a special effort to recognize and respect other forgotten cultures. Why?

Italian-American Lesbians remember the witchcraft of their grandmothers and mothers and still wear evil-eye horns, yet are thought by non-Italian Lesbians to be followers of a woman-hating church. Why?

Non-Italians consider Italian culture to be patriarchal, yet most Italian-American Lesbians grow up in families run, without question, by women. Why?

Non-Italians believe a Lesbian is never tolerated in an Italian family, yet the Italian-American Lesbian most often finds herself accepted as Blood according to Italian tradition, only ostracized by families trying to Americanize themselves. Why?

What is the difference between north and south? What does it mean to be Sicilian? What is Omertà? Omertà American-style? How does it combine with Lesbian silence? What is l'Ordine della Famiglia? La bella figura? La miseria? Il Mezzogiorno? La via vecchia? Il mal occhio? La commare? Why don't you know how to speak Italian?

Given the strength and self-sufficiency of the Italian-American woman; her place of importance in the family; her memory of the Black Madonna; the tradition of Sappho in Sicily; and her determined urging of guests to eat, don't you think she's a natural as a Lesbian?

Basta! Write!" (Deadline: February 15, 1989)

**#39. An issue on Disability.** (Deadline: June 15, 1989)

See the inside back cover for submission guidelines.

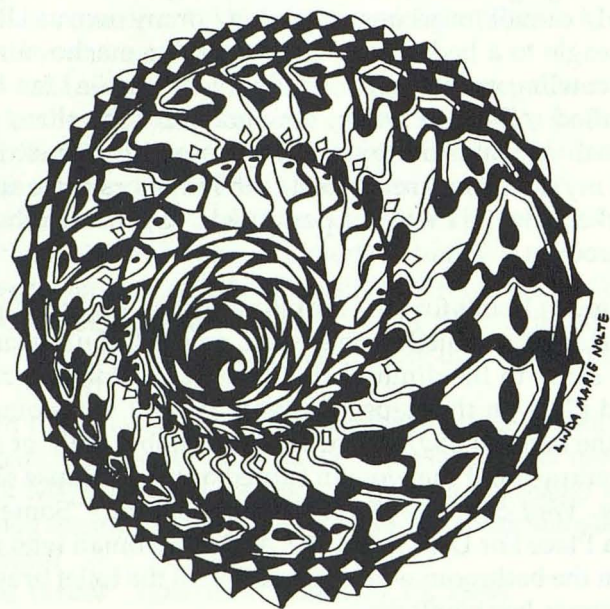


## Because of These Things

Because the old woman/ was possibly dying and I said,/ "She needs a hand to hold," her breathing/ shallow, eyes closed; — I was standing/ in the hall outside her room/ in the insane asylum; Because/ of the nurse who was efficient and cruel,/ the nurse who sat filling out forms, who rushed/ to block the doorway with her body/ and I repeated: "I only said/ she needs a hand to hold,"/ Because the nurse shook a furious finger in my face/ and shouted: "You're only a patient/ and don't you ever forget it;"/ Because of these things, I write/ to say that it is true,/ I am only a patient/ and sixteen years have passed and I/ still cannot forget. I cannot forget/ the woman who might have been dying/ or how roughly two male orderlies/ straitjacketed a frightened woman. I/ cannot forget her screaming/ or my own as I lay tied/ spread eagle to a bed. I/ cannot forget/ the macho nurse who stood/ scowling as she watched me shower/ while I felt helpless and invaded. / (But the water, how grateful I felt then/ for the strong rush of water on my skin.)/ I cannot forget sitting in a pool/ of my own menstrual blood/ while visitors came and went and gawked/ while I was not permitted/ to go down the hall to the bathroom.

There is much I can't forget:/ barred windows, pigeons/ pecking in the dirt/in the walled-in courtyard, smells/ of urine and pine oil,/ the stairs to the dining hall,/ the greasy stairway railing,/ shattered glass on the steps./ I cannot forget/ the woman who walked the halls all day/ bouncing a red rubber ball/ or occupational therapy/ and the woman turned away/ because she used profanity, *West Side Story*/ on the phonograph, "Somewhere/ There's a Place For Us." "Maria."/ And the woman who masturbated/ in the bathroom with the handle/ of the toilet brush. I can never/ forget her blank face.

Because of these things, because of the nurse/ who said I was only  
a patient and the woman/ who needed a hand to hold,/ I have  
never forgotten./ Nor will I ever forget,/ because of the pale  
hospital walls/ with the secrets they hold/ of the lives of so many  
women./ I am amazed those walls stand silent year after year./  
I am amazed that blood/ doesn't leak through the paint/ like a  
Rorschach/ of terrible roses.



*untitled* Linda Marie Nolte



## In Her Voice

One night during a fire drill  
weeds grew over the hospital walls  
pulling pushing squeezing tightlywoven  
until no one could get in

to turn on the heat  
or the water  
or the shock machines.

Choking crumbling  
like time-lapse photography  
while all of us stood there  
our mouths and eyes like perfect O's  
the building cracked and broke.

Bricks became rocks and sand.  
The walls sagged and fell in a rush.  
The ground shook huge and far.

I did that.

I called the weeds and I said,

“Do this for me.”

I called on the strength in my legs and feet  
that goes

down

into the earth

and becomes tangled with the fire  
raging in its center.

Do this for me

for every Black woman who has been angry  
who wanted to cry out to beat to lift the chair and bring it  
crashing down

on the head of the white man  
at the end of the hall who  
raises my meds until all I can do is whisper,

“Stop. You are killing me. And I want you to stop.”

Shock me?

Shock me?

I won't have it.

I don't want your demons in my brain.

You keep them.

They're yours.

Not mine.

I closed my eyes and I prayed  
but not out loud where they could hear me.

I pulled those weeds up out of the center of the earth,  
coiling dripping grease and flames.

Up they came  
shooting from the ground  
wrapping around those hospital walls until they fell  
like the ice from my eyes  
like the glass from my tongue

The cornfield out back trembled and danced.  
And so did I.

---

Tryna is a social worker. This poem was inspired by her relationship with one of her clients, a 58-year old Black woman.



## Don't Call Me Crazy

What do you mean when you call me “crazy?” That what I do makes no sense to you? Then you mean you don't understand something. That's a statement about you, not me. Why do you try to make it sound like you're saying something about me? Why blame me for your limitation?

Do you mean you're scared of me? Do you mean you don't trust me? Then why don't you say so instead of hanging a label on me? If I've done something that makes you scared or distrustful, then you can say so outright. Or is it that I haven't done anything? Are you reacting only to the labels you've heard others use about me?


I took the labels seriously once, before I learned some history. The medical profession made them up, the same medical profession that got its start in Europe by burning nine million traditional healers as witches; that made death in childbirth commonplace by delivering babies with unwashed hands; that keeps going by cutting the wombs and breasts from women both sick and healthy; that helped the Nazis by declaring psychiatric inmates and physically or intellectually disabled people to be candidates for extermination — before going on to “diagnose” the “disease” of Jewishness. It has found many ways to declare Lesbianism and homosexuality diseases, and heterosexuality a treatment. Why should I trust these casual killers to define a mind as “sick” or “healthy?” Why should you?

Are you really in a position to judge the quality of my mind? I'm free to define myself as “mentally disabled” if I choose, but no one else can define that for me. In fact, I don't think I am mentally disabled. I have mental abilities others lack. Plenty of social disabilities have been created around this. In some cultures, it's not safe to advertise oneself as a visionary.

And even if I sometimes act or feel in ways I don't understand myself, does that make me different from everyone else? If I act or feel ways I don't like and can't control, don't you think I feel

scared and ashamed enough without your judgements? Do you think it helps me when you casually dismiss me as meaningless or useless? Or do you think it helps you? Does it get you out of having to face my particular problems along with your own? Does it give you an excuse to ignore or discount anything I say in the future? What good do you think it does you to call me Crazy, Psychotic, Wacko, Borderline, Emotionally Disturbed, Bananas, Insane, Nuts, Clinical, Schizophrenic, Sick, Manic-Depressive, Mentally Ill or any other cutesy or professionalized insult? Even if you think it does you some good, it doesn't do me any.

I've been locked up plenty of times because some people didn't trust me free. For reasons of their own, they didn't like how I dress, how I talk, how I show feelings, who and what I like sexually, who I think should run the country, who I think does run it. I've been locked up for lots of things that aren't supposed to be crimes in a free country. The only excuse ever given was a list of long, latinized words that mean "crazy." Are you saying I should be locked up? Forcibly addicted to dangerous drugs? Electroshocked? Lobotomized? Those are the punishments for being labelled "crazy." I don't think you mean those things because I doubt you think about them. But I do.



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## First Admission

### 1. Diagnosis

psychotic  
catatonic  
paranoid  
schizophrenic  
manic depressive  
borderline personality  
alcoholic  
  
the professionals  
recite litanies of labels  
to name it everything but  
what it is  
INCEST

### 2. Treatment

thorazine  
elavil  
stelazine  
etrafon  
mellaril  
tofranil  
prolixin  
sinequan  
lithium  
cogentin  
seconal  
dalmane  
valium  
you are  
like a diabetic  
and will need  
to be drugged  
for the rest  
of your life  
I'M NOT CRAZY

Winifred E. Eads

## Brain Damage

Drive in the car with old white cadillac he won some old business deal he lost and won the car, my dad: me in the front seat, mama in the back, me the bad girl spoil-spoil whole family tap-tap trapeze dance, I wanna fly back into heat of the. I look over at him and say, "what would you do if I jumped out of this car right now?" He says nothing but sadness inside his eyes still shell in shock from world war was it two?

We're on his-their-my way to the mental hospital, local in the dust teaching hospital for where they do-drop off the queers each batch that ends up where they should not end up at the inevitable universities inevitably trying to kill themselves which appears to be the only option in Indiana in when?

*JUNE, 1966*

Drugged on stelazine, wherazine? eyes so blurr I canna read/  
Zina, I call myself a secret name of Zina tell no one my real name/  
three times a week the shock treatments, all the roe does in  
Indiana in 1966, the current brood of. Sit in a circle and talk a ton  
of talk none of which makes that much.

no, don't talk, just sit and tweee. Circle of queers only nobody  
says, nobody talks about what there is to talk about, us all being  
that which is reprehensible, there is not even thralldom of a  
shadow of gray lavender upon the walls, just shock of our  
treatment of ourselves and shock of theirs.

sit there inside that place and cat arch a preen for exactly one year,  
don't care what happens to me after twenty-six of cat arch their  
treatments of me are not great arcs of light inside my heads but  
instead low-down to the ground bitters in my throats and neo-  
bitters and no sign whatsoever that ever  
could I live as  
myself alive O?



JUNE, 1988

Sitting among the pro-creee spills of this new dynamo dayroom: home, I call this neo-house a home these days anyplace I lay my heads is house a home.

This particular bode-a bode the red magenta castle house a home: YWCA lived here myself five years now. Before that six years in the barn over on Vashon Island. Before that goddess only knows where this or that building spread-eagled across a plaza and casting me adrift. Haven't been locked up since I was. Today I am forty-two years old and remarkably well-preserved in good shape smiling and full of attributes I can't I — still can't yet calculate all my attributes. To put it bluntly I am full of splendors. I mean catch as catch can a whole passle of ruby color eyes for example.

Been this way off and on high and mightily among my swabs. Laugh a little cry a little. I can do both those things now and gladly after ten years of sit-sit therapy sit inside one big chair or another big chair. One time after four years it was a white couch. Most uncomfortable couch ever I did sit on: white and hard with no give and full of little mews like a herd of lowkey wildcats lived inside that white on white couch but wild of the cats never did come out to greet the light of day and neither did I although I vied for change of scene and movement thereof. Best time worst time was the time when I.

bled my period all over that couch. Dependable deep claret color of burnt silences of rust-rust my reds and on white of that couch whew!

this day I draw up all my foreheads and.  
this day I live inside this spot guess girlshed room. I am truly better off now than never I was before like I am now. Writing. Drawing. Doing my yin-yang yogas over all traces of my stars hang dangle from the ceilings of old worlds. There is the threat screee they do re maybe lock me up if I.

but I won't and I don't. ferrycart them-me across deep of my waters, I will not blood drown I will live each day catch as catch as. can.

shock

**t**he hot poker moves  
gradually  
from the fire of my consciousness  
to that deep place  
behind the eyes.

searing the flesh attached  
to bone  
tracing circles in charcoal  
where once was young skin,  
skin grown ancient  
pulling its own weight  
across the white-hot pain.

those twin blue holes now  
are ashes,  
gray piles of litter, debris  
of once healthy dreams.



## Scarves

*To Michelle and the Lexington Control Unit inmates*

**Y**ou look calm, she said.  
And I do — I took a week off.  
*Hold on to it*, she said, the warning  
flash in her eyes,  
as she left me there,  
up to my ears in teenagers,  
confined due to crisis,  
on this mental ward.

I lasted two shifts.  
Six and a half hours into the first  
we restrain a young girl.  
My blood chills as we proceed.  
I am violating some higher  
code of ethics. The one they  
do not pay me for, the one  
I pay for in moments like these.  
I go home on time, watch t.v.,  
do not tell my lover anything  
remarkable about this nite of work.

*Because I had forgotten.*

The significance of this  
forgetting slaps me in the face  
during my next evening's work.  
I call home.  
I say what I saw, what I did,  
and did not do for the  
young woman during her  
"restraint."

But there aren't enough words.  
Next morning I cut off all my  
hair. It's been a bad winter.  
It wasn't just the girl.

I weep, looking in the mirror.  
For all practical purposes  
I have quarantined myself.  
I call in sick. I take a  
leave of absence. I wear  
scarves, because it's still winter,  
I live in a drafty house,  
and people will stare.

The shame of being part of her world  
is in the funny bald spots.  
As I wrap my head each  
morning in my woolworth's  
3 for 2 dollars scarf I find  
my humility, my courage to  
go on, my memory.

I did not lay a hand on her.  
I did not say to her stop acting  
out, this is inconvenient, this  
is not allowed, you are being dangerous  
to us. Never mind we rubbed salt in your  
most private wounds.



## Holding In

My biggest fear  
Is to be like them  
Enjoying their helplessness  
Judged by all  
Given in to their distance  
It's called schizophrenia

Actually I fear psychosis most  
Loss of control  
Letting people see my insides  
It might happen if I burp or fart  
So I don't  
And feel tight all the time

Drinking relieves me  
But then I'm paranoid  
That I've let too much out  
And have fleetingly thought  
Of killing those with whom I've shared

I want to be able to make love with a stranger  
Without feeling guilty, odd, distant  
Escapist  
Feeling pleasure and communication  
And not see my mother in all people

Untitled

I've never had a masturbatory fantasy and now I probably never will. Long before I masturbated with any regularity my psychiatrist wanted to know what I thought about when I did. Every time I saw him he would turn to this subject. I thought it was a little strange, but those days I thought everything was strange, so I let it pass.

Now I know — I was the schizophrenic and he was the doctor and the books told him if he wanted to cure me, what he had to analyze were my masturbatory fantasies.

If he'd only told me; I would have cooperated. I would have gone right home, played with my clit and fantasized for hours. Anything to be cured in those days.

Now when I'm coming,  
if a fantasy starts to surface,  
I push it back.  
How could I possibly experience  
anything so heavy as  
THE KEY TO THE CURE OF MY MADNESS,  
while flat on my back,  
panting and shivering under the covers?



## Center for Delinquent Girls

In a dirt-dark room  
suitcases flow in rows.  
Folded flowers. Snapdragons.  
Sun's locked outside like a pimp.  
At odd angles to each other,  
some suitcases look like  
broken limbs.

At the Glass Club last June  
Deanna watched people  
dance the Black Lint.  
She'd go home. Practice. Come  
back.  
But each time  
the dance had changed.  
She never danced there.  
Here, Deanna can't talk  
to Linda. Each with a record  
of prostitution, caught  
in a plot to run.  
At night they dance to records,  
mirror each other. They practice.

On dish duty, one girl turned  
the sprayer on Susan  
to see her breath quicken  
to watch her  
small breasts swim  
under the wet blue  
surface of her teeshirt.  
Outside on smoke break  
the girls play Ring Around the  
Rosie,

circle the girl who sprayed  
Susan.

They sing and link  
arms like a wire fence.

Teresa sits alone,  
webbed smoke in front of her  
face.

Teresa keeps a dream  
journal. Always dreams  
in color. White  
lines on the black top  
remind her of cocaine.

"Can't cross those lines."

Beyond, the fence  
seems painted on landscape. A  
prop.

"Some girls scale it when they  
run."

Wind blows the leaves  
of the Sunburst Locust  
so far to the right  
the trunk begins to spin.  
Ashes ashes we all fall down.  
But the girls keep singing.



## Letter from a Friend

From my cage I watch them —  
they fly around the empty bird feeders.  
In this place they starve any creature  
to death. They hate not only birds  
but all kinds of animals and people.  
I've tried to run away twice  
since the last time you saw me.  
No success. The first attempt was after  
my cagemate tried to jump from the  
second floor window and two nurses  
caught her by the feet and she managed  
to break a piece of glass and began  
to cut her wrists and the resident  
on call came and he almost fainted and  
I was watching it all from the door of  
my cage that leads into another cage.  
I figured if I waited too long  
around here I might do the same  
thing. That's why I've tried to leave. Twice.  
But the gates of this cage are difficult  
to break and I don't want to try the glass  
on my skin — not yet anyway.

This is a big cage. Big and expensive,  
my family reminds me. From the outside  
it looks like a country club. Lots  
of grass and tennis courts. Even shops  
where I (can you believe it?) bought  
makeup to hide the dead color of my face.  
There are guards called clinicians who  
take us for walks. Once, while we were being  
led from building # 1 to building # 2  
my cagemate peed right in front of every one.  
Took down her pants and did it. Right there.

Near the pool. That's when I tried to run away the second time. No success that time either. I overheard a guard telling another that I was a born loser. Sometimes they can be right.

Often I take the notebook you sent me and write my first and last name several times. Pages and pages filled with the same words so I won't forget. If I have to ask again who am I? in the morning, they'll keep me here forever and I'll go nuts with one more get well card from my relatives. God, I somehow didn't realize I had so many. Relatives and cards, I mean. After I finish writing this letter I'll go back to my notebook and my name. But who wouldn't forget with so many drugs given at night when one is always weak and the knot is growing in the stomach and I am afraid it'll end up all tangled up in the head. So I take all the drugs they give me. I even smile at the nurse. A sweet childlike smile and after I swallow everything she pats me on the head and says "good girl, good girl."

It was good to see you the other day. Good to know you also noticed the empty bird feeders. So nice to see you laughing when I said that the birds were giving us angry looks — You've been the only one so far who realized I was just making a joke.

Thanks for the postcards and the record. And come soon. I am not so far away from you. But next time bring food for the birds. Promise?



## Like Your Other Callers

The nurse treats me like your other callers. "She's not receiving calls. She refuses mail. She wants no contact with anyone while she is here." I say you might change your mind. "She will not change." But —

You need my touch. You need my hand smoothing your hair back from your face. You need your shoulders held, you need to rest your head against my chest, my belly, you need to lie beside me while I kiss your hands, your breasts, your neck. I know. I am —

Alone among your things in what was just two weeks ago, our home. I lean my face into your blooming paperwhites, I play the Pavarotti tape we made love to in the summer. Ave Maria, I dust your tables, I wipe my tears in the neck of your coat, I empty your ashtrays and move the boxes you were packing up to leave me when you lost —

Your voice, thick and soft, your voice that tells poems: I listen to the radio tapes on which you read about your dolls. I rescue from the mouth of the vacuum a satin rose the size of a tooth. This makes —

You lie protected now, riding out the waves  
of the illness you knew would come again.  
the one you hid from me. Were you  
afraid I'd be too small to hold you? Did  
you think I'd run away? Did you make  
yourself invisible and resent me for not  
seeing? Were you leaving to protect me,  
or to protect yourself from me? I want —

A song, *Gracias a la Vida*, to cradle  
you in my arms: I want a dance  
for you with angels over that  
hospital bed. I want a voice  
for you to hear me say this cannot  
stop us. This is smaller than we are,  
we can ride it out together, we can  
heal each other, I can love you more  
than you have ever dreamed. I'm —

In your heart. If you lose your  
way, my flat feet will be  
here, anchored, waiting. As yours  
have been for me when I was lost.  
My flat feet will be stomping  
their own rhythms while the wind  
blows through your heart and howls you  
home to sleep again in the empty space  
beside me where I flail against a nightmare  
in the long, in the long long night.



Jane Ann Dunton

(1888)

They took Emely away last week.  
They said she needed rest, could not  
take care of herself as she should.  
"A grown woman shouldn't act like that,"  
they said, "getting so frightened and sad."

Yes, there were days on end she didn't  
smile, wouldn't change her collar, hardly  
touched the food on her plate.  
But she'd speak to me: "Dear sister, don't  
despair. There's more stars in the sky than you see."

"She's always read too much," said Mother,  
"when she should have been making friends and met  
young men, the right young men."  
Father just stared and shrugged and muttered  
a few vague words about weak blood.

It happened fast: the day they found her  
burning her hair in a china bowl.  
She'd cut it off, first time  
in her whole life, and there it lay,  
black nest aflame in stinking air.

Now she's gone to someplace quiet,  
no books or papers allowed, no scissors  
and no pens. "A poem  
is like a part of you set free,"  
she told me once. Oh, Emely.

Emely Dunton

(1888)

I hear his horses clop on cobblestone,  
their harnesses' brief music all that breaks  
the silence of my days. In here alone  
I know a special kind of time; it takes  
my breath and makes new stories no black book  
has ever held. "And how are you today?"  
he asks, his crow's face taking on a look  
my heart screams out *Trust not!* I've learned to say  
"Much better, Doctor, thank you, very calm"  
— while sharp within me my rage grows, a knife  
I'd use to cut away these walls no balm  
of medicine can make me call good life.  
Look at him now; I see it in his eyes:  
he fears and hates what waits beneath my lies.

From *Still Sane*, by Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly, see review on page 125. Photos courtesy of Press Gang.



I told them what he did to me but they said I was making it up, I was crazy, that I secretly wanted him and I was going to get in bad trouble for telling stories about people who were only trying to help me. I never told again even though it happened again. And again. And again.

What I want to know now is—do you believe me? Do you?





On the behaviour mod ward they had this system where they gave us tokens for doing what they wanted, and took them away for being bad. You had to pay tokens for anything you wanted to do, even taking a bath. I remember I had this green plaid skirt and matching sweater I used to get tokens for wearing 'cause they were trying to change me into their idea of a proper woman.

So this one morning I decided to put on my exalted outfit and net a few tokens. I appeared at breakfast all tarted up and this nurse said, "Oh! You look very nice!" in this really phony voice she always used for the patients. Then she told me I'd look better if I shaved my legs. I remember feeling all embarrassed and stupid even though I'd decided long before that shaved legs were silly. After breakfast I signed out the razor and went off to the bath. I think at that point I was planning to shave my fucking legs.

I remember the rush of blood as I slashed as hard as I could, sort of not looking and then looking, seeing the skin all white and puffy-like, splitting, and then blood welled up and I sat there and let it run in the bath. After a while someone knocked on the door to use the bath so I got up. I went to the desk and slapped the razor down in front of the nurse with my bloody hand and said, "I'm finished with the razor." She looked at me real angry-like and said, "You'll be sorry for that." They stitched me up without anesthetic and I remember it hurt like hell but I pretended it didn't.

# Therapism and the Taming of the Lesbian Community<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Therapism is not a word you'd probably find in the average Lesbian's vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> But oh, how it permeates our communities. Therapism overtakes a community when too many of its members undergo therapy. Actually in this day and age therapism is like herpes — all you need do is rub up against it a little and you've got it. Although preferred, no personal experience with therapy is required. Since so many Lesbians have turned to therapy, those of us who haven't are also influenced by the behaviors therapy teaches. So therapism is more than just the behaviors learned by women who have undergone therapy. It has become the standard of behavior by which our community judges all of its members.

Therapism emphasizes feeling — having and expressing feelings. Because of this focus on emotions, therapism encourages nurturing, tact and acceptance — all traditionally feminine ways to behave. According to stereotype, women are the emotional gender and men are the rational gender. There are several common ways that oppressed people fight stereotypes. The way therapism has adopted is to say, "So what if we're emotional. Emotional is the best way to be, and you're just jealous. Womanhood is superior. Worship the goddess. Revel in your menstrual blood. Glorify your emotions." Now our community embraces these stereotypes with a zest. This makes me more than just a little suspicious.

## Standards of Behavior

It is important to point out that therapism does not necessarily equal therapy. Perhaps the goal of therapy is for us to be more honest about our emotions, for us to learn that it's OK to feel certain emotions that we've been conditioned not to feel (e.g., anger, pride, etc.). This may even be a good idea in certain



situations. Whatever the goals of *therapy*, *therapism* is the resulting doctrine in our community. And therapism says you *must* feel — usually at the expense of rational thought. There is an entire set of standards of behavior that follows this basic premise. Of course these standards were not devised by some devious Lesbian who wanted to harm the community. They are an attempt to establish ethical ways of dealing with one another. Unfortunately they have been far from successful.

I have said that therapism requires you to feel. I know this because everyone is always saying how they feel. "When you interrupt me, I feel as if you aren't listening to me." "When you raise your voice, I feel frightened." "When you are late, I feel you don't care."

I find it redundant for someone to continually use the phrase *I feel* as a disclaimer before every opinion. Why say, "I feel you don't understand," rather than, "You don't understand."? I've never credited anyone with infallibility. When *you* continually use these disclaimers, *I feel* insulted. (That's a little therapy joke.) Or, equally annoying, I think you're a self-effacing wimp. And, believe it or not, when you say, "I feel you don't understand," some of us hear you call us "stupid" anyway. For all your attempt at tact, there are those of us who are good translators and don't buy the sweet talk.

This *I feel* language encourages us to judge everything by how it makes us feel. If we go to a lecture or read an article on some political topic, therapism encourages responses such as, "The author seemed very hostile to me," or "She made me feel very frightened." Rather than encouraging us to evaluate the substance, therapism encourages us to examine how her words made us *feel*. This promotes a microscopic view. It encourages us to look at most events in terms of one person's behavior affecting another person's emotions.

Of course, once one has recognized and expressed how she feels, *process* begins. After all, you have made yourself vulnerable by sharing your emotions. It would be cruel for the other person not to reciprocate. Process becomes the means by which women either singularly or together dissect their feelings surrounding an incident. I recall the first time a woman explained to me that the process of getting there was just as important as reaching the goal.



I agree with this idea. It is important to be ethical in the means we use to achieve our ends. It is also important to recognize that we learn things in the struggle along the way. But today, we frequently process ourselves to a standstill. Process now *is* the goal.

### Friendship

In the good old days — pre-therapism — friendships were made in a variety of ways and were various in nature. We spent endless hours exchanging opinions, brainstorming ideas and telling life stories. During that era, bad times were the exception, not the rule. We knew that friends were there for us in times of crisis just as they were there in good times and even in boring times. This knowledge assisted in getting us through bad times. And we were further assisted by knowing that our friends would *not* be there if the crisis went on indefinitely. We expected that our friends would overcome their problems in a reasonable period of time. In other words, our friendships were based on the belief that we were strong. And, because we assumed we were strong, we also assumed that we could triumph over difficult situations.

Therapism teaches us quite a different way to be friends. In the first place, one must take one's problems to a therapist so as not to overburden one's friends. If one doesn't have any friends, one doesn't have to make any. Once in therapy, women come back to their friends with a whole different set of expectations. Now we hear a lot about "getting needs met." We hear ad nauseam how our actions make our friends feel. Friends don't ask friends for advice. They have their therapists for that. Friends ask friends to take care of them, not to advise them. Friendship is now based on the assumption that we are weak rather than that we are strong. Instead of being a delightfully varied experience, friendship now consists almost entirely of nurturing or being nurtured.

And let us not forget about "safe space." A major problem with these therapeutic means of communicating is that they can be so damn manipulative. "Safe space" is perhaps the biggest manipulator. At one time safe space for Lesbians meant space where we could show affection for each other without fear of heckling or verbal abuse. It meant space where we could dare to look like Dykes without fear of physical assault. This kind of safe space was particularly important to working class Lesbians and Les-

bians of Color who did not enjoy the relative safety that academic communities offered white Lesbians.<sup>3</sup> However, today the term "safe space" indicates something entirely different. It means safety from each other. As far as I can tell, "safe space" is now an environment where a woman can express her emotions or feelings without fear of criticism. Safe space is a good example of how therapism has taken away our ability to discern the appropriate application of political ideas — sometimes popularizing these ideas past the point of significant meaning.

### Political Ramifications

Let's talk politics. Politically speaking, what has therapism done to the Lesbian Community? Do you remember what the expression *the personal is political* originally meant? It meant that all those small, personal day-to-day things we did had political impact. Where we lived, who our friends were, where we worked and how we spent our money were all political choices whether we liked it or not. Now it means that working on personal problems equals political activism. The more time you spend giving or taking support or nurturing, the more politically groovy you are. As a result our community has become politically immobile.

When a lesbian judges everything in terms of how it makes her feel, she becomes very emotionally vulnerable. She cannot take a bold stand on anything for fear of being criticized. Or she cannot criticize for fear that the community will disown her. Although support and safety have always been important to us, our community used to be based on movement. Now, we are so "safe" we cannot move.

Therapism has taught us to find everything equally upsetting. I see Lesbians respond to minor disagreements with other women as if they'd been raped. How did we lose our perspective? We are so emotionally vulnerable that we cannot distinguish between a philosophical difference and a physical assault. Lesbians seem to be spending most of their time being upset with each other rather than recognizing and fighting the real enemies: male dominance and violence.

Therapism also tells us that we cannot trust our intellects because they have been corrupted by male-dominated society.



We must trust our "natural" feelings because they are our essence as females. What makes us think our emotions have not been equally corrupted by male culture? It is certainly true that while we remain emotionally vulnerable, refusing to use our intellects, fighting among ourselves in our safe space, we pose absolutely no threat to our oppressors.

Therapism teaches us to make our actions consistent with our feelings. No longer do we try to make our actions consistent with our beliefs. One example is the Lesbian baby boom. I refer, of course, to the explosion of Lesbian motherhood we've been experiencing lately. I can see several problems that make this baby boom politically unwise for us. Yet there is an appalling lack of discussion in our communities about the politics of having children. Remember, Lesbian motherhood "feels right." And safe space means no criticism of feelings.

Therapism has encouraged us to do what "feels right" to the exclusion of political analysis. As a result our community is tolerating behaviors we used to find abhorrent. The resurgence of butch/femme and sadomasochistic activities are good examples. Women who demand the right to play butch/femme and/or sadomasochistic roles because it feels right are failing to accept responsibility for the larger political ramifications of their personal actions ...a perfect example of therapism's approach to *the personal is political*.

### Support Groups & AA

Many Lesbian mothers are forming support groups, as are Lesbian incest survivors, Lesbian adult children of alcoholics, Lesbians battered by Lesbian partners and on and on. If it begins to sound like a list of victims, it's no wonder.

The support group is a direct manifestation of therapism in our communities. Where we once formed CR (Consciousness Raising) groups, we now have support groups. The difference between the two types of groups is striking. The goal of the CR group was to raise our awareness of our oppression so that we could fight it. The goal of the support group is to band women together to take care of one another. Although they may claim differently, one can see that the majority of women in support groups spend most of their time nurturing one another. Perhaps



the original intent of the support group was to give women the strength to overcome their specific hardship. However, I see little of the overcoming or moving on to action. Support groups have become self-perpetuating systems of dependency, once again encouraging weakness rather than strength.

A good example of the support group phenomenon in our community is Alcoholics Anonymous. Certainly no one can deny the importance of Lesbians overcoming drug and alcohol dependencies. Still, the method one uses to overcome these dependencies is important. AA, like many other therapeutic ideas our community has adopted, escapes with amazingly little examination. I think it's time we had a look.

A concept fundamental to AA is that of alcoholism as a disease. The first of the twelve steps proclaims the alcoholic's inability to control her drinking.<sup>4</sup> Like other manifestations of therapism, AA once again teaches us that we are weak, that we are victims of something beyond our own control. For Lesbians to believe that we have no control over selected personal behaviors is political suicide. In order to overcome our oppression it is vital to recognize and believe in our own individual strength. Most of us have heard the idea that to be truly strong one must know when to be weak. This paradox is very misleading. Yet it is a basic concept for AA people. Alcoholics Anonymous promotes the idea of strength through weakness in its insistence on a "Higher Power."

AA stresses the idea that its members can believe in God in whatever form God might take to them. For example, Lesbians are free to believe in the Goddess rather than God. On the surface this sounds very open-minded. However, there is no hiding the fact that AA wants its members to believe in an all-powerful, external deity. Those of us who believe that *we are* the goddess and that the only deity in existence is the one within ourselves are shit out of luck. AA material is full of submissive suggestions like #7 of the twelve steps, "Humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings."<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, I find this spiritual advice to be questionable. It further insures the timidity and passivity of those Lesbians involved with AA.

Quite frankly, AA solves the problem of alcohol dependency by replacing it with a dependency of another sort. In order to overcome alcohol abuse one must depend on a "Higher Power."

Additionally AA makes its members dependent on the AA group. Frequent attendance of meetings is expected of members lest they start to drink again. As long as AA convinces its members that one drink will do them in, they will cling to the group out of fear of their own fragility.

The bottom line is that AA doesn't offer any real improvement for our community. In that it may offer sobriety, it might well benefit some individual Lesbians. But the ideal solution to Lesbian chemical dependency would benefit *both* the individual *and* the community. As long as we remain convinced that the AA method is the most successful one, we will not look for a better way. By encouraging weakness that needs continual support rather than strength that enables us to move on to other things, AA contributes to our oppression. Rather than looking at AA as a temporary solution until a better one can be found, our community is now using 12-step programs for all kinds of things including drug addiction, eating disorders and "loving too much."

### Lesbian Spirituality

Although AA clearly teaches a Christian spirituality, therapy in the Lesbian Community really teaches more of the pagan beliefs. A combination of Dianic Wicca, Eastern philosophy and "new age" spirituality seems to be popular today. However both the AA spirituality and the more popular "Woman's Spirituality" teach helplessness. Many of you will sit up at this point and loudly object. Woman's Spirituality claims to teach strength. But this claim can be deceptive.

Those of you who have been in therapy recently or have observed your friends go through it (just about all of us) have witnessed how many therapists are into Woman's Spirituality. You need not shop around much to find therapists who'll guide you through creative visualization, teach you self-hypnosis and meditation, clear your aura and clean your chakras. There are even therapists who've started ritual groups.

But once again there has been little political analysis of this phenomenon. At first glance one sees the idea of powerfulness. We are told we can create our own reality in a very tangible way. Light a candle, say your words of power and that new job, new car, new lover can be yours. But with power comes endless



personal responsibility. So Woman's Spirituality teaches the threefold law which basically says that whatever you do comes back to you threefold. This leads us to another concept common to Woman's Spirituality, karma. Karma is sort of tied into the threefold law but approaches it backwards. Since everything you do comes back to you threefold, it only follows that whatever happens to you is the result of something you did previously. *You* are responsible for everything that happens to you. It is no wonder that most Lesbians I've know who are into Woman's Spirituality are amazingly passive — particularly when it comes to political action. According to karma, a woman who has been raped has no one to blame but herself. Furthermore, the threefold law teaches us to leave known rapists alone. Any harm we do them will only hurt our karma. And the rapist will eventually "get his" threefold some time later anyway (if not in this life, in a future life). These beliefs are almost identical to what our male-dominated, Christian society has been telling us for years. Women are responsible for the abuse they suffer at men's hands. Bad things will happen to women who try to hold men responsible. If this is teaching Lesbians to be powerful, I fail to see it.

As a woman who believes much of what Dianic Wicca has to teach, I am appalled at the transformation of this information within a therapeutic community. It once seemed logical to me that radical politics and Dianic Wicca would go hand in hand. But my experience with the women of my community has been quite the opposite. Those Lesbians who are into Witchcraft usually claim not to be very political (and believe me, they're not). Furthermore, most Dykes I know with radical politics (and granted they are fewer these days) find Lesbian Witchcraft to be a joke. Therapism has caused this schism. So it is not until we solve the problems of therapism in our communities that our spirituality will fuel our activism again.

### Conclusion

It becomes very clear as we analyze further what's going on in our community that therapism is doing us harm. It has taught us that we are basically fragile and weak. The language of therapism is full of talk about empowering or enabling because we assume that on a personal level we don't have power to begin with. True,



as an oppressed group, Lesbians lack significant political power. However, therapism doesn't address Lesbians as an oppressed group. It addresses us as individuals. And it tells us that as individuals we need to have personal power *because we ain't got it to begin with*. In addition, therapism teaches us to judge everything in terms of how it makes us feel emotionally. It tells us that friendship and caring must be expressed primarily through nurturing. It teaches us to be tolerant, passive and apolitical.

I remember one day when I was very young, my grandmother explained to me her amusement over the corruption of the word *square*. Calling someone a square was to ridicule that person for being too conservative, too cautious, too old-fashioned. But when my grandmother was a child, calling someone a square was a compliment. It meant the person was well-rounded, balanced and level-headed. As individuals, we need to become more square in my grandmother's sense of the word. As squares we'd take for granted that we are innately strong. We'd start dealing with specific political topics once again rather than just vague personal "issues." We'd start to "empower" ourselves in more tangible ways like owning more women's businesses or thwarting rapists rather than simply solving individual emotional upsets. As squares we'd have less therapy and more friendship. Our friendships would consist of excited philosophical discussions and work on common projects as well as support during difficult times. Our friends would challenge us as well as listen to our troubles. And as friends we would show each other what it means to be strong individuals committed to being a community of Lesbians.

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1. I'd like to thank Tara Ayres, Lori Saxe and Edie Dixon for their thoughtful comments and ever stimulating conversations.

2. Janice G. Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 155-160.

3. Conversation with Tara Ayres.

4. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, third edition (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976), p. 59.

5. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 59.

**Note:** this essay has been substantially edited. The full manuscript is available from the author. Send SASE to Joan Ward c/o *Sinister Wisdom*.

## I Used to Live in That House

I used to live in that house, the half of it with the screen porch. Mrs. Macassar lived in the other half, still does, and rented my half, still does, to two women I know well, Millie and Lee. I imagine they don't think I know them anymore. That's because they don't know I sit under their window every night and listen to them. They could know if they wanted to know. People could know about lives different than their own (different meaning not as good). But mostly they don't want to know, like they don't want to know about me.

I can hear Millie and Lee pretty clearly through the window by their bed, and through the other one by their couch in the summer. During the cold months I listen through the heater vents from the basement. Mrs. Macassar never locks the basement; I remember that from when I lived there.

It's not like Millie and Lee are the most interesting people in the world to listen to. They go on about politics, about saving the world, and about how great Lesbians are (except the ones they happen to be down on at the time). I remember conversations like theirs; I used to have them in that very house. This morning they talked about Rae. I saw Rae today, Millie says. Oh yeah? Did she speak to you? . . . No, she crossed the street as soon as she saw me . . . Good thing there wasn't any traffic. I can't believe she still does that . . . It's been two years. . . . Then they talked for an hour about groceries and their plans to go out West.

Millie used to be my best friend and some years back I was lovers with Lee. Yeah, I was one of the girls, one of the "community." I even worked at the bookstore part-time. I went to potlucks and meetings, therapy, dances and events. I read Adrienne and Mary Daly. I listened to Meg and Chris, Alix and Sweet Honey in the Rock. I recovered, discovered and uncovered the patriarchy within and without. I protested, refused to protest, created my own reality, ate macrobiotic, celebrated solstice and healed my-



self with crystals, the whole bit. What happened? I don't really know, to tell you the truth. I still basically believe in all those things. I don't really know what happened.

Millie and Lee know, though. For them it's simple. I went CRAZY. Otherwise, how would a white middle class college educated political dyke end up on the streets. CRAZY, a word used to cover more territory even than the word LOVE. I treasure the times I hear them talk about me. They are rare and usually brief. I memorize the words and savor them like lozenges. I repeat them over and over like mantras: "She just went crazy. I tried to help her, found a therapist to see her for free. I tried to feed her."

It's true, Millie did try to feed me for a while. So did a few other women but finally they all stopped. It was too much of a strain to see me. More and more I wasn't like them. So I'd do something to offend them, one by one. It amused me to figure out what it was I did each time. Maybe I laughed too loud or said something too true. Maybe I wore something I found in their trash. Who knows. Finally they all stopped.

The only contact I have anymore is with a woman named Roseann. She works at a restaurant around here called Frank's. Every day she works (six days a week) she bags up some of the leftovers carefully in a small bag and throws them out with the others in a bigger bag. The small bag she always throws out at the edge of the dumpster a little to the right of the door. Every night, after my vigil under Millie and Lee's window, I walk over to Frank's and get the bag. With that and with what I scavenge and lift, I get by. There's really a lot to eat in the city. For instance, the people at the bagel store over at Ansley Mall do a similar thing. They bag up all the old bagels to keep them separate from the other trash, not that any "street person" I know would mind eating a dirty bagel, still it's the gesture that counts. Roseann's gesture counts. It means she knows I exist.

There are many weeds you can eat. I only know two of them, lambsquarters and little purple violets. Some time in her life Millie had been near the edge I went over and lived partly on weeds, wild pears and crabapples. The two weeds I eat I remember Millie told me about back when we were friends. She told me a bunch more but I only remember those two. I get great pleasure in the summer from making a big salad out of lambsquarters and



purple violets. I eat them with my fork and smile with every bite thinking about all the vitamins I am getting.

I was in a group once with a rich dyke, an heiress. I remember thinking how weird it was for her to be in a room with me, who couldn't pay car insurance (it seemed important at the time) and Hally who needed serious work on her teeth, and Liz who lived in two rooms with two kids. We all pretended we didn't need anything and Jean pretended she couldn't walk out the door night or day and buy a new Porche with cash. Later I thought about how I pretended spending \$5 on breakfast out couldn't feed a lot of people a lot of beans. Jean wasn't in that group long.

Maybe I did go crazy, though. Maybe that is what happened. I remember feeling like I was on a stage doing a silly dance that took all my energy. As long as I was doing this dance, the audience watched me and I existed. The more I danced the more money I had. The closer I danced to the audience, the more they applauded. If I danced away from them, the applause grew faint. The back edge of the stage was a cliff. Some days I would wake up and rush toward the audience dancing fast and hard. Other days I'd hit middle stage at middle speed. More and more days, I'd slow down and move back waving my arms, occasionally tapping a foot just enough to keep hearing them, knowing that if I stopped altogether I would fall off and the audience would never see me again.

That's what it felt like. The reality was that I stopped taking all those part-time jobs I pieced together to cover my days and pay my rent. At the bookstore they said I didn't seem very happy anymore. I started being hostile to customers, especially the men looking at Lesbian picture books and the women in fancy suits with long lists. I got angry when Lesbians called needing help that wasn't there. I was angry that they needed it and angry that it wasn't there. If they expected it I was angry that they did, if they didn't I was angry that they didn't. That was the last job I quit.

People go crazy every day. They get up, have a cup of coffee and go crazy. They take all of the little particles of themselves and put them together according to someone else's prescription and they act all day like it was their idea to wait tables or sell books or put together car engines. Then they go home, get in the tub, disintegrate, and rebuild themselves around their own life. But

never completely. There's not ever time for that. Part of them stays ready for that alarm clock. Complete disintegration is not allowed.

And that's just the job kind of crazy. Consider for a minute how Millie and Lee are crazy (and I'm not just saying that to get even). Millie and Lee do the married kind of crazy. They live together in the same house (something I always considered a mistake). Every now and then they have a huge fight. They scream and yell and get really vicious. Then at last they take a little time apart. While they're apart they feel terrible. They thought the other one loved them, but how could someone that hateful love them? For a minute the big R relationship disappeared and they could not organize all the little tiny pieces of themselves around it. For a minute Millie was just Millie and Lee was just Lee. But not for long. Reconciliation awaits like the alarm clock, not to miss it and fall off the stage.

So I fell off. I fell for a long time. Friends' faces became blurry and their voices hollow. I realized there was nothing they could do for me. When I came up for air, I was here, outside my old window, listening to Millie and Lee talking in soft voices about definitions, blueprints and plans, the old dyke cabin in the woods dream, a place where nobody had to do anything they didn't want to, a place right outside their window.

My life isn't sadder than most. I cry a lot now that I have the time for it. I cry over any little thing, things I read in the paper, people I see. I don't ever have to smile when I don't feel like it. I miss the girls, though. Sometimes I imagine myself in some heated, lighted living room, laughing with a bunch of friends. I wouldn't make the mistake of defining myself by those friends. I wouldn't expect them to be the "community" I once thought they were. I would just be happy to be there, accepted, in a warm room.

Last night when I went to the restaurant to get the bag of food I found a book beside the dumpster. It was titled *Edible Weeds and Wildflowers in the Southeastern United States*. Inside the cover in old ink was Millie's name. When I went by their house the next day there was a pickup pulling away full of stuff. Inside the cab was Lee and a friend. All night long I listened to Millie cry. For a minute, sometime near dawn, I thought of going up to the door.



## The Dead of Winter

The north side wind sneaking through the kitchen walls, as well as the mound of silently waiting dirty dishes, prompt me to start a pie dough. A brief search in our otherwise orderly kitchen quickly reveals the new lemon meringue recipe. It'll be great made with our own honey and eggs fresh from the coop. As I stand rolling out the dough my mind rolls over the events of the weekend, slowly, methodically, finally having control over the shape of something. I begin to feel a little soothed.

All four of us in the house had been a bit nervous about throwing the party — our first together. I was still mad at Adeline. Shit, we all thought it was scary to try and party without drinking, but there has to be a first time if we really are going to get sober. I know it's scarier when it's only been three weeks since your last drunk, but there can't be much temptation when the nearest drink is a twenty minute drive away, especially when it's so damn cold out. Be lucky to even get a car started to go get one.

Damn you, Adeline, was your bad headache just an excuse? I know part of you wanted us to be worrying over you all weekend and feeling bad because you weren't here. You could prove that nobody really cares, 'cause we didn't call and beg and plead with you to come on and change your mind. Nora said she already encouraged you plenty before she left, and your mind was made up. Sure would have brightened up the party for her if you'd come. She seemed pretty low all weekend. No matter how I try to let it go, it nags me that you deliberately wanted to put a damper on the party.

Josie points out that my pie dough has gotten paper thin and I'm stewing again. "Yes," she agrees, "it sure was typical of Adeline not to come. She was probably hoping we'd feel bad. Ol' misery loves company routine, you know."

When you live in an isolated area like ours, and the TV only gets two channels, you have to be a lot more creative about providing entertainment. So our party was billed as a sober, wear your tie,



bring your pajamas and old photos party. Ruth, Jean and I, in the safety of this group, were comfortable enough to wear our knots at the throat, at least until abandoned in favor of comfort. I'd have loved to see how Adeline would have dressed, besides her long johns and jeans. Would she have dared to wear a tightened tie? Would she have felt as validated as I did by the pictures of the butch girls and teenagers? Would she have felt supported by the talk, by everyone of us sharing how hard it was to be in our families? Someone was always trying to inhibit us until we took over the task and began to inhibit ourselves.

The temperatures didn't inhibit us much. Well, perhaps we would have tobogganed longer if we weren't so bundled up. Anyone watching from a far hill would never guess the sober dyke in the powder blue stocking cap covered with snow was playing in her 69th winter, or me in my big green parka in my 43rd.

It would have been so great if Adeline could have shared all of this with us; it sure helped me feel more OK about my butchness. There just isn't another good word that says it so concisely. Butch, such a loaded word. Everyone has her assumptions about us, but rarely from straight talk with us. I know it's gotta be one of the main reasons Adeline is drawn to me as I am to her. We can never hide our queerness. Everyone showing pictures of her youth last night sure turned out to be an affirming experience. Some of us just weren't very believable girls at any age, no matter how hard we tried. All the other girls seemed to be doing just fine at being girls. It never quite fully leaves you, knowing you've just got to be with them, but you're not like them. We took on a tougher-than-you-feel kind of posture so early in life that it's as much us as the jackknives in the front pocket, the wallet on the hip, and the quiet fear in the gut that we'll be discovered.

Seemed Adeline and I were beginning to break down a few of the barriers between us. Both of us sure had a big need to be talking real about our class and roles stuff. We were both raw from it, but talking sure wasn't easy.

Those weeks of house painting together last summer seem so long ago now. Adeline and I were riding home one day, exhausted, when she points out the home of this woman she'd dated a couple of times. I remember her trying to describe to me

how she felt whenever she was with her; with her in the semi-biblical sense, that is. It wasn't so much that she was unclear about her feelings — she, like me, just wasn't very used to talking about them. It made more sense to us just to feel your feelings and talk about things and thoughts.

This day, breezing along the highway, she talked about how it made her feel good about herself that Vivian, a professional, “normal” looking woman liked her and wanted to spend time with her. She also knew something was wrong. In spite of being embarrassed she confided, “You know how you're in bed and you think she's so wonderful and so beautiful and being together feels so good that you want to melt inside her skin and you feel yourself going in her and it's like you're lost in a storm? But, it's not scary. You let your heart out while you're exploring her with your whole body, making her feel as good as you can. And then, when it's over and you're lying there, she says something that lets you know that she thought of you as ... ah ... well ... ah ... like a stud. ...”

I had the clear feeling that she wasn't only talking about Vivian, that she'd felt it many times with many different girl friends. Just as I had. As she talked my armpits were ripe with recognition. But by then we were almost home and the moment of being vulnerable was past. Both of us retreated to our tough exteriors.

On one of our other rides home from work, Adeline asked me did I have a gun? She was afraid of her neighbor, who was writing her love letters, calling her up and generally scaring her pretty bad. She'd reported it to the sheriff, but knew that was no protection. Last winter this same guy had entered her house and beaten up another of our lesbian friends who had been staying with her. The “authorities” did nothing about that, or about Adeline's other complaints. She wanted to borrow my gun because she was terrified to walk into her house alone — afraid he'd be in there. She knew he had been sometimes, that he'd even been in her bedroom. Since I happened to be in possession of a friend's gun at the time, we went out into the hayfield and she practiced with it before taking it home. A few weeks later she returned it because she'd gotten her own with a permit to carry it.

Every time we talked there was a new drama going on in her



life. She was lonely since Silver moved out and until Nora moved in. Then if she was lonely, I didn't know it. Nora and Adeline got fall jobs at the local pumpkin packing plant. Everyone who works for them gets screwed over real good but Adeline was getting doubly screwed. She got one of the "men's jobs" but was only getting wages as a woman. She was the second lesbian we knew in this situation at the same plant. No coincidence, I think, that they're both butch. Finally Adeline and Nora quit and Adeline took the brave step of bringing a suit against them for sex discrimination. Usually her dramas got pretty complicated by her drinking, but her drinking never got in the way of her hard working.

I'd only been sober about a year so this was a pretty big issue for me. Adeline was constantly going on the wagon and falling off. She was going to a group therapy session, and had been doing some one-on-one counseling. She was also in a group for PMS sufferers, so she was trying real hard to make her life work. I was often frustrated with her 'cause I knew that at a gut level we had similar experiences (both lesbians all our lives, butch, working class and still living at subsistence levels), but I rarely felt supported or listened to by her. She was so needy that she hardly noted that I had feelings too. I'm kinda notorious for bringing up hard stuff; well, not necessarily bringing it up, but for calling it when I see it, instead of brushing it aside. I think that really frightened her 'cause she always wanted to have everyone be happy and get along good, even if we weren't. We could at least look like we were.

She was pretty turned off by our household's open distrust of, and disdain for, the male of the species. Bottom line she felt the same way, but she drank beer and played cards with her het neighbors, and would stop in at the local tavern and have a few with the boys. For awhile she had this "real nice guy who needs a place to live" sharing her house. He was always owing her money. I recall, we had a pretty good fight one day when she told him to leave money off at our house to save him a ride. We were all pissed that she'd give a man directions to our safe women-only haven, especially without our consent, and I was extra angry that I had to go out early one morning and deal with him. She, of course, didn't understand what the big deal was, after all, she

trusted and liked him, why couldn't we? There was no reason to be so unfriendly and hard on him, or her.

Nora had recently confided that Adeline would go to him for comfort and solace after they would have an argument or fight. Nora was feeling real betrayed as she thought lesbian stuff should stay in lesbian circles. We're starting to get to know Nora more lately, feeling a lot of understanding and support going both directions. So it was real sad to have Nora come to the party alone. All of us sure were in need of a light fun time together.

Next time we hear from Nora is while I'm still rolling that pie dough and thinking about her and Adeline. Just before hanging up I can hear Sylvia say, "We'll be right there." Coming into the kitchen, "That was Nora," she begins. I think the three of us knew by the look on her face what was coming next. "She found Adeline dead, in her bed. She killed herself."

"Oh, my god, No!" Jean runs screaming up the stairs, pounding the walls, hurling defiant "NO! NO! NO!" into the icy dark.

The others of us take no time, now, to feel. We need to get to Nora. We decide Sylvia and Josie will take one car and leave immediately. We might want to have two vehicles in case some of us stay longer than others. I will stay, bank the fire and wait 'til Jean is able to go.

Sylvia, as she's going out the door says, "Can you think of anything we should do?" I know she's swung into thinking like a dyke, not just a neighbor and friend. This is not her first experience. Hadn't been but a couple of years ago that one of her former lovers was found dead in her home. Dead of an overdose. Never was a satisfactory conclusion of whether it was intentional or accidental. Or was Sylvia remembering the hassles around the attempted shooting suicide of one of our other friends? The police had come into her home then and taken lots of her personal stuff, including journals and letters — dyke stuff, meant only for the eyes of trusted friends and lovers.

That was what I thought of immediately, that cops would be pouring through her intimate belongings, violating her in the only way left to them now. So I suggest to Sylvia removing any of her dyke personal things that are laying around.

While Jean was collecting herself and getting the truck warmed up I wadded my pie dough back up into a ball and stuck it in the



fridge. I don't know what to say to Jean. I don't know what to say to myself. I open my mouth and what comes out is venomous, "Dirty rotten trick to pull on your lover." I feel no compassion for Adeline. "How can she say she loves Nora? She knew she'd have to come home and find her, and live with it, live with it the rest of her life. Damn you, Adeline, you could have called, you could have come over."

I am furious and know I've got to cool out before we get there. As we pull into her drive I'm immediately relieved that there are no cop cars yet. When we finally make a way through the four barking dogs and countless cats all gathered around anxiously waiting to be fed and comforted, I'm surprised and disappointed to find the nearest neighbor woman there. They quick fill me in that her husband has gone to town to try to find a sheriff because they can't raise one on the phone. Nora called the neighbors after calling us because she was afraid being there alone so long.

Sylvia and Josie have already been upstairs and seen her, but Sylvia offers to go up again with me. A big part of me, right off, wishes I hadn't 'cause of the memory of her lifeless face with grey stuff, that I think is brains, oozing out of her nose, and the blood all in her hair. Well, I know I'm not going to get that picture off my eyes for a long time. Then I focus on the gun. It's still in her hand but it looks wrong to me. It looks almost like she laid it there, casually across her stomach. I don't like it. "Was there a note?" I inquire of Sylvia.

"No, there wasn't. But there was a blank steno pad and pen on the stand beside her bed." Sylvia confides that she'd picked up a few things around the house and taken them to her car. She's pretty sure Maude saw this but said nothing. No note seemed strange. We try not to get ourselves spooked. We all know Adeline was very capable of suicide, that she'd talked about it more than once, that she definitely had been depressed. It was the preferable thing to believe, as horrible as it was.

We are all together back downstairs, but being careful not to say too much in front of Maude, when the deputies finally arrive. Then soon the coroner, a woman, and about an hour later the undertaker.

The cops want to question Nora. I go with them into the front parlor so she won't have to be alone. Thinking back on it, I

suppose I pretty much switched into a "take charge" mode. I made all of the necessary phone calls except for the initial one to the sister, which Nora had already made. Seemed like then I was on the phone most all evening and a big part of the next few days.

The neighbor farm lesbians agree to be responsible for all the animals until other arrangements can be made. It's so hard for us to comprehend that Adeline would leave her animals unattended. It makes us think it must have happened late in the weekend. Nora said she was pretty apprehensive as soon as she got home because the door was locked from the inside so she couldn't get in. She'd tried pounding on it and calling to Adeline. Even now my balled-up stomach and tightening throat recognize the fear she must have felt, struggling to remove a storm window from the porch, raising the inside sash and lowering herself into the cold darkening house.

Refusing to acknowledge something's wrong, she quiets the dogs and stops to warm her hands at the wood stove. It is stone cold, silent and empty, except for a few flickering coals and a pile of ash. Spotting Adeline's car battery confirms she must be here. Dreading what she'll find upstairs, she slowly, summoning her courage, drops her overnight bag off in her own room and follows the sound of a hyperactive football announcer. Her horrified moans and cries of shocked disbelief fill the grey, cold room as her arm, like a remote control, silences the TV, leaving her completely alone.

The sister, Lois, calls back. Unable to accept it, she presses me to call an ambulance and a doctor. Gently I try to tell her it's much too late for that. She knows it can't be true, that Adeline would not kill herself because they have a pact. An agreement that if either of them ever feels like doing it they will call the other. Then she starts in on me about where was Nora? Why wasn't she there with her? I know she needs to blame someone. I'm glad she's saying it to me and not to Nora. Even so, I don't want to hear this shit. I stay calm, try to comfort her, and refuse to give credence to her blaming. If she had any sense that any of us were grieving, or in need of anything, she gave no indication of it. I understood her pain, but I couldn't take in her hostility. I am painfully aware that much of what I feel is anger and that it feels inappropriate to express it.



Josie, especially, is being able to be with Nora. I'm relieved that she knows how to do this. Since I seem to be having so much self-control, I go back to the phone calling. Tacked up by the phone is a list of calls which Adeline made over the weekend. From their house just about everyone was a long distance charge, even us. The practice of writing them down eliminated hassles at bill time. There was Vivian near the bottom of the list. Adeline had made a date to get together for brunch and skiing today. Vivian had been trying to call all day. Yes, she was sure Adeline was sober when she called. I stay on the phone with her till she's ready to hang up. She says she has friends she can call and be with.

I wonder if Adeline drank the eight bottles of beer then, or did she drink them? Nora is sure there was no beer when she left, mid-morning yesterday. My mind still doesn't want to accept suicide. I don't want to have to be so angry at her. Maybe her ex-roomie buddy, Will Dance, was there drinking with her. Maybe even in her room. Maybe she said something honest to him about thinking he was screwing her in their most recent business venture.

Since the officials are still upstairs with her body and the het neighbors have left, I go back to the phoning. No luck at Silver's. I breathe a sigh of relief for not having to tell her yet. I know it's going to be the hardest call of all. It was pretty typical of Adeline to hang on and hang on to a relationship, even when it was no longer good. There was still lots of unresolved stuff between them. Partly she needed to not be a failure at love. She wasn't any different than the rest of us in her desire to avoid rejection. And a failed relationship, no matter what anyone said, felt like rejection to her. If a relationship doesn't work then what you've got left is yourself. That's who she couldn't bear to focus on. She was, more than likely, coming to the realization that Nora was not to be her life-long mate either.

Every few minutes I'd find myself going back and forth from the one option to the other. She did or one of those men did it to her. Didn't really matter a whole lot, the truth was that men had killed her, no matter who pulled the trigger.

The only sensible thing I could think to do with my anger at what they'd done to her and are doing to the earth and all of us is to firm my resolve to resist them and to create even more dyke identified time and space. I know my anger at the injustice of it all

fuels me as much as my love of us. My sadness begins to come out as it sinks in that Adeline won't be coming forward with us.

Somehow we all managed to get through the next few days. Nora, with her dog and kitten, come to stay with us for as long as they need. We host a giant potluck and memorial which lesbians from college town and the two nearest cities attend. On the table amidst the many white candles, stones and magic memorabilia, are the handful of photos she'd picked out to bring to the party.

This was a much bigger group but in a way I was reminded of the last time a bunch of us had gotten together for a meal. The occasion was to celebrate the harvest. It was the end of October. We were an unfamiliar group, so it wasn't always comfortable. Adeline and Nora hosted at their house. I was impressed with all the fancy family heirloom table dressings that Adeline brought out for the occasion. Mostly she kept them packed away, unable to look at them because it was still too painful to remember her mother, and accept the fact of her death. Seemed she was taking a pretty big step forward in coming to terms with it by beginning to use her belongings. She even loaned me a favorite green enamel coffee pot of her mom's, admonishing me to be very careful with it.

At the informal memorial many of us tell stories of her. Horses, cats and dogs were central characters in many of those stories. We also share our thoughts and feelings about suicide. Nearly half of the women in the room had seriously considered it as an option. Several tell of unsuccessful attempts. We talk of making pacts with a trusted friend, to call her if any of us get to thinking about it seriously. This didn't do anything to prevent Adeline, but maybe it would save one of us. This ritual served as a closure of sorts for some of the women. To those of us intimately involved with the ongoing drama, closure seemed far away.

The day before this, Ruth, Josie and Nora had gone back to the house to get enough of Nora's things to tide her over for a week or two. Nora wasn't ready to be packing and going through her stuff but she did put some of it in an out building so she wouldn't have to go back in the house to get it.

Slowly, gradually we begin to put our lives back in order. Less than a week later Lois calls to say she's had the locks changed on



the house, in effect evicting Nora, without notice, before she's even had a chance to pack. With each passing conversation she becomes more hostile toward us. Six different lesbians try to talk sense to her, but she persists with her accusations and insults.

Meanwhile the authorities are dragging their feet. As it turns out their primary interest is in filling in the blanks in the FBI files on our households. The sheriff strongly urged both Nora and me to come in and talk to him separately. All of us, together, had told all we knew. We figured he had created his own scenario. It went: Adeline was the jilted lover; Nora and I were the other pieces of the puzzle. Either she killed herself because she was jilted or Nora did it to get rid of her, to be with me. We kept refusing to go in and he kept threatening us with stronger measures. We were pretty unnerved by this to say the least, and three weeks had gone by with still no official determination. Suicide or homicide? Every few days there would be some little story on the local TV or radio, saying they were still following leads in the possible homicide.

It seemed this would never end and spring would never come. Then one day smack in the middle of February the sun moved a lot closer to the ground. It gave Nora and me the push we needed to get out for something besides going to work. We took the truck and went to retrieve her belongings from the shed. By noon the temperature was reaching 60. We were anxious to get home, out of our long johns and heavy insulated boots, but there at the end of our road were two sheriff's cars.

They make a big show of flashing their lights and sirens as we turn in front of them. It's so ridiculous I consider not stopping, but figure they'd love an excuse to shoot us. We are under arrest for theft and are to proceed to jail with the truckload of evidence. They book us, do all the mug shot and finger print routine, allow us our calls and split us up. For several hours we both refuse to answer any questions. We have no lawyers. Then they make a big production out of taking another set of prints and mugs of me and letting me know it's for the FBI. They bring this slick dude who I assume is a fed to take a look at me. I'm being relatively calm 'til now 'cause I know both of us have a half dozen witnesses to vouch for our whereabouts and the theft charges will obviously go nowhere. The whole truckload of stuff probably wouldn't be valued at \$100, and it's clearly Nora's personal belongings. What

was their game?

I decide I'd rather know what they are looking for than spend the whole weekend in jail in silence. I agree to talk with Chief Deputy Fearsome. Most of the questions are things I know he already knows the answers to. Then he wants to know did I ever handle her gun. I remember her showing it to me. Searching my memory I can't remember if I picked it up or not. I thank my lucky stars it was her gun and not the one she'd borrowed. I decide he's just trying to intimidate me and confidently answer, "No, I've never touched it." He wants to know did I remove a note after we found her and before the deputy arrived. I say, "Give me a break. You already know the neighbors and three other people were in her room ahead of me."

His next question is the last one. "What are the names of the individuals who arrived there first?" This is certainly no secret, so I tell him. Then miraculously we are free to go if we can come up with \$200 cash bond each. He seems surprised that we do but Jean has spent the afternoon getting ahold of as much cash as she could. We think surely the whole trumped up thing will be dropped the following Monday in court, if not before. But no, we're told to get lawyers and reappear the following week.

The public defender assigned to me is the same person who'd handled the purchase of our collective's land seven years earlier. I wonder if he knows anything about criminal law. I wasn't inclined to tell him anything except the bare essentials about the so-called theft. It didn't seem he would be sympathetic to issues of queer harassment. It wouldn't be a popular position in our town of 5,000.

A few days later Nora remembers this lawyer she'd heard champion some unpopular person in another court. We meet with him, tell him the whole story about Adeline and he agrees to take both our cases for no charge. A year or so later, incidentally, we read in the paper that he has been sentenced to five years in prison for income tax evasion. He had better luck with our cases though, and after three appearances in court and three weeks of dealing with the slime balls, the charges are finally dismissed.

All this time, a total of six weeks since her death, there was still no ruling about the case, and supposedly still no reports from the autopsy.



At night I'd lay in bed and close my eyes, see her mutilated face, and I'd feel an overwhelming sorrow. I believed she was destined to learn whatever it was she was trying to avoid in this life and that she'd just have to do it in her next one. Letting myself feel some of how lonely and despicable she must have felt, I could remember it with my whole body. The horrible consuming depressions, walking around feeling powerless over everything, especially myself. And always the drinking to try and make it go away. Then, when I wouldn't be in that deep depression I'd drink just a bit more moderately, enough to ward it off — and just out of habit. It never helped, of course, that I surrounded myself with others who dealt with life in a similar fashion and who didn't know any more how to love themselves than I did. It made me sad that there was so little we seemed to be able to do to take care of our own. And even when we tried as lots of us do, there is just no way to insure that one who needs help will take advantage of the offered hand.

Finally a week later we get the report that her blood alcohol content was considerably higher than legally drunk and that the official ruling is death by suicide. The position of her gun hand is explained by the fact that she apparently lived for a short time after the bullet entered her head.

Several months later we get ahold of a copy of the official investigation, and confirm everything we already know in our guts. Confirm there was virtually no investigation, except of us. It states that the FBI was investigating "this group" and they and the sheriff decided to "share information and names to see if we could get a solution to this problem." We learn that Howie and Maude had accused us of stealing her stuff, but would not come forward because "they were afraid of us." We learn that violent suicide is not unusual in "these kinds of people." We learn that the abusive neighbor's mother is his alibi. We confirm that the sister wanted us prosecuted. We learn that Will Dance had volunteered the information that Nora was leaving Adeline to live with me and that is why Adeline was depressed.

Well, Nora did come to live with us, and we all did get to be great friends and eventually go on with our lives. Life wasn't the same without Adeline and our lives were never the same because of her. In those first few weeks many lesbians would write or call

and say, "Is there anything I can do?" Once we had some resolve we wrote a letter to everyone updating the situation and ended with our answer to that question. It's still timely today, almost five years later.

"These are actions that would feel supportive and that can help us all:

- For dykes to make wills, durable powers of attorney and take care of personal business so that we exercise power over our own lives and our own deaths.
- For lesbians to stop using drugs and alcohol.
- For lesbians to stop putting their trust and energies into men.
- For lesbians to set up support systems so we can get our stuff out in the open and help each other live.
- For dykes to do everything we can to eliminate suicide as an attractive alternative to living in this world."



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Chiah Heller-Zbloki

for michiyo fukayo;  
april 25, 1953-july 9, 1987

Somewhere  
along the furthest coast of june  
'bout twelve noon  
you decide that you've had it.  
too many years  
of queer, crazy and poor  
daughter old enough now,  
taken care of.

so you walk to the university mall  
through iron waves of heat  
been circling vermont three days now  
open the door to that american cathedral  
just shot up like a mushroom  
on the edge of town  
complete with everything  
ever worshipped or wanted  
just cause you don't have it.

but you've had it.  
you've had it so bad  
that you buy the one thing  
you've been wanting for years  
a black trigger floating between  
the fine fingers of angels  
in your dreams  
angels with pearl white oriental faces  
gowns soft like mother's breasts  
calling you home into their dark creases.

two p.m.  
a woman drying her blond hair

in the next room  
heard the backfire of a car  
then a gurgle.

opens your door  
sees a bed, big stain  
swell across the porcelain sheets  
in one great cloud  
red as the world  
after hiroshima.  
sees your black hair  
circle round your sleepy face  
like water whirling  
round japan, frantically licking  
the poison from the milky sands  
of the shore

sees a round door  
along your temple  
small opening to a world  
could only enter by force  
or by the sharpest desire  
to let your blood tell the story of everything  
you ever cried or loved for

only nobody hears the story at first.  
that week in the hospital  
men in green cloth  
force air through lungs  
weary for the stillness  
they'd worked so hard for  
— shaved a clean square of sanity  
round that red temple door,  
sealed it up  
till no stories came anymore.

some came to see you  
a lover  
a caseworker  
a few old friends



knew you when you were younger,  
saner, angrier,  
writing poems 'bout being  
a dyke daughter of a jap girl  
imported by a soldier  
to this white racist land  
— poems about your love for your half-brown  
almond-eyed daughter  
growing like everything  
in your weakening arms

and the stories did come.  
ten days later they ran up in our throats  
with salt and laughter.  
we made a circle for you  
your growing daughter found her place in the center  
and we told about your crazy, your poor  
your years of taking care of everybody  
but your own woman self  
we read your angry poems  
told about the shape of your smile  
and sang in long tones  
like women from some other land  
we do not know across the sea  
— a land where the water  
still comes home to the shore  
every eve after wandering  
to wash away everything crimson,  
broken and burned.

to the women who weep

They say we are crazy  
we women  
who weep  
we women who weep  
who keep  
the last grains of soil  
moist with our grief

they say we are crazy  
for we do not string coins  
upon a cord  
and then eat them  
instead  
we set clay bowls  
beneath the moon's face  
we sit and dream  
over her reflection

they say we are crazy  
that we long for a past  
we've invented  
that we long for a time  
when women stroked the earth  
with magic feet  
and when women ruled gently  
like grandmothers

but we are not crazy  
our madness makes us bold and sane  
our sadness and our rage  
are the last precious stones  
of our fortune



we need these stones  
to throw, destroy  
rebuild  
what we know  
we have lost

we are not as they say  
our tears and our memories  
fertilize our fields  
and taste in our mouths  
like manna



*untitled* Linda Marie Nolte

Elana Dykewomon

## The Story I Never Write

So you, what are you crying about? Everything comes around again. And is hard. Here you are, you got everything a dyke could want. But your mind goes up in flames in an instant.

I've been listening to "Thorazine." "I was chained to the floor with a needle carrying thorazine/ I had something to say ..."

I sat in the red chair and stared out the window and counted to myself — four of the womyn whose bodies I touched, four of them were locked up and me myself, that's five. There is something to tell about that. But what?

Zeena said she was reading a book about a holocaust survivor who just last year had gotten herself to write what had happened to her when she was a child.

What happened to you when you were a child?

— it doesn't matter

it was a long time ago

I'm a different woman now

I don't care

that child

who stands there the best I can do for her is the best we can do for our daughters still hope she makes it out of the corridor alive

I don't remember

I don't write this story

I don't even like to allude to it

The student nurses were nice, one of them beat me at cards all the time, she wanted me to know I was too much of a smart aleck

It was a long time ago in baltimore

and baltimore is a dead city

no one remembers it

I work in a small town by the ocean on the oregon coast. Next to the museum where I print, there's a cafe with a little style,

---

\*"Thorazine" by Susann Shanbaum, on *Trying to Survive*, by the Berkeley Women's Music Collective, queer toones Publishing, ASCAP, 1978.



Andrea's. Maggie's the main day waitress, a woman in her forties with a strong British accent. I've watched her for awhile because she has a bright and bitter energy around her. She has a daughter but no obvious man. She plays a musical instrument. She works hard as a waitress.

Andrea's has an art show on the wall, which changes. It just changed. I went in for coffee, to hang out, look across the street and worry about whether my Oakland lover was going to come see me or not, how to pay the bills, and about politics. There were several woven sculptures on the wall. Two boys were discussing them with Maggie who had made them. I was impressed by her work. Thought again, what is this woman doing here? As anyone thinks about anyone in this town they are tempted to think about. I admired her work to her. Then went back to pretending to correct the typesetting in front of me.

Maggie had Ella Fitzgerald playing. Andrea's in-laws or parents came in. They asked Maggie if she'd been to art school; they thought her work was so fine. She said no, she was an occupational therapist, you have to learn about twenty crafts to do that. They asked her where she had worked.

Meanwhile, I thought to myself — occupational therapist — and began to remember something. A cage at the top of a building. The older people questioning Maggie were on the other side of the room and I didn't catch everything they said. But I did hear her say Johns Hopkins, said she left there in 1968.

I scribbled on the folder. 1949 — that's the year I was born — plus 13 = 1962. I thought about it for a little while. I watched Maggie move around the room. Not many customers, 11 a.m. I motioned to her. I said, "Did you work at Johns Hopkins in 1962?" She said she had just gotten there in May of that year. I said, "I was there then."

She said, "Where did you work?"

"I was a patient. I was thirteen. You worked with me in the ceramics room."

She asked, "What's your last name?" I told her. "Yes, I remember that name." She looked at me again. "That's one of the things you do when you leave, you forget. Do you remember Jackie?" I remembered someone, but it was a long time ago; it was eighteen years ago. She said, "Well, you're doing very well."

I laughed. I said, "I guess so." I don't know what I said.

"Oh, they called you an 'adolescent adjustment,' they never label anyone that young with anything more."

O yes they do, I wanted to say but didn't. She got up. She went back to work. I started to shake. I paid the bill and left her tip and felt strange about tipping. I went back to work, told the story as best as I could to WillaMae, the museum's dyke CETA artist, and later when we went to lunch there, Maggie was more open to us; she put on old jazz and shimmied around the room while she was serving, but other than that she let it go and I let it go  
it was eighteen years ago

in baltimore

which is gone now.

The afternoon wore on me and the museum seemed small. At lunch I talked with WillaMae about emotions and control. I said, "I feel like I'm very emotional."

She said, "You sure don't show it."

And I said, "Funny how the skull encompasses you." I thought about feeling and tried to feel my way through the thoughts and couldn't. Started to have a hard time with it. Way back in memory I could vaguely see Maggie's face eighteen years ago, unlined, not bitter, clipped in the way it is now, and sweet, helping me to make a blue ceramic vase from a mold which she disdained (making ceramics from molds). The vase was on my grandmother's TV in new york until my grandmother died and I kept thinking about that, the vase and my grandmother and Maggie.

The upstairs of phipps clinic starts to come into focus for me: the attendants bring your ward up in the elevator, the ones who are able to go. The different rooms for different crafts, and at the end of the room where a bearded man teaches painting, a sun porch. Caged in. You can stand out there, five stories up, and pretend you're climbing on monkey bars if an attendant doesn't catch you. People on the streets below can watch if they want to.

I turn my head away, because I don't want to watch her. But here she is again, on my bulletin board, a snapshot someone in my family must have taken: myself at thirteen, sitting on the edge of a metal frame bed on east one, in a sparse room with peeling plaster. And I feel like —



The woman can not say how she feels. It was a long time ago. The city is dead. She remembered Rita, though. Riding home tonight she remembered once, in high school, her favorite teacher, Rita, overheard her tell the story of her life to some woman briefly, just the sketch, "and then I was in a mental hospital for a year when I was thirteen, and then I was in a half way house in Baltimore in the slums for another year, and then I was kicked out of a friends' boarding school, and then I came here." Later Rita laughed at me. She said, "You'll have to get over telling people that, Elana, it's such an emotional, manipulative thing to do, dear. You're just playing for sympathy or shock. It keeps you from having normal relationships. It keeps you in your role, you know, your play-act of mental patient. You're not so crazy."

I started watching more carefully. I didn't want anyone's sympathy. I didn't want to manipulate anyone. So I learned never to say to anyone: and then I was in a mental hospital for a year — until I knew them really well, and could say: but see, that was a long time ago, I'm not crazy, it doesn't mean anything, don't let it even scratch the surface of how you feel about me.

I turned off the typewriter and wept. I leaned against it and sobbed. At first I just wanted my grandmother back. Then I started to cry: You fucking bitch, you fucking bitch. I sobbed and said: I'm so angry. I will tell you the student nurses were nice, not that they tied me into a chair to set my hair, saying, "You'll thank us for this, it will make you feel like a woman." They too, after all, were victims, passing on being a victim. Personal anger is such an indulgence. Is taught as indulgence.

I am so angry about keeping this in. About being afraid to tell you. The disapproval, the closing down of a woman you love and whom you want to love you ties you up, ties you to the ground, keeps you down as much as thiorazine. And I've walked around New York so pumped full of thiorazine my joints froze my body rashed my vagina turned red. I couldn't remember anything except, in the back of my brain, if I ever got home, I would kill myself right, so that wouldn't happen to me again — and I know that that careless gynocidal chemical brutality can sometimes be little compared to what we have done to each other for them mother to daughter woman to woman lover to lover

friend to friend

o you yer getting personal again  
it's not like

it's not like the men didn't rape you with freud every way they knew how. I remember one of the rounds doctors, a giant prick, coming by and seeing a painting I had done in occupational therapy in which there were two mountain peaks. "Hmmm," he said without looking at me, "clearly you have a regressive fixation on your mother's breasts here." I was very upset. I went to my psychiatrist. I said, "What did he mean?" My psychiatrist knocked the ashes out of his pipe and said damn dr. whatsisname, I wasn't ready to talk about that with you yet. He laughed like it was joke. What's the joke, I didn't say. You want to tell me: a. if I paint mountains you'll say they're breasts, b. that it's wrong for me to paint mountains or breasts, you'd say I was healthy if I painted trees (I started painting trees), c. that it's regressive and there's hardly anything worse you can be than a fat thirteen-year-old regressive throwing her emotions around wanting breasts somewhere in her fantasy. I lay awake thrashing in my bed. My thoughts were teeth, grinding each other: why do they think it's not regressive if a woman wants a penis, why isn't it regressive to want your father, who says it's the right way, why, why did they do this to me.

Years later my mother went to visit the psychiatrist, to talk about old times. He said, "I was just a young resident then, we didn't know a lot, I would have done things differently, but I couldn't have done so bad, she never went back in again, did she?"

There are too many stories. I wanted to write something — good — about having been a mental patient in a mental hospital in a big city the whole year I was thirteen. Good — that is, linking it up with the experiences of my lovers:

Lois, who stayed straight, had shock therapy and used to say, "— all the plots of the movies are gone but why I stay with Richard is because he came to the hospital every day I was there and read me from the newspapers. Even though I didn't hear a word of what he said, he came every day ..." I bought that for awhile because I knew what it meant, hoping she would realize



she had already paid back more than she ever owed. Last night I read in the *Lesbian Insider*, "straight women who are locked up get lots of visitors. Lesbians don't."

And Mary, who couldn't bear it after her lover of five years left her, got drunk and went to a motel on the jersey shore, started to carve her lover's name on her arm. Her friends came and locked her up. She was lucky and only stayed in the hospital a couple weeks. Survived the hospital, and the fact that that's all her friends knew what to do with her. She rolled up her sleeve and showed me the scar.

And Sharon, who was not lucky, who did not escape drugs or shock therapy or psychosurgery or the judgement of lesbians who thought that if her karma had been in shape that wouldn't have happened to her. Before whose pain I felt like some who had survived a camp relatively intact in front of someone who had come out terribly changed, tortured, left furious but broken. I thought it was up to me to fix it because I understood what had happened there. Because I had seen the place on the CAT scan where they burned the holes in her brain. Because we were lesbians who could do anything, change the actual molecular structure of the wound. I couldn't fix it, and I began to use what had happened to her to hide what had happened to me.

And Zeena, whose crazy time haunts her still, a woman who folded in upon herself in deep depression, scared to death of her fear and of the incomprehensible demands of the world. She says, "that time when no one knew what I was going through" — and wants me to speak, wants me to talk about it. And I say:  
it was a long time ago

I have nothing much to say. I was a lesbian child born into a straight family and I did what I could to get out of there, that's all. I don't want to talk about it. The worst I thought could happen to you was to die; they taught me different.

There are many things worse than that. One is to fall into their hands. Another is to come out of a mental hospital submissive, unable to fight back. A third is fighting back in silence. The fourth is breaking the silence and finding the womyn around you saying, "There must have been something wrong with you in the first place if you fell into their hands." Is having the womyn say, "There's nothing we can do about it. When a lesbian is crazy,

difficult and in pain, we have no way to help her here or provide refuge, it may be she has to go back in again.”

Once I heard a story about a lesbian community that took care of a woman who was — in trouble in herself — who had been in hospitals before. They decided she did not have to go back. Womyn who were her friends and womyn who hardly knew her took turns staying with her. Being there with her in the place where she wanted to be. Over months and months of time. I don't know how they worked it out. The rent money, the food money, the time, the commitment to persistence. I heard that they did and that they did it simply, without condescending, without extracting a debt larger than: I hope you will do it for me if I need it and you can.

It's hard to believe of us. But I want to believe it. Taking it back to you, the story I can't write about myself anymore tonight because it hurts too much, it brings back too many hallways with the fear on every side and me that child shielding against it, against the dead womyn and the dead self in that fear, against the suicide, the remembrance of feeling: there is nothing worth waiting for — brought back to me today by accident in a cafe on the coast. The circles my life makes sometimes shatter me, time falls apart, what I want is never what I think I want and what I get is not satisfying me. In an instant I can be caged again.

After all that started to stir I suddenly couldn't believe anymore, didn't care what happened to me. Too much comes back, too much has happened to too many lesbians that will never be told. I am too angry and I have no purpose or direction for that anger. I feel very tired and very alone.

And it happened a long time ago.



## My Mother Played the Accordion

It is the smell, the open gray metal accordion case, it floats out like a ghost. My mother stands in the Good Room laughing again like a girl, the music strapped to her chest, part of her broad shoulders. She plays; I dance a child's polka. I press my cheek against the crimson velvet lining, run the backs of my arms along the smooth buttons, the colored inlays.

A luxury, this memory; our private life.

Only once he walked in, the last time.

"Oh for Christ's sake Vera, not that again. You don't have enough to do without making a commotion too."

*i arrived a fool with my seventeen years and hope my grandmothers accordion wedding gift three sticks vine charcoal one pad paper from nuns five year diary four lines per day expecting by eighteen*

Is this how it was for her: he is in the kitchen where I am washing the dishes. He never takes his eyes from my back, stays in his chair and doesn't move to help but doesn't shut up for telling me how each plate should be rinsed thoroughly as I am doing just that, how the baby bottles must be scrubbed with the bottle brush which I am already holding in my hand. Why do I go around so dumpy all the time he wants to know, put on such an act, and don't I know how lucky I am.

I despise my own face when tears are stronger than my pride to hold them. I turn to him fully, "Get out of here. Get!"

He charges, grabs me ...

"It will happen to me, I am becoming her. You are making me into her. Leave me alone!"

He is purple, ripping my shirt, screaming into my face, "You little bitch, don't you dare say I had anything to do with her, she was nuts, crazy, a mental case from the word go — you got that, you got that?!"

I smash his head with the soapy plate still dripping in my hand, it breaks against his crown. I hit him again, he bleeds, stares, stunned a moment out of his attack.

"You," I say, with absolute certainty, "you, are an assassin."

And then I run, I run out of the house, down the highway. I run and run wondering where can I go, finally dropping into a ditch where I wipe the sweat from my eyes with the dishcloth, and make a plan.

*beautiful babies yes i want to crawl into a hole in the ground awake every night his rage make the infant stop nothing consoles what is wrong what power do i have*

*no he says i dont have good christian love im not nice anymore im not im chipped at chipped away*

*i am starving to death there is a cavern in my chest my life seeping out*

For five years I lived in an apartment down the street from a place called Misty Manor. Twice a day the patients were paraded down the street, past my bedroom window; arms hanging stiffly, heads loose atop curled-in shoulders, sluggish robotic steps. Prisoners of war, daily I was reminded what it was my mother escaped.

*i dreamed i was walking many other people were walking yet i am alone thinking how the bomb could drop wouldnt that be justice after all i have waited so long to die that doesnt mean that i want the whole world to disappear that doesnt mean somewhere for me for the future for not just my children i have hope it is not enough*

*in the dream i came upon a friend she was like me locked in sitting unclothed as they make us times they think we will try anything she was weeping i said come on it is time to continue*

*the path was narrow water on one side but deep the other razor rocks no choice but i did attempt the rocks regardless pulled down by attendant i knocked him away but did not escape*

*a woman with an infant whispered to me you will come to a place tell them you want to sleep not shower*

*i see already the barns i hear the showers*

*i want to sleep the man does not understand he takes me into a room where all the men sit around a table they speak to one another but my language no one can comprehend*

Once in the attic I found four yellowed charcoal drawings of an infant sleeping in a wooden cradle. It was dated the year of my birth, there was no signature. I have searched and never come across them again.



Once I was walking down the basement steps and came upon these words scrawled in a child's hand with charcoal: why is mom playing with death. Perhaps it was a dream.

*depressed is the word he said shame on you a pretty girl get over that nonsense*

*i write here even when it betrays me*

*the thought of any more need of even words i am so afraid of losing more than i have what do i have ever will have a woman only has her secrets*

She is standing in the kitchen much taller than me. I am the invisible witness to her howling deathwish, terrified to leave her alone. I don't know where to hide or how I can save her. I am Alice getting smaller by the moment.

*they say this will pass truth is it will return again too*

Once not so long ago she cradled me, told me I was a jewel, made her ring sparkle in the light shining through the ice on the window; "See."

If they say she was a monster they don't know.

Under my feather quilt I am safe, angry, I want to know why her, who I love, and not him, who deserves it. I want to know.

*things i want to be true i dont write down when have i ever not had a face reading over my shoulder cut it out rip it out that is what they cant bear that a woman should have her secrets*

My father is driving the car too fast down a steep hill.

My mother is coming back to us, they have let her out after three years. She sits pale, in a mint-green pantsuit, fragile, her hair sprayed stiff with Final Net.

*am i so terrible*

*i dont want to see gawking up at me from the page dont i know enough to not say more if i got drunk i would tell stories until they set me on fire so who cares so i dont so who wants to read it anyway*

They think her love for me is stronger than her will to escape. I do my part by never once taking my eyes off her. I don't know what they see; I see my mother.

She has the knife in her hand, she is fast, suddenly strong, she breaks for the bathroom, with a quick hand she locks me out. Let me in, let me.

*how exposed one feels suddenly when the blood really does come out  
runs on the sink wounds really running from my arm see i am real i  
am a painter, carver*

*if i act quickly no one will know no one will know no one*

I run for rescue in slow motion crying, I betray her; I am no different. Backing away from the grip of two strong men, she turns, pushes me onto the floor in her rage.

Her rage, her life; I want her life so much. I want her life because I am a child and do not think I can survive without it.

From then on we shared no secrets. From then I would listen to her tortured sounds vomiting the overdoses, his fingers down her throat. I could be no comfort, found none for myself.

*there is one thing they can not make me do that is live not even if they  
outsmart my body*

*this prison is a prison is my home where i wait cant move unless he  
springs the trap*

*dont they know i am not for waiting*

My father was beating me with his fists, I felt I would die. I looked up and saw her sitting, alive again; silent, pale, observing. I realized it was a dream, she spoke to him through me, "I will destroy you, don't doubt it."

*i walk down the street stare go ahead a curiosity i look into a store  
window that reflection is not me*

*what is it they want i fix my eyes straight ahead look only direct  
or meet their eyes with nothing in mine a skill i have pull my mind to  
a safe world*

*there is no safe place to go crazy what i didnt know there is no cure it  
only gets worse the drugs take away they cut it doesnt end doesnt heal  
it doesnt there is only one end to this path*

*once i was blue it was mine now i have nothing not my own body not  
pride dont push away they say i trust no one  
spare me your pity*

Out of superstition and mother loyalty, I avoided the doctors who gave pills, did surgery. A therapist instead: eighty dollars a fix. As I came down each time the voice haunted me, "No of course you are not queer. You hate your father. Not all men are like him."



"You say you are weeping about the woman found strangled at the edge of campus, but really that's an excuse for deeper grief. Don't put your problems on the world."

Out of rage, common sense, I dismissed the dealers, learned to dismantle my own bombs and return them carefully to their origin: reset.

*there is no pill to make him stop  
no operation to cut away time for me no hospital to give me peace of  
mind time to hold the baby all night there is no cure  
the gold stars mean nothing to me i wont work for them im sick to not  
want gold gummy stars alright im sick  
he said not the time for questions not the time to think*

I think of my mother's act of rebellion: she wouldn't live for them.

I think of my own and know: I won't die for them.

*it is not because i dont love my life it is because i love it very much*

I don't know what they see; I see my mother. No one tucked away hankies that day and said, "But what an accurate portrait Vera could draw, a born artist she was."

No one recalled, "Vera played a fine tune, that you could count on. That you could remember."

Maybe I was too young to know. After all no one really is a born artist. More than inclination it takes hours, money, and for a woman a voice in her own time that reminds, "It is right to want to do this above all else."

*it is not because i dont love my life it is because i love it very much*

I hear the hushed gossip of cowards behind me in the grocery store, asking of my mother; what did she do, what did she do, what did she do. They don't hear. It is only a whisper.

*My mother played the accordion. That is what she did.*

## Money Changes Everything\*

It took many months away from misery entrepreneurs before I began to realize their effect on my life and on society as a whole. While paying a shrink, I drifted away from unpaid friends. I learned that not only did I frighten them, but that they lacked experience to help me understand my pain. I learned friends were "too close" to the situation, that I couldn't trust them with my deepest secrets. I learned that only thoughtless self-centered people expect support for free from untrained folks they call friends. Friends learn from subtle behavior modification programming that turning to books, dogs, trees, streams or deep breathing will only delay "necessary treatment" and worsen the potential customer's condition.

To believers, therapy means goodness, helpfulness and expert care. No matter what goes wrong in the chatting-for-hire relationship, the opinions of the faithful do not budge. When one professional damages us, we often seek out another in hopes they'll fix us up and heal our pain from the previous damage. Torture, murder, brain washing, incarceration, rape, battering and fascism all happen in the name of therapy. These are not merely side effects or the errors of misguided professionals. They are part of the package. All therapy is political and hierarchical. Some professionals lie about the relationship more than others.

Psychotherapy is a medicalized term used to distinguish it from common activities. If we play in our homes it's called play. If it occurs in a professional building the identical activity becomes play therapy. If we weave baskets or make belts we're doing art/craft labor. If under psychiatric guidance, we're engaging in occupational therapy. If we wash our kitchen floor, we're cleaning house. If we're inmates in a psychiatric institution, we're

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\*This paper is excerpted from a much longer article, which will appear as a chapter in *The Misery Business*, a book in progress. The full text, as well as other chapters, is available for postage and copying costs from Dee dee NiHera, P.O. Box 20904, Juneau, AK 99802.



engaging in industrial therapy. The market is rapidly expanding to include every activity imaginable. People in this field can only make a living from what they perceive as therapy.

All universities teach beliefs. Beliefs become facts when the majority of those in power agree with the beliefs. The general population is often in awe of what it takes in time and resources to acquire a degree. People are taught to assume that a degreed person is better qualified, more skilled and dependable than her or his non-degreed counterpart. Less expensive and time-consuming ways exist to exchange ideas and teach each other different ways of doing things. But without social validation from degree granting institutions, ordinary wisdom remains outside the realm of possibilities.

Universities do more than sell information. They create a professional privileged class and institutionalize racist, sexist and classist ideologies. The concept of professionalism serves to divide the haves from the have nots. To insist on the preface "doctor" for one's name is to desire the status of master over others. The ideologies of therapy and professionalism overlap in purpose and meaning. Both convey a sense of goodness and desirability. Hidden beneath this cloak of misinformation we find that both therapy and professionalism encourage inequality, authoritarianism (under the guise of expertise), cut-throat competition, and ethical irresponsibility. Simply by virtue of their titles alone professionals are considered respectable, trust-worthy specialists. They teach lay people that oppression wears a smile and should be embraced and respected. They repeat the mantra to themselves and each other, "We are superior to non-degreed helpers and friends because of our expensive formal education. Everyone needs our services because all people have difficulties surviving in the modern world."

### Why We Buy

New graduates enter one of the fastest growing markets in advanced capitalism thanks to government sponsored advertising. We don't choose therapy simply because we're angry, hurt, frustrated, isolated and confused. A manipulative and clearly planned advertising campaign financed by tax dollars continuously shapes our thinking on the subject. We learn almost hyp-

notically and unconsciously to associate the terms therapy, helpfulness and alleviation of pain.

The media is the most powerful ally of the misery industry. Reporters present the beliefs and opinions of psychiatrists as scientific facts. Successes and breakthroughs are big news. Death and relapse make poor copy but are quite common.

Misery entrepreneurs use the media to their individual and collective advantage. Because they perceive that most problems have a personal solution which can be marketed as therapy, there is no end to supply and demand. Part of any advertising campaign is to make a product desirable and then to confuse a potential buyer about the difference between desire and need. The final step is to create a dependency on the product and limit its delivery to the marketplace.

Therapists require dependency from customers, they survive on it. Part of the professional's marketing strategy in collaboration with government agencies is to convince potential customers that first, professional conversation is a service commodity and second, that the populace desperately needs to buy what they alone are licensed to sell.

Language is another important aspect of the sell. Atrocities hidden in language are a method used by both the military and the mental illness industry to keep their image acceptable and saleable. Take for example psychiatric and psychological treatment. Many think that when a person is placed in a locked facility with no trial they incarcerate the inmate illegally. If a medical staff runs the locked building, people believe, due to advertising, that the "patient requires hospitalization." Drugs change to "medication" when prescribed. Medications somehow avoid the current medical blitz on drug abuse. Supposedly only self-medicators abuse chemicals. Electrical shocks change to electroconvulsive therapy. When a person takes a razor and carves little lines into her arms, doctors call this activity self-mutilation. When a physician saws into a person's skull and slices out portions of the brain, doctors call this psychosurgery.

How many folks would bring their friends, their kin or themselves to the prison gate for punishment? By medicalizing the language to "hospital," "treatment" and "help," authorities know that many will turn in themselves and their loved ones.



In the office of the therapist, a more subtle form of oppression occurs. Equally dangerous, it too goes unrecognized and unchallenged. The expert promotes herself as different from and superior to the ordinary peer. Some therapists claim equality with their customers while promoting themselves as superior to the customer's peers. The medicalized title of the paid conversationalist or treater is central to the entire misery enterprise. Also important is the language professionals use to describe their customers. Some therapists call those who pay them consumers or clients. These experts attempt to de-medicalize the buyers' position in the hierarchy. Removing the stigma of mental patient is also good for the business of those who fear the "real wierdos." They can treat everybody else. For some reason, these therapists see no reason to change their title or position. They were top dog with patient/customers and still are with client/customers. A change in title might have threatened their authority and thus their income.

Psychotherapists today needs the patronage of their customers and the State to survive economically in their career. Even though customers and the state keep them in the money, they pretend it is their product (therapy) which is needed. How many workers do you know who can charge for services their customers didn't order and don't even want, who can drag out the sell for a life time, who control both the time and the manner in which their services are delivered to the market?

If a house cleaner who earns ten dollars an hour questions her psychotherapist who charges seventy dollars for fifty minutes, the therapist may equate money with personal worth. "I charge seventy dollars because I'm worth it. You would too if you could get it...and I can help you get what you want and deserve." More frequently, the discussion will shift to the customer's supposed problems. "Why do you resist my attempts to help you feel better? Why can't you make and keep commitments in your life?"

Once somebody lays their money on the table, the therapy hook goes deeper. Sellers congratulate their voluntary customers for "doing something good for yourself," or starting to "take care of yourself" and advise that "you owe this to yourself." The fee collector reminds customers that "this is a safe place, a non-judgmental place, you need not censor a single verbal response."

"You're not weird or alone." "It took great strength and courage for you to make the decision to come here today. I applaud your strength." "You're special, I'm here and I care." It's seductive to have an audience who you believe is there only for your well being.

Therapists tell their customers to share their fears in this society, but in an attempt to mask their own terror, they drug visionary customers. Because most customers have learned to fear these non-ordinary sensory perceptions, they willingly swallow damaging chemicals and hope the pay off is worth the risks. Drugs are well-marketed and highly profitable. Drugs prove how much users need them like therapists prove how much we all need therapy.

### Government Dispensaries

Money is one of the most taboo topics in this commercial caring enterprise. Folks without money have "the right to treatment" but if professionals judge them or their middle class counterparts as being possessed with a serious mind sickness, they have no right to refuse treatment.

Without choice, the legal system sends offenders to misery entrepreneurs as a court sentence, a requirement of parole or as an alternative to jail. Others go as a requirement for receiving public assistance, an insurance settlement, or so the court won't take away their children. As professionals have moved into the lucrative market of child psychiatry, more and more children are forced to participate in treatment. Over the past five years child diagnoses have increased 1000% while child hospital admits (incarceration) have increased 400% over the same period.

Social turmoil greatly benefits misery business entrepreneurs both in private practice and in clinics. The more who come to the clinics, the more clinics will be reimbursed by third party payments. While the customer in private therapy for two years will pay ten times the amount of the annual income of half of humanity, the public customer also contributes to the gross national product. McKnight writes in "A Nation of Clients" that those receiving public assistance are more valuable in their dependency because so much income is derived from this dependency. They probably will never produce the amount made off them, so



can not contribute as much working as they can dependent on services and therapy.

The government and the misery business need each other to survive. Misery entrepreneurs adjust people to their oppression (including sellers who call themselves feminist and radical). In return the government grants these professionals certain privileges, licenses and free advertising. It is in their interest to conceptualize social injustice as individual psychopathology (mind sickness). It is in their interest to have the "masses" adjust to oppression. It is in their interests to train the "masses" to seek out authority for every problem and to make authority appear concerned with our well-being.

If we're all isolated and preoccupied with blaming ourselves for our poverty, homelessness, sickness, battering and unhappiness, we will never unite and confront the unequal distribution of wealth, stealing disguised as taxation, biological warfare, racism, sexism or anything else. We won't even recognize their existence. Social unrest and demands for equality will be put to rest in favor of a trip to the therapist. We all pay for such a philosophy. Some more than others.

### Who's Sorry Now?

Sellers of therapy have a few formulas to deal with dissatisfied, violated or dead customers. One is called "the bad apple" theory. They pull it out frequently as so much seems to go wrong in the misery business. The bad apple theory concedes that cruel or ignorant practitioners exist among professional ranks, but that a few misguided and ill individuals in no way reflect upon the entire operation, only happy endings and customer satisfaction.

Co-optation is an important aspect of diffusing anger and restraining social action against all institutions, including psychiatry and psychotherapy. Faithful customers defuse criticism of the profession by accusing violated critics of poor shopping habits. "You just didn't find the right shrink." The assumption here is that there is choice at all times.

Entrepreneurs and customers also charge survivors of therapy violence with frightening the needy with horror stories, and label critics as "mentally ill."

## Feminists Strengthen the Business

Criticizing feminist conversation-for-hire in a meeting or a women's news journal in the United States is like criticizing Catholicism in the Vatican. Women jump to defend their shrink (feminist therapist) and shrinks jump to defend their products. The critic rapidly becomes the anti-feminist, the outsider, the ignorant. Critics are too negative, unsupportive of women's needs, can't listen and are "addicted" to an anti-therapy stance.

If a feminist seller violates a customer, the feminist was only masquerading as a feminist or the incident never really happened. Unlike other sellers, feminists seem to believe that their colleagues never harm, disable or destroy their customers.

The term "feminist" is not a liberating one to me. Further, I do not support the U.S. feminist (therapy) movement. I think that a group so embedded in psychiatric jargon and which takes no stand against incarceration is not a women's liberation movement. (Maybe that's why women took "liberation" out of their name and decided to call themselves a feminist rather than a women's liberation movement. A friend of mine suggested that a change in class perspective put women's liberation out and feminist in as labels.) I think the feminist (therapy) movement in the United States is different from women's liberation in other parts of the world.

Neither political criticism of psychiatry nor counter institutions were new ideas in the 1960s. Women's liberation theorists naively decided that the problem with psychiatric and psychological services was an over abundance of male practitioners treating female patients and a sexist theoretical foundation for such treatment.

With a limited analysis of the problem, no critique of a medicalized language and little understanding of classism within the professions, women set up grass roots projects such as women's centers, battered women's shelters and mutual support networks. They took power rather than waiting for the experts to "empower them" with the right to change.

Meanwhile, highly educated feminist entrepreneurs decided that the way to change the system and "empower" women was to work from within the system. This at least gave them a good



salary compared to grassroots organizers who had to scramble for phone money. The reform philosophy is different from a philosophy of revolution. Their strategy was to reorganize existing institutions without altering their basic foundations. They called their reorganized institutions "alternatives." An alternative's progressive appearance helped appease certain elements of this social change movement. Feminist therapy, for example, was conceptualized and marketed as an alternative to oppressive psychotherapy.

All licensed sellers pay tuition in the same classist, racist and sexist universities, but supposedly those calling themselves feminist put their indoctrination aside to bring their sisters a product packaged with more appeal.

Feminist therapy sellers, in an effort to corner the market in the political women's community and convince prospective buyers of this therapy's uniqueness, proclaim equality between buyers and sellers (later some acknowledged that it wasn't an equal relationship, but that's life).

Is it equal when buyers teach sellers about human interactions and give them marketable experience yet have to pay to teach? Is it equal when buyers are expected to share their inner most secrets while sellers sit safely watching and interpreting their customer's behavior? If the seller decides to share pain and the buyer listens as part of her paid treatment? When one has the power to imprison another?

Another early selling technique was to convince women with political problems that therapy could help. As a recruitment method, supporters of feminist therapy decided that apolitical women could get politicized and active through feminist therapy, not through peer consciousness raising groups or any other obviously political channel.

Non-degreed women offering women feminist therapy for free needed to be dealt with. The pros taught trainees that working without economic remuneration was anti-feminist and showed they suffered from a mother/martyr complex. Non-degreed women began charging women to come to groups in their homes, groups that in the past were peer-organized without fees. Now professionals pointed out that they were selling support without a license, and advised women to purchase proper

university training. Professionals were invited into many rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters to observe and help out as equals. Slowly they moved out the "lay persons" who organized the shelters in the beginning.

Now women wrote articles and sold workshops on how to choose a therapist. Professionals invented syndromes for survivors of rape, battering and incest and wrote up grants to provide "treatments" for these diagnoses. They said what women in pain, women battered and raped, women brutalized in prisons and psychiatric institutions need is not mutual support, grass-roots organizing and political revolution. We need a marketable resource, an expert to chat with, a professional "sister" to sell us hope.

While inactively waiting for a revolution, frustrated feminists need to purchase professional talking. How else can one keep her spirits up in these unsettling times. Sellers make buying easy. A woman can even buy on a sliding scale from the majority of sellers except they generally slide up easier than they slide down. Sliding scales are a great marketing strategy for a glutted market. Women who would pay nothing now pay something and feel gratitude for the favor.

In a relationship determined by money and inequality, women learn how to relate, to love, to befriend one another. Non-commercial relationships weaken as the therapeutic model of relating teaches women how to be (or not be) with each other. Feminist therapy sellers know that "the personal" makes better business sense than "the political." Classified sections in women's papers don't include "political growth" sections. The sellers market therapy as a social change activity. The government is pleased with the state of affairs. It supports the philosophy of capitalist individualism. This philosophy is based on the idea that personal change is really the only change possible and social change as part of personal change is inconceivable. How can a hurting confused woman even think about changing the social structure with others before she purchases and completes a life-long personal care program?



## Where Do We Go?

Those making war would definitely prefer to psychologize every aspect of our lives for obvious reasons. If we're bombed it's because we have negative thoughts rather than greedy governments.

When we psychologize an inmate's anger or a critic's displeasure, we quit paying attention to these people. They become invisible. Psychotherapy has harmed many people and altered even our most intimate relationships. It helps alright. It helps us become more invisible to each other and to the government.

Disenchanted therapy customers often have difficulty finding each other and psychiatrically violated people generally experience isolation, silence and self-blame for atrocities not of our own making. This must and can stop. The solution is not to hire non-degreed therapists or hire peers to hear our pain. We can all start talking to each other outside the marketplace. Though it takes a lot of courage and attention, we can start changing the world today by asking a woman "how are you?" and meaning it.

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## Breeze Inn

Entering the first vacancy of the day, Marla slides open the window for a breath of fresh air against the smell of stale cigarette smoke in the room. Rose grabs a set of clean sheets off the cart in the hallway and drapes them over the arm of the chair next to the table. Working as a team hasn't changed the amount of time it takes to finish cleaning the total of twenty units between the two of them but it does give the women a chance to talk.

As they strip the spread, blanket and sheets from the bed Marla asks, "Did you hear about Joyce?"

"No. What's happening?" In her mind Rose pictures Joyce who works as a breakfast cook in the coffee shop at the motel. With her veteran spatula in hand Joyce scrapes up spattering bacon, hash browns and fried eggs then slaps them over on the grill. Steam rises to frizz her graying hair tucked daily under her hairnet. Grease and sweat revive teenage acne at the age of forty-five. The smell of fried food clothes her like a second skin that she's grown used to wearing from six in the morning until two in the afternoon Monday through Friday.

"She shot and killed Eddy last night."

Stunned in disbelief for a moment, Rose jars herself back into her job and yanks the pillowcase off the pillow then tosses it on the heap of dirty sheets.

"I was at the eight o'clock meeting at the eastside AA clubhouse," admits Marla. "Just two houses down from Joyce's upper flat. We heard the shotgun blast just as we were saying the Serenity Prayer."

Rose takes her end of the clean folded sheet. With a flip of their wrists the women snap open the sheet in the air over the double bed then smooth it into place and tuck the ends under the mattress. The corners are neatly squared off with military precision and ready for inspection.

"Joyce must have called the ambulance herself cause they come rushing right to the house in five minutes flat with their

lights flashing and the sirens screaming bloody murder," continues Marla as she pulls her side of the fuzzy gold blanket over the top sheet.

"I can just hear Joyce calling and saying: I shot my old man and he's bleeding all over my rug. You coming or do I need to call on the sanitation department?" After stopping to pose an imitation of Joyce matter-of-factly reporting the shooting, Rose smooths out the wrinkles in the blanket.

Rose fumes, "All those years of Joyce calling on the cops for protection against Eddy. And they didn't do a damn thing."

Marla heaves the heavy spread back onto the bed. "Well, they sure did something last night. Locked up Joyce in the county jail. Stuck her kid in juvenile hall. And they got Eddy iced on a slab in the morgue."

Rose shivers before speaking. "That poor girl's tried everything from moving back South with no forwarding address to checking herself into the state mental hospital. You know things are real bad when a girl has to hide out in the nuthouse cause she feels safer there than at home."

They pull the bedspread up and over the pillows and slide their hands under to form a neat fold.

"You know, a couple of the old-timers at the AA clubhouse knew Eddy personally from years ago. Last night they were saying he was probably drunk as a skunk and meaner than a pit bull when he come busting down Joyce's door," comments Marla.

"Eddy sure got what he deserved," says Rose.

"You better believe it. Joyce blasted that S.O.B. out of her life for good. 'Cept now they'll be slapping a murder one charge on her."

In a glimmer of hope Rose says, "Maybe she'll get off with self-defense."

"Fat chance!" says Marla with a huff.

Rose grabs her bucket of cleaning solutions and a stack of clean towels off the cart and disappears into the bathroom.

When she pushes up the sleeves of her olive green cardigan Rose's thumbs slide over the ridges of scar tissue on her forearms that remind her of the winter she spent in the state mental hospital. Joyce was an inmate with her at the time. Rose never saw herself or Joyce or any of the other women on the fifty bed ward



as crazy. Granted, they all had problems - mostly with the men in their lives. Many had been raped as children or as adults. Some like Joyce were being battered by their husbands or boyfriends. All of them were being drugged or shocked into submissive silence. To Rose's horror, five of the women had been lobotomized into vegetative states. And that winter, Karin and Pele died under suspicious circumstances behind the locked doors of their ward.

Sprinkling the white cleanser in the tub, toilet, and sink basin, Rose scours her memory for clues as to how she and Joyce ever got out alive. In her heart she knows that there is no mystery to it. After seeing that any attempt to get help for their problems or relief from the pain in their lives resulted in an array of punishments, they realized that compliance with those holding the keys was the only way out.

And then what?

After being honest about her incarceration to one employer Rose quickly learned to lie about her past to avoid the ever watchful eyes of her boss just waiting to catch her "acting crazy" so he could fire her.

She wrings out the cleaning rag until her knuckles turn white.

When Rose started working at the motel and found out Joyce was the breakfast cook in the coffee shop, they nodded and grinned at one another. Like long lost friends they joked and talked but never said a word about the old days.

Rose spritzes the fingerprints left on the bathroom mirror and buffs the surface clean of any evidence of last night's guest. She looks directly at herself in the mirror and sees Joyce, then decides to call in sick on the day of Joyce's preliminary hearing.

Marla drives the vacuum cleaner across the carpeting as if it was a lawn mower shearing every blade of grass down to their very roots. Her left hand strangles the handle of the upright Hoover while she steers the machine around the bed, then bashes it against the metal frame repeatedly.

"Bastard!" She flips the switch off and weaves the cord into figure eights around the hooks on the handle.

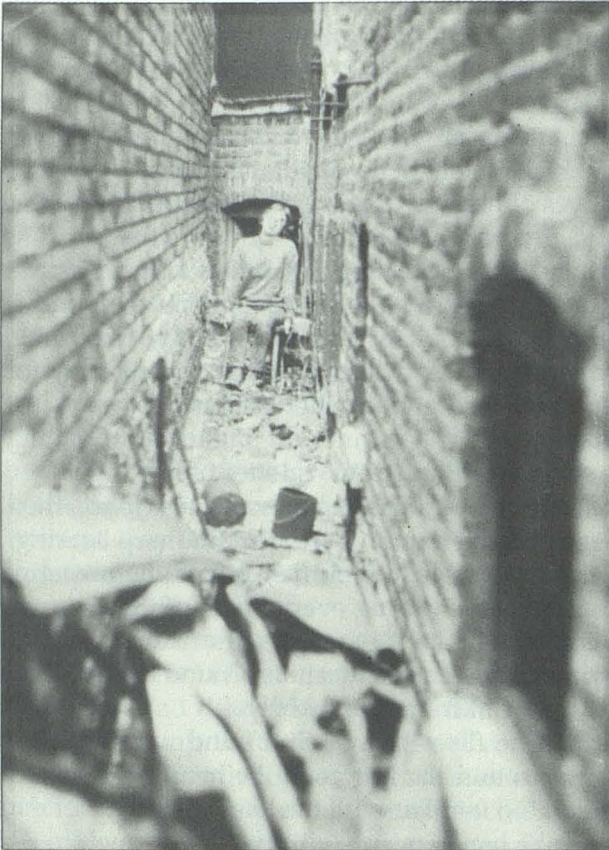
Marla is all too familiar with the likes of Eddy. Her daddy was a drunk. As she bends over to empty the ashtray into the wastebasket her right temple throbs over the scar above her eye. A

reminder of the time her daddy threw the lamp at her mama, missed his target and split open Marla's head. She was twelve then and screamed through the tears and blood running down her face, "I hate you! You're not my father! I wish you were dead!"

Wiping away the beads of sweat on her forehead, Marla polishes the dresser, table and nightstand with Pledge and swears she'll be at the hearing for Joyce.

While Rose fumigates the room with a mist of Lysol Marla slides the window shut and draws the drapes against the morning sunlight.

"Only nineteen rooms to go," sighs Rose.



*City Life Myra Fourwinds*



iz it 2 hard 2 admit that  
womyn hurt womyn?

i have noticed that many womyn are so squeamish about discussing the mental health system & how many womyn have been hurt by it, that they'll do anything just about 2 get someone 2 stop talking about the way they feel, because they are so busy trying to get womyn to buy in2 the system of mental health, because they say that it "helps."

what i often wonder iz how these very same lesbians can be the ones who are the most vociferous when it comes down 2 what they call the "patriarchy," when the system they proclaim as the "best 4 certain lesbians" iz just as malest & just az oppressive az the other systems that they have fits about? the imbalance & stupidity of womyn having literary heart attacks about what they call patriarchy & then crying about "how good the system of mental health can be" makes me feel like going off 2 an island all by myself.

we exist/live in a lesbian society which iz supposedly a woman loving society, but espouses sameness & assimilation 4 anyone who iz different. why a system such az mental health which haz been systematically proven 2 be oppressive & destructive 2 the psychic & emotional abilities of womyn is still supported by womyn, some by becoming mental health nurses and doctors themselves, is a mystery 2 me (& 2 most womyn i have spoken 2). & 2 think, 4 years many of us have been called "crazy," "looney tunes," "psychotic" by these self-same womyn who wouldn't think something iz the matter wif them because they would have us go 2 torturers (many of us know just what they will do 4 us!).

i do not apologize 4 my anger because it is righteous anger & i am expressing anger that not only i, but many of my sisters, feel & if someone iz upset because of my raw anger then something iz tapping on her conscience.

## Oasis

Oasis, an alternative emotional healing space at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, was originally created in response to protests when a Spanish flamenco dancer was hauled away by security for jumping on stage to dance to the drumming. She had just landed in the U.S., was not wearing clothes or her contact lenses and was hauled away for being "schizophrenic" and "speaking word salad." Her interpretation was that she was experiencing spontaneous rebirthing after she had attended a workshop. Eventually she wore out even the other "crazies" who coalesced in protest (consciousness was already high because of a post-festival disability conference the previous summer). Many of us went from Michigan to NEWMR (New England Women's Music Retreat) to the West Coast Festival, protesting and consciousness-raising en route.

At the third festival, being able to speak Spanish, I helped her by explaining how to get a paper she had written posted and passed out and how to set up a workshop. Because she was seen as "a crazy," it was assumed by some that I had written the paper for her. We parted ways at a boarding house in S.F.

Dealing with this through three festivals, a group drew together and presented a proposal for a new area. Even though we were the radicals, on the scene doing the work, women were hired the next year (with salary) who had degrees as therapists, in humanistic psychology and such. We had to fight to get our feet in the door, but we did, for barter and trade. But eventually tension and resentment blew up, as a result of the long-standing problems.

For example, some people think they know what is "healing" and don't like loudness, anarchy, spontaneous energy and cigarettes. But that's often what being "a crazy" is about. And some people think that what ya gotta do is organize structure, designate time and workshifts. Whereas others, who might have been locked up from time to time, feel just hanging out and being



around to pick up on whatever needs to be done can pass for work. Some identified this as professional versus lounge workstyle, and others (guess which ones) resented this.

Other problems emerged: the patronizing attitude towards "us" by the ones who had taken over. The white middle-class workstyle. The need for some of "us" to please the therapists in charge by trying to "heal" them, instead of seeing some of these divisions as political. The ripping off of carefully fought for materials. The in-fighting over class background and cultural differences. The dropping off of the consciousness-raising about craziness and turning the area into a mental health facility with identified "grief" therapists and this kind of therapist and that kind of therapist and workshops. Festival security turning to this in-house community mental health center for an inner police force to placate anarchist consciousness (i.e., calling Oasis reps to "rope in" belligerent rule breakers, instead of questioning the rules themselves). The martyrdom-consciousness of those who took over. Women hiring their girlfriends or friends or girlfriends of other "important" festival women instead of ex-patients. The high ex-patient turn-over because nobody could stomach the shit. The disintegration of collectivity into hierarchical structure partly due to the whole "take charge" shift in the inner working of the festival.

But there are positives — no one will ever be taken off the land to a hospital, even though divisions on this arose within the Oasis structure itself. And there is cross-networking among exs, and sharing of information on alternatives. It's a good place to hang out if you can stand all the condescension if you happen to be "a crazy" or "ex-" yourself. And some spin-offs occurred like the creation of Trinity — grounding space at NEWMR by women who met doing this networking.

## Therapissed

This paper examines some of the problems in the lesbian community when it comes to therapy's standards and ethics. My encounters include therapists who gossip to others, incest therapists who cross emotional and physical boundaries, and therapists who believe that Al-anon is a completely safe program within the lesbian community. Since I am a lesbian, my experience is with Lesbian/ Feminist therapy and lesbian community attitudes.

Growing up working class, I had been taught that therapy was for the upper class people who couldn't handle their own lives. Six working class people I knew wound up in the state mental institution, never to be seen again. So when I decided to seek help with my emotional problems, relating to the incest I'd experienced as a child, it was with a lot of fear. My search for a therapist was hard. I had to find one who was willing to deal with my disability, work with me on wheelchair access and accept the fact of my limited finances.

I found a therapist, Joyce, who specialized in healing from incest and had an excellent reputation in the field. She was a good therapist and pulled me through some of the hardest times I've experienced as an adult. Even so, it was difficult to accept that I was paying for therapy time to educate her about my physical disability.

I joined a group for lesbian incest survivors. Once I told the group what I knew of my own story, I felt empowered. I left feeling good about myself and the group. A few hours later something very strange began to happen. My lover, Chris, told me that I'd been talking as if I was six years old. This kept happening. My lover and other friends would tell me they had been talking with me at all different ages. These younger personalities started to tell stories of abuse I not only didn't remember, but that were also beyond my imagination.



A few days later I went into a mental crisis. I would think seconds were passing, when it really was minutes to hours. I thought I must be going crazy. Joyce came over and helped me calm down through some relaxation exercises. Then she gently introduced me to the concept of multiple personality disorder (MPD).

The first time I split (went into another personality), in front of Joyce she was stunned. She had not worked with anyone with MPD before, "It was if a whole new person was sitting there instead of you. Not just facial expressions and gestures, but also your voice and presence." That's basically what everyone around me was saying, it really was like I was three, six, thirteen, sixteen, etc.. Joyce decided to get help with my "case." She found a senior therapist (Shirley) who had a background in MPD. Shirley had also worked with other disabled people, so I didn't have to re-explain my disability.

It was about two or three months later that a distant friend asked me if I was still splitting as much. I asked her how did she know about it anyway? She told me that a friend of hers heard it from Chris's therapist. The feeling of being exposed was overwhelming and I really questioned if all of this was worth it. I decided to continue therapy anyway, feeling secure in the fact that Joyce did not gossip. I now know that I have over thirty separate personalities.

Chris was in Al-anon. It soon became apparent to me that, to Chris, being disabled was the same as being an alcoholic. She was responding to my physical crises as if I were an alcoholic on a drinking binge. Chris said part of her healing process was both of us working on our relationship, so that she didn't feel responsible for me (feel "co-dependent"). She moved out, we spent limited time together, and she took little or no responsibility when I had a crisis. It seemed as if any form of caring was considered co-ing, and as a disabled woman I especially resented that.

Arguments between us continued to increase, and I really didn't know why. We desperately tried to hold on to some form of this relationship. Finally, on the day before our third anniversary, Chris and I decided to have Shirley mediate. (We choose Shirley over Joyce because Chris was an old friend of Joyce's.) While Chris was still outlining the basic problems, Shirley broke

in saying she fully supported Chris's moving away to take care of herself, and that she herself believed in the teachings of Al-anon.

I sat and watched as Chris explained how alone she felt when I had a seizure and how it angered her. She felt left behind. Shirley said this was a normal reaction to seizures and turned to me saying, "Don't you understand this? How do you feel when someone is too sick to give you the support you need?" "Such as an emergency?" I asked. "Why, I take care of the emergency, especially if you mean a medical one, then I take care of myself, but no, I have never felt angry with anyone who had a seizure just because they had one." "But what if it inconvenienced you, like made you late getting somewhere?" Shirley probed my feelings. "Well, I suppose if there was already a question as to whether this person was using the seizures to get something," I responded. "But what if it just made your life harder?" Shirley just wouldn't let go. "No, I wouldn't be angry, but I am getting angry now." I pushed these words out. "Maybe you're just not in touch with your emotions then, because it's very normal to be angry at someone who has just had a seizure," Shirley informed me.

I couldn't believe my ears. People have a variety of reactions to emergencies such as seizures. Initial reactions may be harsh, but once they become familiar with seizures, most people learn to handle them matter-of-factly without dumping on the epileptic. A non-disabled example of a similar situation is when a woman has severe menstrual troubles to the point of throwing up and fainting. I wondered, was it only in disability issues that Shirley would validate this type of angry response?

I sat silently as Shirley asked Chris what it was she truly wanted from this situation, not to hold back. Chris remained quiet for a few minutes so Shirley asked her, "Do you want out of this relationship, is it just too much for you at this time?" "Yes," Chris replied after her silence. "There's no way for me to remain in this relationship and not be co." Shirley commended her on her courage to say this. At that time I fully realized that Shirley was in no way being an objective mediator. I was numb, and thoughts moved slowly through my mind. The first thing I needed for survival was to feel safer, so I brought up issues around Al-anon meetings which Chris attended twice a week within the lesbian community. "If you're leaving me then it's fine if you talk to



people, but please not in front of large groups like Al-anon. It makes me feel exposed. How many women in wheelchairs have multiple personalities?" I asked. "Yeah, that's fine with me," Chris responded. But Shirley was inflamed. Shirley told me that my fears were totally unfounded, that no one in Al-anon made judgements from what they heard at meetings and most certainly would not tell others in any situation. As a disabled woman, I know I am not the only one to run into problems concerning Al-anon versus disability issues. Is Al-anon sometimes used as an excuse for not caring for other people?

By this time I was so broken inside that I don't remember a lot of the rest of the session, but I do have it on tape. When I later confronted Shirley about how she'd handled the mediation, she told me that she was so supportive of Chris because she felt that I was the stronger of the two. Shirley refused to listen to the tape herself to see if on second thought she might have been biased during the mediation. I never saw her after that, though Joyce continued to use her as a senior therapist on my case.

In the weeks that followed, new issues arose. As I began integrating one of my personalities, the memories were becoming mine. I didn't expect that the memories would have anything to do with Chris. There were scenes between Chris and part of me who is an eighteen year old prostitute. I remembered Chris yelling at me: "You whore, going out to get some ass?" and shoving me. Then physical confrontations would take place. This was very disturbing to me. Later when I asked Chris if these memories were accurate, she said "Yes, in fact that's a big part of the reason I left you so suddenly. I found myself being abusive, and didn't know how to stop except to get totally away. It felt a lot like when my father was so drunk he wouldn't remember, and I could actually haul off and slap him with no repercussions." A couple of days later I became furious that the lover I trusted so much would hurt me because she knew that I wouldn't remember. And why hadn't any hint of this come out in our mediation? Why had Shirley been so eager to focus on Chris's "co-ing" as the main problem?

Chana, a sweet, non-threatening woman had recently entered my life, and some personalities trusted her enough to communicate with her. Once they were sure Chris wasn't coming back,

they came out with some horrendous stories about how Chris had treated them. Chana believed the personalities she spoke to, but I was hearing it through her, and my heart just wouldn't accept it.

Next therapy session I told Joyce about the stories and asked her if she would please try to talk to some of these personalities to find out what had happened. Joyce said no. She told me, "Don't believe everything you remember, some of it may be out of any recognizable focus." Which parts was I to believe and which to disregard? Was I only supposed to believe what my various personalities said about the past? Obviously, I was not supposed to believe what any of my personalities said about the present, especially when they involved my lover.

Joyce insisted on a mediation with her, Chris, and me before talking with me alone about it. Her refusal to speak with the personalities who were angry and afraid of Chris scared the hell out of me. She seemed, like much of the lesbian community, willing to accept that women don't abuse women. I began to wonder if this was how Joyce would handle other situations where possible abuse had occurred. Would she, an incest therapist, call in both the victim and the possible abuser before ever really dealing with the victim's feelings in the first place? This was more like the court system — face the accuser instead of help the victim cope with the trauma.

We spent many therapy sessions discussing my fears. Joyce still wanted me to face Chris before working on my feelings. She never did get my point, and I still do not understand hers, but it cost me financially and emotionally just the same.

Joyce and I had established a ritual hug at the end of each session. It was a way of saying good-bye and it let me feel that she cared for me as a person. At the end of one of our sessions I was feeling withdrawn but conceded to the closing hug anyway. This time Joyce would not let go. At first I slightly pulled back, since I couldn't get up and walk away, but she hung on. Then I reached up and grabbed both of her shoulders and pushed her away. Still she did not let go. Finally I pushed with all my strength and she let go. All of my panic buttons around physical boundaries were pushed sky high, and I was unable to speak at all.

The next session I brought up what had happened. She said "I

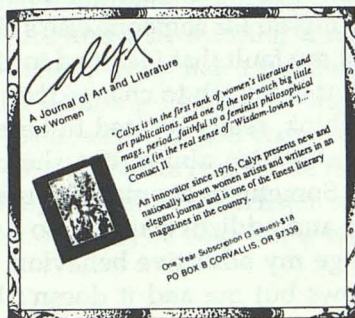


thought that your pulling back was really your way of saying you wanted more." That's exactly what my father or anyone else who ever sexually abused me have said. I told her the trust between us felt violated. Joyce's only reply was that either she was reading me wrong or that I was scared of further intimacy and that's why I reacted as I had. This discussion lasted through two therapy sessions. But neither session brought any resolution, I didn't even get an apology for misreading my moves or a promise not to do it again.

At the end of the second session Joyce said, "I guess a hug is out of the question for now," and I said "Yes, it is." Then she asked if we could at least shake hands, to which I agreed. While her hand was still in mine, Joyce said, "This makes that Certs jingle run through my head, how does it go, a handshake instead of a kiss." That was it. I exploded in her face, "Haven't you heard one damn word I've been saying? Let go of my hand and please leave now, I can't handle this anymore."

That was the end of my therapy with Joyce. There was no way for me to continue working so intimately with someone I could no longer trust. Although I had planned on going right back into therapy with some other therapist, I didn't find anyone who had the time or who understood MPD enough to want to take me on. It left me stuck with a million questions and no known way of getting to the answers. To this day, that's where I'm at. I work hard on pulling myself back together, but it sure would be easier with some help.

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## Cutting

One Tuesday morning I sat in my regular spot on the couch and my therapist announced that she was moving to another city. I was overwhelmed. Shocked, terrified, enraged, abandoned. I didn't know I was, though, because I shoved all those feelings out of me and just said something like, "Oh, well I'm glad you're getting something you want." Then I left, went home and decided to slash my arm with a razor blade. I was very calm about it, and felt relieved that there was something I could do to control myself. So I did. I put about 40 cuts in my arm, a few of which left a scar. Most healed in a week.

It's hard to say what happens or why I did this painful thing to my body and me. I started cutting when I was 32 and did it every few months or more for four years. When I cut I don't feel panicky; I just feel calm. Just deciding to do it enables me to get a grip on my life. Most of the literature says it starts in adolescence, so I don't know if I'm weird or they just haven't gotten to us grown-ups yet. When the thought comes over me that I can hurt myself, it is always a great relief for those moments of extreme anxiety that I can only describe with words like "hurt" or "shame." But part of the problem is not knowing what I'm feeling, just feeling out of control and needing to get control. I think it's related to feeling abandoned and unlovable, and ashamed of those feelings; wanting to hide them. When I can talk about them and don't feel the shame, I don't cut. Shame only leaves me blaming myself for someone else's abuse and mistreatment of me. It's not my fault that I learned to abuse my body and to hate myself, but it is my job to change that learning now.

My therapist, I think, really wanted to help me come to love myself and get free of this abuse. But she didn't understand it...how could she? Sometimes her main focus was to confront me on the compulsive and addictive aspect, so I would muster the conviction to change my addictive behavior. I'd say to myself, "Since no one knows but me and it doesn't hurt anyone, why



not?" I think confrontation only made me feel more separate, frightened and abandoned by her. I wasn't good enough to be loved. I was "sick." I wouldn't be OK until I could stop this, and my feelings of being totally un-OK and unloved by her made me want to do it. What a mess.

I'm not a professional, but I think it would help a lot if therapists didn't get frightened and focus on trying to stop the cutting. I think it's important to accept cutting on a certain level, so that telling about it doesn't make us feel more ashamed, more sick and more isolated. It would help if they acknowledge the part of us that is trying to take care of ourselves by cutting. It would be good for people dealing with cutters to accept the cutting as the best thing the cutter can find to do for the time being, and to focus on emotional recovery, maturing, finding new channels and outlets and so on. For me, awareness is the path to freedom and responsibility and a fuller life, but no wonder most of us forget the past, resisting remembering and feeling. It's not fun or easy.

Today I can learn to accept life the way it is, to accept the things that I didn't get, accept my needs and fears, name my feelings, find persons worthy of my trust with whom I can talk. I've learned this from my lesbian friends, who care for me in ways my family never could. When I'm hurt I can say so to someone. When I'm angry I can express it toward the right person, and I can learn to forgive. I can learn that people are not perfect or totally horrid; they are a mix of things, and none of them has the life-long job of taking care of me. That is my job. Progress is slow but I have a group of friends who believe in me and support me, and I think that keeps me from falling into despair.

I live in a culture that has always secretly or openly participated in hurting and exploiting women and girls. I can learn to say no to that culture and that learning from my childhood. I don't deserve to be chopped up like a piece of liver or a carrot!

Whew. Thanks for listening. I feel better when I talk about this. If you're a "cutter" or a burner or you chew your fingers or bang your head or pull your hair or anything like that to hurt yourself, I hope you start telling people who can listen to you and love you. People like yourself. It won't be easy but it will help.



*head & heart line connection*  
Judy Springer



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## Testimony

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*These pieces are excerpts from longer narratives and poems.  
We created this section to provide room for a multiplicity of  
voices and experiences. This testimony bears witness  
not only to the horrors visited upon womyn, but to  
our ability to survive and envision new possibilities.*



Sharon Sumpter

from *Nature* (part of *In Pieces*, a book in progress)

In the hospital there is no such thing as nature. Just long cold walls, an anonymous grayish-green. Windows leading outside are barred. We are so high up. The ground appears far away, the people merely ants. Nothing in here is alive — not the impersonal staff nor the patients who pace the hall, guinea pigs for the psychotropic drugs of the sixties. All connections with the outside world, the world of nature, have been removed.

One time I actually managed to escape as we came down the elevator and the doors opened. I ran as fast as I could and actually made it to the outside! I laugh remembering myself running down Soto Street with the men in the white coats coming after me. I am proud of this escape, even though I am captured and dragged back to my prison. In my desperation I have not even seen any of the nature that must be along the way.

One day Dr. David took me on an outing. I was allowed to leave the building with him. The doors were unlocked. We came down the elevator and walked through the lobby where the outsiders are. They are free to move at will and have no idea what happens once you step into the elevator. We walked past the information desk and out the double glass doors. We were in the back between the hospital and the nurses' dormitories.

It is a different world once we step out the doors. I am overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. There is a blue sky that goes on forever. The vastness, the freedom of it is exhilarating! There are some trees which in the years ahead I will come to love as family. But for now, we go to sit on the grass. It is so green and shimmering. Full of energy and movement. I look at a blade of grass. I

realize I have never seen it before. The rest of the world disappears and I move into this blade of grass. I understand now. I cry at the beauty. I love the grass. I feel I am seeing the world for the first time. I want to hold it in my arms. I feel immensely happy. I realize I am no different than the blade of grass. I have seen the Goddess.



Kathy Moorhouse  
from *Turning Point*

Fear arises. It's OK I tell myself. I'll be able to move in the morning when it's light. Nightmare after nightmare. Dark figures, men, approach my bed as I sleep. I rise up screaming, eyes wide, and I see them. I know they are there. But no, maybe not. Sometimes I open my eyes and everything is red. "What do you think about that, Kathy?" the therapist asks. "You're seeing red?" Give me a break. And I feel myself sliding more and more, down and down.

The ambulance arrives and they pick me up, put me on a stretcher and carry me away. But can they take me far enough away? I hope so.

I lay on the table for hours, my friend speaking to me as I lay in silence. Lots of coming and going, doctor consulting with my friend. At last the doctor approaches me again. "You must do this one thing," he says, "for your own good. Will you sign this paper?" It's a voluntary commitment to Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute. "If you don't, you'll be sent to Napa involuntarily."

Now they wheel me to the ward and another examination table, another doctor. This time there are more questions. And assignments: count backwards by threes starting at one hundred; what does a rolling stone gathers no moss mean to you? Recite the presidents backwards starting from the present.

For months prior to my hospitalization I'd felt myself slipping into craziness. At first I was terrified by what was happening, but then insanity became very alluring. The more overwhelmed I felt by the confusion of emotions, nightmares, hallucinations and inability to concentrate, the more I began to view insanity as my



only hope of escape. I came to believe that insanity would relieve me from the suffering, so I stopped trying to slow my descent and I threw myself into a free-fall over the edge.

Maybe I thought that someone else would have to deal with it then. Not me. I wouldn't be there. But I *was* there. What a disappointing surprise. I was still there and I still had to deal with myself.

I realized that first day in the hospital that nobody but me, the me I was at the moment, could live my life. It seems obvious now, but it hadn't been before then. I always had been convinced that somehow I could escape myself, whether it be by moving, by over-medication or by going crazy. Even now I sometimes slip and think I can spiritualize my way out of myself. But I know better.



Karla K.

from *On Surviving Psychiatric Assault*

At this writing, I am coerced by the psychiatric professions under a 6 month order of probationary commitment. I am told that I am mentally ill. No psychiatrist approached me with an open mind after the police felt that I was a danger to myself.

Wearing muddy clothes on Palm Sunday after walking in a field was the suspicious event that alerted the police. Their misrepresentation of events caused an emergency detention in a hospital. I don't actually know how I can go on not feeling the fear I feel from five-point restraint and solitary confinement; and from spending 30 days locked inside a hospital.

Knowing the conditions of the psychiatric professions, in itself, is an awareness I think that enlarges the view of democratic America that I previously had. If looked at as a prejudiced system, people different from the norm are weeded out.

I can go on by virtue of the fact that I must. That is all I feel now.

Other women make my life worthwhile. It is separatism within the system.



Maria LaVara

from *Suspicious of a Manic-Depressive*

When I got ahold of my medical records (which was no easy task) I was alarmed by the numerous diagnoses I was tagged with (go get Hitchcock!), so I decided the psychiatrists must need more practice, and hoped they could practice on someone else in the future.

Every time I was compelled to leave the house it became a "choose your own adventure." Magic was absolutely everywhere. Neighborhood dogs were angry wolves and possessed elevated intelligence. Food was inedible, I learned this the hard way when I bit into a screaming peach.

My brother reasoned with me, "You need to be put into a 'controlled environment,'" he said. I was highly suspicious of him and his every move. I knew what that "controlled environment" was. What he failed to see was — who's controlling that "environment"!

Off I went to the nice controlled environment. An incredulous-looking doctor appeared, obviously a Powerful Being with a diabolical sense of humor had guided him to the path of psychiatry. He sat down and began writing furiously in his note-book without bothering to look at me. He slid a typed form on the table in front of me and offered his gold pen, "I am going to admit you for a period of seventy-two hours, sign this. If you won't sign, I will put you in against your will. In that case you will be kept for two weeks for observation. "



Yvonne M. Moonstorm

from *The Adventures of Yvette*

When it came time to lock the ward door her first night there, she panicked and tried to get out the door. A couple of the young staff members then grabbed her, and forced her down to the floor. They then lifted her in the air, and carried her to the locked isolation room. All that was in that damned terrible room was a mattress and a pillow. They took all of her jewelry, rings, watch and earrings, away. She doesn't remember exactly how many days and nights she spent in that awful and terrible isolation



room. She had no watch. There was no clock. There was only one small window and it was barred and she couldn't really tell the time — except if it was day or night. She was a mess. She couldn't change clothes. She couldn't wash, or take a bath. It was a terrible and horrible experience. One which she has tried so hard to forget over the years. She could tell time somewhat because her meals were brought in on trays by the different shifts. She rebelled. She pounded on the door (steel), and wore herself to exhaustion.



Bethany

from *An Excerpt from a Non-Existent Diary*

August, 1982

I am to be put in the seclusion room for a reason I cannot remember. Several women enter my room. I must take off my clothes and put on the hospital gown they bring. I begin to undress there, before them all. I know enough to know that I will be given no privacy in which to undress. They tell me I must take off my underpants. I can wear only the hospital gown. I say No, I need my pants.

It is hospital policy, I am told. It is a rule. I must take off my underpants.

I say No and sit down on the bed, the plastic mattress-cover crinkling as I sit upon it. No, I say. I need my underpants. The standing women form a semi-circle around me as I sit. I am given the explanation one more time. It is hospital policy. There is nothing they can do. I remain as I am. One of the standing women sits down next to me. She asks me to be reasonable, to please take off my underpants. It must be done. I say No. Probably tears start down my face.

Won't you be reasonable? they ask. I cannot answer them. I think I am being reasonable.

They begin to push me, on my shoulders, to force me down upon the bed. They are planning to undress me. I struggle with them. They stop. They look at me sternly.

Do you want us to have to call the men? If you don't cooperate we will have to call the men. Is that what you want? I cannot answer them. That is not what I want.

I do not cooperate. I continue to struggle. They call the men and then stand aside while the men remove the underpants from my struggling body. They are offended that I have created this situation where the men must see me naked. They are offended that they must see the men overpower me and remove my pants. The men complete their work and step back to watch while the women lead me to the seclusion room. I am locked in the room, in a gown with no underwear.



Lynne Yamaguchi Fletcher

from *To Dr. Loren D. Acord, clinical psychologist, retired naval officer, an open letter*:

I was sixteen and terrified, a drunk, a drug abuser, a chain smoker, reckless, accident prone, self-mutilating, suicidal, struggling to come to terms with my sexuality — of these we talked only about my sexuality. We were enlightened, sophisticated, we talked about angst, the pain of being different, of living in a shallow world. We were kindred souls, fellow geniuses in a mediocre world.

I had gone to say goodbye to you. I was to leave shortly for college and would miss you, I knew; what we had shared was true feeling, true communication. This was so, and then you kissed me.

After you kissed me, you said you had never done anything like this before, and you stood and locked your office door. You undressed me, then yourself. I don't remember saying a word. You were gentle. I lay rigid and dumb, passive, numb. You kissed my breasts and genitals. You tried to please me. I tried to please you. I willed myself to feel none of it, not the kissing, not the gentleness, not the penis I held to my mouth, not my fear, not loss, not your soft push into me.

Afterward, and later, I played cool, savvy. I even bragged of "sleeping with my therapist" to friends, oh yeah, more experience for the streetwise wiseacre.

It took me fifteen years to apply the word "rape" to what happened between us. It took me fifteen years to apply the word "rape" to what you did to me.





Ruta (Mazelis) Windstar  
from *Cracking*

My abuser choked me with penis, with body taking my breath and being away; then I was choked with values, control, power greater than rapist — the rapist was more honest, clear, direct, and never professed to care, to help, to heal. My present still contains the weight of bodies holding mine while keys crashed together endlessly in the process of unlocking doors, thresholds waiting for my captivated crossing. Today I carry my keys bunched together. Noiseless. My hand empowered. My being determining what is to be locked out, or in. Never up.

I, woman of newly born voice of power, recall the days of my speechlessness, stutter...the trembling courage to state my knowing to my father, naming him my perpetrator. After his scream of "NO!" which rings its lie in my ears today, the helpful therapist educated him regarding my withdrawal behavior and "processed his feelings" while approving a weekend pass for us.

...Today, rocking with fear and need for expression of nightmarish memory, I first planned my escape route. How to run, just in case helpers with keys should come for me. They know where I am. I receive a monthly bill to refresh my memory. I am still paying. I am beginning to demand payment in return. And I am winning. I am truly healing. I am angry. I am whole. The civil battle transforms into a battle of personal wholeness naming the reality of abuse, of psychiatric gynocide. I am beginning to crack my silence.



Cheryl Marie Wade  
from *Finding Words*

Fall 1986

Counselor: Let's see if we can discover what you're really angry about.

Joanne: I'm very clear. I'm angry at you.

Counselor: Stay with your feelings.

Joanne: This is the fourth time you've promised to do something and the fourth time you have some feeble excuse for not

following through.

Counselor: Let's look more closely at your anger. Let's look at its root.

Joanne: I'm angry at you for not following through on your commitments.

Counselor: It's good you're expressing anger, but let's focus on what it's *really* about. Doesn't this sound a lot like feelings you have about your mother?

Joanne: Yes. My mother betrays commitments and doesn't accept responsibility for her behavior either. The difference is, she does it for free.

Counselor: That's good. Let's keep with this. I'm your mother. What do you want to say to me?

Joanne: I don't want to talk to my mother. I'm talking to you.

Counselor: I'm your mother. Talk to me.

Joanne thinks about all the words she knows. She thinks about the art of conversation, the nuances of the counselor-client relationship.

Joanne: Mother, would you please tell my counselor that I won't be coming back to see her.



Linda Stalker

from *Northampton State Hospital*

October 30, 1981

Five months in a state hospital living behind locked doors, noticing the set of keys and who has keys — keys are what separate them from us. At any given time what you own and value can be taken away. Feelings of anger and insecurity blend together. Pain surfaces and I begin to scream. Losses become vivid and the sense of being alone surfaces. I grow into a frightened little child, yet I am 28, aren't I? Sometimes I am able to accept medication and it dulls the pain. Anger that a chunk of my life has been spent here. Such a high price to stay here and accept the help. Yet what are my alternatives? Why is it so difficult to make some sense out of my life and why does my life seem so tattered? The anger is constant. Some days I control it other days I don't. I strike out against myself and others. They take action against me and my anger intensifies.



November 4, 1981

A quiet evening walking on grounds. Tenderly trying to work out a friendship, feeling low but having the satisfaction of "keeping it all together." Almost losing it a couple of times but happily able to control the anger.

One greeted me at the door, smiling — trusting I walked down the ramp with her. "We are going to have to do a search." I said fine and emptied out my pockets. But what I had in mind and what they wanted were not the same. I became an object they had to search. We were each engaged in a struggle for power. More than that I was fighting for my own self respect, but that was stripped. Suddenly there was mass confusion, male and female staff were there, the men held me down and the women searched. They said, "Why are you acting like this?" Screaming, "I didn't do anything! Why are you doing this?" Flash backs of times my body was invaded. This was routine, but I was facing another time of violence.



Linda Marie

from *Sue: On Healing Ourselves*

Sue Rose is a friend I went to school with. She has been in mental wards in Australia and the USA. I did not want to believe Sue was ill because she was my friend so that meant she was like me. Most of us would like to be taken seriously but that is difficult if we are thought of as mentally ill. I have always feared being considered crazy because of what "They" might do — like lock you up.

She recorded her experience for me. The following is what I have copied from the tape:

"...There are some things I find now that I can do such as the natural act of stretching and yawning. I couldn't do this before when I was on medication. You loose some of your natural urges.

"I'm becoming the person I was before all this happened a long time ago. A sort of Rip Van Winkle effect. I sat out the 70s and part of the 80s. It's easy to blame someone else — 'if this person hadn't done this or that I wouldn't have gotten like this' — actually everything rests inside. I know I can choose not to let people or

situations affect me. I can realize situations that are negative and not let them destroy me. I would rather put my energies toward constructing.

"I know I am lucky to be alive. I met people who were diagnosed as manic depressive who were given heavy drugs like prolixin. Two of them died from the drugs.

"I would like to teach a class in how to make the most out of the least. This is something I had to teach myself. I have learned from the inside what it is like to unrealistically view the world. Also, I've been in touch with my deeper self. And there have been good things that come out of it.

"I have learned to trust a lot of what is in myself. I feel that a lot of what I experienced in the past was unreal. The worst time was when I was on drug therapy. Those years were terrible. The heavy drugs put a lid on me. Everything was forced back on itself. My energies were forced inward in a chaotic way.

"The last thing I would like to say is that you are the most well when you heal yourself."



Bethany

from *About Shock* (dedicated to Jean)

I had already spent the last two years unable to function and in almost constant pain, despair and depression. Now I was spending much of my time locked in a barren room and strapped to a bed. He said shock treatment would end all this, that it would relieve my depression, that it would end my pain, that I would feel better.

In truth, if he had said he wanted to amputate my feet because that would make me feel better, I would have agreed to amputation too.

Burning my brain did not seem like such an outrageous way to relieve my pain. I spent lots of time trying similar things anyway — cutting, tearing, mutilating my body. I might as well let the shock-doctor try.

I knew other women who had been shocked. Some had lost huge pieces of their past, their future. Others seemed fine. Either way was okay by me. I thought I had nothing to lose.



Why did I participate in this destruction? Why does anyone?

Why didn't the shock-doctors see that they were simply supporting my own ever-spiralling self-destructiveness? This time however, they bought the weapons, and I was relieved of the burden. They were paid handsomely for that service.

Should I ever be tied down in that locked room again, willing to cut off my feet and destroy my brain — I long for one clear voice to speak to me—to remind me that my life is precious, is sacred, and is worth loving. That I must seek ways to protect it and nurture it, and NEVER, no matter how unbearable the pain seems, try to destroy it. Neither through suicide or electro-shock therapy.

Perhaps this clear voice will be a friend's voice. Perhaps this clear voice will become my voice. I long to hear it.



Janelle Lavelle

from *Learning to be Obnoxious Again*

My unconscious mind rebelled. I started seeing things that weren't there. Gabby (my lover) took me to a shrink, who decided I was schizophrenic and put me on large doses of Thorazine. It worked. The visual hallucinations stopped, and I became steadily more docile toward Gabby and everyone else. I quit writing; I lost all ability to execute the graphic design that was so important to me as a career; but — for the first time in my life — I wasn't pissing anybody off. Gabby, my shrink, Gabby's shrink, and others convinced me that I was on the road toward healing, and that I was "better."

I have become sensitized to the world again. I get mad; I get happy; I write pointed analyses and emotional editorials; I fight back against oppression. The people who knew me in the pre-Thorazine days are glad that I'm a strong and forceful ally again. The people who only knew me "drugged out" — those who controlled my life by "taking care" of me — are quite unhappy. I have split away from many of them in the last 1 1/2 years, as I have reclaimed my ceded power. I have exchanged people who control for people who love.

I have thought about what we can all do, as a lesbian community, to create emotional well-being for ourselves. I think it is important that we maintain a healthy balance between suspicion of established psychiatric medicine, and acceptance of its occasional power to heal.

We all know the danger of accepting being drugged because we are too different. But we also need to be sensitive to the women for whom drug-connected therapy is real, effective and helpful. Medication is allowing me to understand what I think, feel and fear *for the first time in my life*. The change has been earth-shattering for me, and for those who love me. ... I wish my lesbian friends were a little less disapproving. They're glad enough that I'm fully functional; but I am dead certain that the anti-druggies among them are still critical of the way I accomplished it. We don't need that kind of second-guessing from our own community. Our job is to validate and recognize every woman's search.

I also think the usual lesbian tendency to hide from the world greatly inhibits our ability to help each other. At least in my Southern corner of the universe, women tend to form iconoclastic couples or little groups and let the rest of the lesbian world walk right on by, instead of reaching out to help. We desperately need to improve our communication, physical contact and willingness to support lesbian and gay/lesbian institutions that help bring women to wholeness. Too many lesbians are crying out for help, and too few are willing to provide it. Part of the problem is getting the word out to women that we need their help; any suggestions will be gratefully accepted. Some lesbians' attitudes toward the mentally-struggling remind me of many women's approach to their professional life: they have fought every step of the way up the career ladder, and they'll be damned if they'll make it one bit easier for the women coming up behind them. If we don't teach others our hard-won lessons — if we don't answer the hotlines, provide the lesbian-positive counseling and support our sisters' struggles for mental health, whatever that struggle might be — we are leaving no trail marks of our own passing.

And too many of us will get lost as they search for their mind's way home.





Mary Lou Daugherty  
from *Depression*

1955, 14 years old.

It's July, and I am locked into a series of rooms with white walls and bars everywhere. Why? Because I ran away from a "happy" home for no reason. I was diagnosed as schizophrenic, then as manic-depressive. Cookie, my best friend, needed to get away, so I joined her. I think I was in love with her. Everyone agreed that this was absolutely no SANE reason for running away. Cookie ended up in the state reformatory for girls for two years. My mother knew the judge, and pointed out that I was lucky to be in the state mental institution, rather than with Cookie and all those BAD girls! They gave me pills and shots. I was tied to the bed at night, for my own protection, they said. I was in a large room with rows of beds. People were always screaming, crying, moaning and talking. We all wore hospital gowns and bathed every morning. We waited in a long line while two men with smirking smiles and glaring eyes watched us shower, and then gave us clean gowns for the day. They took some of the people, one by one, into the adjoining room at the end of the hall. I could hear screaming and moaning and harsh commands by the attendants. Sometime later the inmates would be brought back, secured on stretchers, unable to talk, their faces distorted and their eyes blank. Some people had surgery. Their heads were bandaged. ... I finally got out after only three months. The others stayed behind.

...Depression, for me, is the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness; I see a future of only doom and dread. A terrible weight is holding me down, when nothing is okay and no one can understand or be with me in the terrible, frightening, loneliness and nothingness. No help is possible. I forget what it feels like to laugh and can't remember feeling good. I don't care about anything or anybody and often can't focus or think logically. Time seems to stand still. I especially don't want to live because it's too hard. What if I were "rescued"? I would be locked up again.

Being depressed is easy; it feels more comfortable, more natural. I can predict what will happen. If I listen to the positive

thoughts, do something to make the depression leave, I'll be less comfortable, unfeeling, less alive.

What would I like to do to help others like myself? (1) Provide for support. I need to feel that my depressions are acceptable by my friends, that we have unlimited respect for differences. (2) Make known those lesbians psychiatrists and/or therapists who can deal with depression. (3) Recognize and provide support for lesbians who are not "out" at work. (4) Recognize and provide support for spouses and children of depressed lesbians. (5) Provide crisis centers or groups where lesbians can go for help that is confidential, professional, reliable and supportive. (6) Set up special "care" units for lesbians with problems.

May our lesbian daughters never have to face depression without the love and support of those of us who have lived with it before. May we conquer the isolation and let it surpass us no more.



Louise Wischild

from *Patience Becomes a Dragon* (for an imaginary client of Freud's)

She turns, to face the monster, the father, the brother  
She turns into a dragon She is big and they are small  
She roars, making a new silence filled with the explosion of her  
voice

In the morning, her body, burning with fire

At breakfast she writes,

"My name is Patience

and I am a dragon.

Dragons do not lie on couches

with mortals towering over them."



## Song of the Woman with Rope in Her Hair

I tried tying rope around my head  
To keep my brains from flying out  
But still my mind  
Kept slipping through the knots. The hemp  
Was so  
Abrasive to my ganglia;  
I found  
Myself  
With rope burns on the nerves.  
All right.  
It didn't work.  
But I was desperate  
I'd have tried anything.  
I *did*  
Try anything  
I knew to stop the pain  
To keep on  
Holding on.

Sometimes I still  
Wear braids of rope  
Against my frontal lobes  
The weight  
Upon my head  
Makes me know I'm still alive.  
Sometimes I think  
My mind,  
My precious, prisoned mind,  
Is all that keeps  
That rope  
Off of my neck.

Marie Cartier

## The Naturopath

*for Jody Shevins, N.D.*

She paints magic — peacock blue, eggshell white, violet.  
An art, this healing.  
She can part the mist, call the barge.  
Morgan Le Fay has shown her Avalon.

I pour my litany on torn canvas:  
alcoholic, anxiety attack, night terror,  
chill, sweat, insomnia.  
She nods, knows the underground, the Fairy Queen.  
Hands me a cartography of flowers, herbs.  
Trust this, she says.

Leopard's-bane, Mountain Tobacco  
Chamomile, Ground Apple, Oystershell

Our hands hold the brush,  
this solid magic.

Monkshood, Honeybee, Metallic Gold  
Deadly Nightshade, Blister Beetle, Brazil Root

I gather thread,  
slip needle through canvas.

Sew with earth medicine,  
a chant of light.

St. Ignatius' Bean, Wolf's Foot, Staghorn,  
Quicksilver, Quaker Buttons, Meadow Anemone

I mix colors.  
Tender. Eggshell white.  
Stroke the palette.

Rock Crystal, Inky Juice of the Cuttlefish  
White Cedar, Brimstone, Tree of Life

Trust this, she says.

I begin to paint.



## Gretel

### Part I

When Gretel grew up, she felt guilty. She thought about all the witches who'd been burned before, and then she thought about shoving her own witch into the oven, and she had nightmares.

She rationalized that she'd been young at the time, and scared, and didn't know what was going on. I mean, Hansel'd been the one with the idea, and what could she do? They'd been warned not to eat sugar or take candy from strangers, and how was she to know, at the age of nine, the old woman was an archetype? She also felt bad about the rumors that her parents had been trying to get rid of them. Another cultural misunderstanding. Plenty of children'd been sent on vision quests before, but they didn't usually try to kill the objects of their visions. This time the papers got word of it, and it turned into a child abuse legend.

Oh god, how could she face herself? And Hansel! She *still* wanted to punch him for the way he puffed himself up and took charge of everything when the police came. How he wrote all those stories and got rich from it, distorting all the facts and not even having the courtesy to use an assumed name so his sister, at least, could avoid achieving notoriety on the tails of her brother's pretext. Christ, she'd had to change her name to "Gretchen," and still people would recognize her sometimes. She had nowhere to turn. She developed headaches. She wanted to scream.

One day, she did. She screamed long and hard. She screamed at the sky and she screamed at the earth. She shook her fist at the ground and she pointed a finger in the air. Waved some pots around, threw a few things. Made a big ruckus and then sobbed herself to sleep on the lawn. Ah, catharsis. She didn't care anymore what anybody thought. Let them come and take her away if they wanted to.

They did. A neighbor called the police and said that strange woman Gretchen had flipped, and was raving and shouting incoherently on her lawn, posing a danger to the community.

Another neighbor backed the story. She *had* waved a saucepan menacingly, you know. And she'd even thrown a butterknife — you could see it there, sticking straight up out of the ground by the petunias. Now, who would throw a butterknife? She *had* to be crazy. Anyway she'd been talking to herself. Anyone could see she was a nut, and they just didn't want to take any chances. She could hurt somebody. Or she could hurt herself. She needed help. Such a serious woman. It figures she'd do something like this.

She didn't cooperate with the arrest. She just said, "Leave me alone, I didn't hurt anybody. I just had to let off a little steam. C'mon, let me go back into my house. I'm sorry if I bothered the neighbors, but hell, it could've been worse. At least I wasn't playing rock music loud with my windows open, like some people do *all the time* on this block. The butterknife, it was aimed at the ground, and no one was near when I threw it. It's not as dangerous as a baseball hit out of the park. I didn't menace anyone; when I shook that saucepan I was just trying to make a point with the Goddess . . ."

These were mistakes. Don't say "Goddess" when you're trying to plead with the police. Don't be rational when you're resisting arrest. In fact, don't resist arrest. It's hopeless and it only convinces them that you're scared and therefore that you have something to hide.

They booked her, dosed her with downers, and waited for her to improve. She didn't. The meds only made her disoriented. She was so angry about the situation that they had to keep increasing the pills just to keep her from getting "worse" (louder, more uppity). Her brother wrote another story, and got even richer off of it. Everyone was very sympathetic and moved by Gretel's predicament, but still they felt she was a danger to herself and society, and they were glad she was receiving expert treatment.

## Part II

Why didn't she just talk to somebody about it, instead of letting it build up inside her like that?

Okay, let's try it. Gretel was tired of keeping her brother's secret. She was tired of pretending she wasn't tired. She didn't really want to make a big public stink about it, but she wanted to tell *someone*, just to clear it off her own chest. So she called the



Community Mental Health Center and made an appointment. Just for her own sake, to learn how to deal with this trauma. You know, there's no shame in finding a professional to talk to about your problems. And Gretel wanted to work it out instead of keeping it bottled up inside her. So she went, on a Wednesday at two. She talked to a nice, well-trained psychologist, who was very sympathetic.

☛ First of all, it was good that she'd sought treatment

☛ Second of all, why hadn't she done it sooner?

☛ It just proved that all child abuse accusations were based on lies.

☛ Or: It was just another case of famous-person stress and nervous breakdown (so they medicated her, see part I).

☛ Or: Whatever had happened to her to make her so delusional as to want to recant her original story?

☛ Or: Did she really mean to say that *she* was *the* Gretel of fairytale fame?

☛ Or: It is my duty, as a responsible citizen, to notify the media/the law because people should know/because it's such a sensational story/because you should sue for justice (spend a lot of money, destroy your anonymity and private life, make me a famous therapist).

### Part III

Gretel was sick of living a lie and protecting her brother's secret. So she went to a wimmin's group and told her story. She knew *they* would believe her.

They did! But they couldn't believe she'd kept silent so long: Why'd you let your brother get away with that? (Goddess, what a patriarchal woman.) Also, I mean, what did she expect after burning the archetype?! YOU MEAN YOU DIDN'T LOVE THE WITCH? (Obviously, this woman got what she deserved.)

### Part IV

Okay, this is cynical. I made the whole thing up just to advance my own point of view. Gretel had options. She had friends and a support group, and she didn't care what her brother did, or whether anybody believed her. She was on good terms with her parents, though they didn't see each other often. She told her story to people, and either they believed her or they didn't, but

she was secure enough in her own self that it didn't bother her what other people thought.

She prayed a lot and did rituals, and made peace with the witch, who told her, "Honey, it was *your* dream — I've no intention of disappearing just because you might have wanted me to. Old woman archetypes, we don't get much appreciation these days but we're alive and well outside your imagination. You *can't* get rid of us, no matter *what* you do. I'm not saying I was happy about you and Hansel setting fire in the woods like that; it was a nasty story Hansel told, and you could've done a lot better if you hadn't tried to burn me in the first place. But I'm glad you got off, because now that you've changed your attitude, we have a chance to work together. So get up off your knees, and let's get on with it. Here, have some granola. The oats are organic, and I didn't use any sugar — "

Now, *there's* a happy ending. But how many wimmin are as creative and lucky as Gretel?



*Witch II* Judy Springer



## Branded

1.

Take this  
the doctorman says.

Silent on couches,  
eyes lowered, women  
place pills on tongues  
and swallow,  
blowing up inside.

2.

I have been called crazy  
in fun, by friends who want to laugh.  
I have laughed too,  
never having been locked up.

I am not laughing now,  
sitting in a circle with women  
whose faces have been razed,  
senses erased,  
who are the battlefield.

Our voices  
travel, one to the other,  
hoping to be heard.

3.

This is war  
and I have been branded  
dyke, bitch, manhater,  
diseased. For some  
this means I'm crazy.  
For others I don't exist.

The facts of my life  
have saved me thus far  
from destruction  
but I am not outside  
the range of fire.

The real damage already done  
is that when we talk  
woman to woman  
words we use shatter  
inside each other's heads.  
I could sit here  
still, mouth closed,  
eyes on the ground  
in the middle of a minefield  
praying I'll survive,  
or I could move forward,  
asking questions,  
telling my version,  
knowing that when I am taken  
I will not go face down.



*Still Sane*, by Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooley, photography by Kiku Hawkes. (Press Gang, 603 Powell St., Vancouver BC V6A 1H2 Canada, 101 pages, \$12.95 Canadian.)

Sheila Gilhooley's first woman lover told her that Lesbians have "subconscious feelings of guilt to resolve" and need psychiatric "help." Sheila's woman the-rapist had her locked up for being a Lesbian. Thus began a three-year nightmare of forced drugging, forbidden friendships, unsuccessful escapes, suicide attempts, desertion by friends outside, electroshock, rape, and destroyed self-confidence. It ended only when Sheila decided anything was better than dying inside. She lied her way out by smiling continually, no matter what happened. After three more frightened, drunken years in the closet, she met "a woman who called herself a lesbian . . . in public . . . And my life began to change."

The sculpture series *Still Sane*, which opened at the Women in Focus Gallery, Vancouver BC, in 1984, told the story of Sheila's three years inside, through Persimmon Blackbridge's sculptures and Sheila's words. All the clay sculptures were made from three plaster body casts of Sheila. Sheila wrote the text, often remembering as she wrote. In the book *Still Sane*, Kiku Hawke's photography preserves the show's power in two dimensions, and several essays and interviews develop its themes.

*Still Sane* tells "one person's story . . . in a way that would let the audience see the wider situation." (Persimmon, "Coming Out Crazy") The life-sized sculptures, uncamouflaged by hair or clothes, scars showing, are sometimes whole, sometimes chopped-down or fragmented. The flight or droop of the shoulders is as eloquent as the eyes or mouth. Sheila's story appears handwritten on the walls, or sometimes on the sculptures, so that neither is reduced to commentary or illustration. Both *are* the story. (The book also contains each sculpture's text next to the photograph.)

Two-page spreads of quotes from government reports, commercially-produced books and mad movement sources put particular incidents in context. The sculpture "19 shocks" illustrates

the electroshock "treatments" Sheila's shrink ordered her to undergo because she "didn't want to be cured of being a lesbian." It shows a row of shattered, armless female bodies, stacked floor to ceiling. It is followed by a listing of shock's "side effects," statistics on how many people undergo it, and testimony about how institutions get around "informed consent" requirements.

*Still Sane* doesn't pretend its story is unique, or one that happens only to dykes. It is a story of systematic terrorization, like prison or military basic training, in which the state tries to break down an individual personality and rebuild it for the state's purposes. In the closing essay, Dee dee NiHera concludes, "We must stop rationalizing that torture is necessary for anyone."

Means of resistance vary in different institutions, as "unladylike behavior" shows. On a "behavior mod" unit, where everything, even a bath, was a reward for "good" behavior, a nurse told Sheila to shave her legs. She took the razor, changed her mind, and slashed her arms instead. The sculpture shows her whole, hands on hips, legs planted, face confident and even humorous, taking up space — the picture of a successful resistor.

Although many critics thought of Sheila as the "disintegrating" subject matter and Persimmon as the artist, they planned and executed each phase of the work jointly. *Still Sane* is about better alternatives to expert-subject relationships. It is one long reminder that women as a group are the raw material for the mental illness industry, which needs "patients," "consumers," or "clients" — people who don't take care of themselves but create jobs for others "taking care" of them. Minimum-wage attendants and \$100-an-hour talk sellers both stay off welfare thanks to people, largely women, who feel "crazy" or "need help."

*Still Sane* stresses that help, however hard-won, comes not from "experts" but from a community of equals resisting what made us feel "crazy" in the first place. One of the two color photos is a group sculpture of Sheila and four dyke friends. Each one's short autobiography tells how she (and her parents or shrink or husband) thought she was "crazy" for not losing weight or liking boys, for "talking to other women," for being overcome by "screaming, kicking, hysterical" rages — which stopped when "I kicked out (my husband), stopped seeing my shrink and had a miraculous recovery."



The title *Still Sane* doesn't intentionally reflect contempt for madness. It was inspired by Carolyn Mas's song about self-respect under pressure: "They may say you're crossing the line... You may think you're losing your mind. Stare in their faces: Still Sane." Sheila writes: "I began to see my strength in surviving and feel proud that I hadn't ever given up on myself and been 'cured' even by such a formidable institution."

Quotes from visitors to the exhibit and Nym Hughes' essay show how the mental illness system still endangers and traps Lesbians. Nora D. Randall illustrates this through the story of one dyke who attended the *Still Sane* show "on a one-day pass from the loony bin," where her lover had been thrown out and barred from visiting her, and where she had been thrown in isolation for stopping and reporting an attempted rape. The dyke got a diagnosis other than "homosexual," but still no respect as a dyke, a woman, or a human being. After all, 11 years after the APA took "homosexuality" off the "disease" list, at least one medical school still had lectures on "sodomites and perverts." Tragically, Lesbians and feminists keep sending "troublesome" women, by force or persuasion, to psychiatric lock-ups, as if the mental illness system were a resource to be used.

Dee dee NiHera's "Still Mad" analyzes why it can never be other than a threat: "(T)hose in power define 'reality' and 'sanity' to suit themselves. Psychiatry . . . enforce(s) these narrow definitions . . . Organizing (emotional realities) into some disease category alienates us from so-called normals . . . (and makes) those not yet labelled censor their words and actions for fear of fitting into one of the hundreds of diagnostic categories . . . Medicalizing behaviour does more than threaten self-esteem and create false fears. It obscures the political nature of psychiatry... Those interested in (ending) forced psychiatric treatment must cease giving credence to diagnoses" and develop our own values and frame of reference. Like Persimmon concludes: "Maybe we have something good and valuable to offer just as we are. Maybe we shouldn't be normalized. Maybe we've got something we should be proud of." Or as Sheila writes: "If I had it do over . . . I'd call the show *Still Mad* and be proud of that."

— Rebecca Ripley

## Books Received

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*Not Vanishing*, the long overdue, wonderful, first poetry collection by lesbian and Native American activist Chrystos, 1988, \$9.50, Press Gang Publishers, 603 Powell St., Vancouver, BC, Canada V6A 1H2.

*Lesbian Psychologies — Explorations and Challenges*, an anthology of 26 feminist writers, therapists and academics in sections addressing identity, relationships, family, therapies and community, edited by the Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective, 1987, \$12.95, Univ. of Illinois Press, 54 East Gregory Drive, Champaign, IL 61820.

*Bird-Eyes*, a 16-year old lesbian befriends a deaf woman in a mental institution, by Madelyn Arnold, 1988, \$8.95, The Seal Press, PO Box 13, Seattle, WA 98111.

*Angel*, generations of women and the coming of age of a West Indian heroine in Grenada by Merle Collins, 1988, \$8.95, The Seal Press.

*The Obsidian Mirror — an adult healing from incest*, a personal journey by Louise M. Wischild, 1988, \$10.95, The Seal Press.

*We Stand Our Ground — Three Women, Their Vision, Their Poems*, a dialogue and individual poetry sections by Kimiko Hahn, Gale Jackson and Susan Sherman with artwork by Josely Carvalho, 1988, \$9.95, IKON press, PO Box 1355, Stuyvesant Station, NY, NY 10009.

*The Crystal Curtain*, a lesbian psychic murder mystery by Sandy Bayer, 1988, \$7.95, Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

*Incidents Involving Warmth*, lesbian feminist love stories by Anna Livia, 1986, \$7.95, Onlywomen Press, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP.

*Love Death and the Changing of the Seasons*, a lesbian novel in verse by Marilyn Hacker, 1987, £4.95, Onlywomen Press.

*One Foot on the Mountain*, an anthology of British feminist poetry 1969-1979, edited by Lilian Mohin, 1979, £2.95, Onlywomen Press.

*Beautiful Barbarians*, lesbian feminist poetry, edited by Lilian Mohin, 1986, \$8.95, Onlywomen Press.

*Unholy Alliances*, a collection of new women's fiction edited by Louise Rafkin, 1988, \$9.95, Cleis Press, PO Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

*My Father was a Toltec*, Chicana feminist poetry by Ana Castillo, 1988, \$6.95, West End Press, Box 27334, Albuquerque, NM 87125.

*It's A Family Affair: The Real Lives of Black Single Mothers*, by Barbara Omolade, #4 in The Freedom Organizing Pamphlet Series, 1987, \$3.50, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, PO Box 908, Latham, NY 12110.



*Violence Against Women and the Ongoing Challenge to Racism* by Angela Y. Davis, #5 in The Freedom Organizing Pamphlet Series, 1987, \$3.50, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

*Osten's Bay*, lesbian adventure and romance set in the Dutch Antilles by Zenobia N. Vole, 1988, \$8.95, The Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

*We Walk the Back of the Tiger*, lesbian romance set in the early 70s women's movement, 1988, \$8.95, Naiad Press.

*Sunday's Child*, lesbian sports thriller by Joyce Bright, 1988, \$8.95, Naiad Press.

*The Secret in the Bird*, a psychological mystery by Camarin Grae, 1988, \$8.95, Naiad Press.

*Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community*, an illustrated guide to the film by Andrea Weiss and Greta Schiller, 1988, \$7.95, Naiad Press.


*Lesbian Crossroads*, interviews on lesbian identity with 15 lesbians (and some of their families) by Ruth Baetz, 1988 (orig. 1980), \$9.95, Naiad Press.

*October Obsession*, a mythological mystery in which a woman seeks her missing aunt and her own lesbian truth, by Meredith More, 1988, \$8.95, Naiad.

*All Out*, a lesbian sports and politics novel by Judith Alguire, 1988, \$8.95, New Victoria Press, Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

*Lesbian Stages*, five plays by Sarah Dreher, author of the Stoner McTavish novels, 1988, \$9.95, New Victoria Press.

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## Letter from El Cenote Writers' Workshop

June 15, 1988

Elana,

There is something inherently racist in white women editing the works of women of color. What makes this so? We live in a society where racism is the construct for how the society functions. Everything women of color do is filtered through whiteness — the white norm. White women have to be aware that they are a part of that norm and garner power and privilege from it, solely based on their color, be they lesbian, heterosexual, able-bodied, disabled, poor, rich, fat, thin, old, young....

It is common for groups of white people, women and progressives included, to develop exclusive new languages that set them outside the status quo — the white norm. The new languages, just like the language of the white norm, are used to define the experiences of other people. When those other people are of color, white people ignore that the new language gives them as much privilege as the old. *And* they use the new language as a pretense that they are no longer racist. People of color have not been allowed their languages and have not been included in the development of the "new" language; therefore, it is an illusion that this new language, progressive or not, can be anti-racist.

The "women's community" has taken the lead in identifying a number of oppressions. It has been notorious in creating a "politically correct" language which equates the "isms." This has the effect of leveling oppressions; the leveling distorts, negates and trivializes the experiences of women of color. No matter what oppressions a white woman faces, she still benefits from white privilege. As a white editor you must recognize and acknowledge the power and privilege of your position. In changing the wording of the works of women of color, regardless of your intent, you attempt to fit the experience of the woman of color into the white model; this enforces the invisibility of women of color.



For women who've done their anti-racism "workshops," racist acts often become more and more subtle. It is imperative that white women who espouse an anti-racist line stop and listen to what women of color are telling them, rather than telling women of color how to make their experiences "politically correct."

We encourage you to publish this letter for the benefit of all white women who edit the work of women of color.

From that piece of each of us that refuses to be silenced,

Uzuri Amini  
Pam Maes  
Virginia R. Harris  
A. Loba Nemajea

Roz Leiser  
Carolina Delgado  
Peggy Sullivan



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## Contributors' Notes

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**Katharyn Machan Aal** was born in Woodbury, CT, in 1952. Since 1975 she has lived in Ithaca, NY, where she teaches on the faculty of Ithaca College, coordinates the Ithaca Community Poets, and directs the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, a national summer program. She is the author of twelve published collections of poems, the most recent of which is *When She Was the Good-Time Girl*, 1986 winner of The Signpost Press annual competition.

**Janet Aalfs:** I write and practice/teach martial arts in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts with other pioneers. I am a founding member of two lesbian writing groups and head instructor of Valley Women's Martial Arts. One of my guardian spirits is a seal.

**Diane Averill:** I currently teach at Portland Community College and Lewis and Clark College. I have published in *Calyx*, *Calapooya College 10*, *Colorado Review*, *Hubbub*, *Kalliope*, *Mississippi Mud*, *Northwest Review*, *Plainswoman*, *Poet & Critic*, *Portland Review*, *Room of One's Own* and *Seattle Review*. My book of poems, *Branches Doubled Over With Fruit*, is looking for a home.

**Bethany** supports her dog OBOE and herself by working as a bookkeeper. After 13 years in and out of mental institutions, halfway houses and day treatment centers she considers this a revolutionary action.

**Rosario Caicedo** was born in Colombia, South America, and has lived in the U.S. for the past 16 years. Rosario's work has appeared in *Sojourner*, *El Taller Literario*, *Embers* and other publications. She won First Prize for Poetry in the THIRD WOMAN Literary Awards contest, 1986. She has read her poetry at Yale University, Trinity College and at several literary events. She is a member of the Board of Directors of *El Taller Literario*, a new journal which is being published by a group of Hispanic writers from Conn. Rosario lives with her two children in New Haven.

**Marie Cartier** has published in *Pudding*, *New Kent Quarterly*, *Focus*, *Eidos*, *Black Maria*, *Kalliope*, *Eve's Legacy*, *Central Park*, *Colorado Review*, among others. Currently, she is at UCLA. Her play, *When the First Two Hundred Letters Came*, about political prisoners, will open in Los Angeles this October.



**Mary Lou Daugherty** is a training manager and professional educator working in Chicago. She and her lover have raised four children while residing in Bartlett, a suburb.

**Winifred Eads:** I am forty-two, a writer-artist full of petroglyphs I have not had said through me yet; live in Seattle, work in spirit world among elders in a nursing home where I assist them in their activities.

**Lynne Yamaguchi Fletcher** is a Japanese-American free-lance writer and editor living alternately in Mass. and Arizona.

**Myra Fourwinds** is a writer, photographer, videographer living in the Bay Area. She believe that images using mythic archetypical symbols speak to us on an unconscious level across time and across cultural boundaries. By finding these archetypes within ourselves and others around us, we become aligned with the collective imagination and find access to the essence of life force. As Meridel LeSuer says: "The most revolutionary act is to celebrate life." Myra exposes aspects of this celebration on film.

**Chiah Heller-Zbloki** is an eco-feminist theorist who teaches feminism and ecology at The Institute for Social Ecology in Plainfield, VT. She is also a feminist psychotherapist, artist and poet who writes and writes and writes because she has to.

**Tryna Hope:** I am a Jewish lesbian living in Northampton, MA. My clients are people who have been in and out of the State Hospital. My job is to make sure the community does all it can, and more, so that my clients need never be institutionalized.

**Diane Hugs** is a 33-year old disabled lesbian. She's been published in *With The Power of Each Breath, My Storys On, The Courage to Heal* and a local printing of *Disabled Calligraphy*. Diane is currently working on a novel, and is an active member of Wry Crips (a disabled women's theatre group). Still in transition from losing her sight, this is the second published piece she has done without being able to see her writing.

**jodi:** I'm a disabled Jewish lesbian, currently working on starting a newsletter for disabled wimmin/lesbians/women. The address for the newsletter is 2 Sun Lane, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601. I love farming.

**Karla K.** is a writer-editor who is unemployed in the midwest, after living and working in the east. She has published articles on health and a poem.

**Maggie Kazel** is a former nurse's aide, psychiatric technician and musician's manager. She currently resides in Minneapolis, writes screenplays and poems and teaches drama and music. If she could live part of the year in the southwest, San Francisco and the southeast while maintaining residence in the prairie lands, she would. Travelling is the only balm for her condition.

**Kendall** is a displaced New Orleans actress and writer now teaching theater in the North. Her collection of other women's plays, *Love and Thunder* (Methuen), came out this year.

**Maria LaVara:** I'm from Los Angeles and I sing with the band The Trash. This is the first story I've ever written, and I got high on it for three months after I wrote it.

**Janelle Lavelle:** I am a 36-year old North Carolina transplant who works in emergency services for pay, and gay and lesbian groups for sanity. I am a staff writer and survivor of *The Front Page*, a North Carolina gay and lesbian paper. My spouse Pat and I maintain a two dog, one cat home.

**Bea Loud** is a pseudonym, chosen for this piece because the names of the other characters have all been changed in this otherwise true story. I've been a lesbian activist for 19 years, only recently turning to writing as a primary vehicle for expressing it.

**Linda Marie** is a lesbian writer living in the S.F. Bay Area.

**Yvonne Mattingly Moonstorm, M.A., 41,** is a graduate of St. Louis University and the University of Denver. She is the mother of two sons, 18 and 19. She writes poetry and short stories, and has had poems published nationally. In 1984, she also wrote a book — a biography of her mother. She has traveled extensively.

**Kathy Moorhouse** is a 41-year old Berkeley lesbian, working class, Ph.D, blue collar worker who has a way with animals.

**Mary Moran** is a madwoman with a sense of humor who loves to eat and gossip with her girl friends at neighborhood restaurants.

**Dee dee NiHera:** I have survived psychiatric cages and many other forms of violence against women in my 40 years. I am active in the battered women and mad movements. Loving women, teaching healing practices of the world, and living in Alaska help keep me hopeful.

**Linda Marie Nolte:** I am a 29-year old short, fat lesbian with northern European Fairy ancestry who loves living in Minneapolis. My drawings provide an emotional anchor, a safe channel for



expressing my subconscious self.

**Ellen Oppenheimer** makes contemporary quilts in Oakland, CA. "I am pleased to be able to contribute something to *Sinister Wisdom*."

**Laura Post:** I am an angry, obsessive Jewish lesbian raised in a dysfunctional family, a recovering alcoholic training to be a psychiatrist in San Francisco, and a niece and ex-lover of people that my profession has labeled schizophrenic.

**Rebecca Ripley** is disabled, middle-aged, Jewish, and a former psychiatric inmate. She is also a former long-term user of the rapy and phenothiazines, having quit both in the early 1970's. After 17 shrink-free years, she's still mad and now proud of it.

**Margaret Robison** is a tired old southern bitch now painting and writing in Massachusetts yet again. She is the author of two books of poetry, *The Naked Bear* (Lynx House Press/Panache Books) and *Here* (Camelback Press).

**Barbara Ruth:** "Song Of The Womon With Rope In Her Hair" is from my book, *Past, Present & Future Passions* (available from HerBooks, PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95601). I continue looking for ways to make that rope a lifeline, rather than a noose. Braiding helps.

**Bettianne Shoney Sien:** I write short pieces of fiction that explore my experiences growing up in a large family (13 children) in rural Midwest poverty, and the joys and struggles of my life now as a radical lesbian feminist. "My Mother Played the Accordion" is included in a collection of my short stories entitled *Lizards/Los Padres* to be released by HerBooks in December 1988.

**Judy Springer:** I am a 42-year old, white, Pisces, lesbian mother-of-two, artist/ceramist and a small town dyke (Brandon, Manitoba, Canada).

**Linda Stalker:** I'm still struggling within the mental health system. Since '81 I have been involved in human rights and citizen advocacy. It's one way to deal with my anger. Sharing my experience with other women and writing is a vital part of my life.

**Sharon Sumpter** is a bisexual lesbian activist and psychotherapist who works with women survivors of abuse, institutionalization and sexual oppression. Her book-in-progress, *In Pieces*, is dedicated to opening the closet doors for former "mental patients." "I went into my work to undo the criminal things that

were done to me and that I saw done to other women." She thanks Deena Metzger and Asherah for this, her first published work. **flyin thunda cloud rdoc** iz a non-feminist/non-separatist lesbian who iz of mixed native amerikan, jamaican west indyan & afro american heritages who loves to talk & iz learning to be a good listener & friend. one of the ways i support womyn in their search 4 a way out of the mental health system iz to produce a newsletter SUPPORT. no newsletters will be sent 2 any mental health professionals. sample copies are \$1, subscriptions are \$10 per year, from SUPPORT 3423 Coles Rd., Columbia, SC 29203. Include SASE.

**Cheryl Marie Wade** is 40, a crip, a writer, straight, an incest survivor, a performer — today, in that order. Her work has appeared in *Calyx*, *Ikon* and *Sinister Wisdom*.

**Joan M. Ward:** You might just say that I'm one of those Dyke Separatists from Madison, Wisconsin — quiet, grim and humorless.

**Batya Weinbaum** is a wandering Jew with a post office box in Vermont.

**Rikki Westerschulte** is a 37-year old lesbian, a part-time mother, a tech-writing manager in a computer firm, and a graduate of UC Berkeley and San Francisco State. And a feminist who finds healing through self-love. She is currently earning a marriage & family counseling degree from the University of San Francisco.

**Feral Willcox** is a radical lesbian outlaw Southern poet.

**Ruta (Mazelis) Windstar:** I'm a 29-year-old lesbian feminist celebrating life with my lover, our 3 cats and other healing womyn. The name Mazelis belongs to my abuser and that's why it's included; the name Windstar is my chosen name and represents new breath and freedom.

**Louise Wischild:** I'm a writer and massage therapist in Seattle and I have a new book from Seal Press, *The Obsidian Mirror: An Adult Healing from Incest*.

**Jo-Ellen Yale:** I am a renegade lesbian-feminist therapist who has spent her entire professional life observing and repudiating the abuses and hypocrisy of the traditional psychiatric/psychological community.



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## Announcements and Classified Ads

### CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

*Psychiatry & Womyn:* A call by womyn — for womyn — to create alternatives to psychiatry: “What is your perfect healing place?”

We’re asking for input from womyn (especially from mental system survivors) on a project we’re planning — a safe place for womyn in emotional distress. If YOU were in emotional distress . . . (say your life is falling apart around you, you lost your friends/family, you have no job, you have no money, and/or PAST hurts/violence against you build up inside — you’re in a painful, confusing situation). . . and you are in danger of being committed or committing yourself to a “mental” institution, what would you want INSTEAD? If you could stay in any kind of safe, healing place, what would that be? What can you envision for yourself as a wonderful place to be in times of emotional crisis?

You can use these questions as a guideline for writing, or make up your own. We don’t need a well-organized grammatical essay — whatever form it takes will be just fine and much appreciated.

**Location?** — city, country, suburbs, near ocean, river, open space, near neighbors, quiet neighborhood, near city bustle, etc.?

**Building?** — house(s), dorm(s), cabin(s), tent(s), yurt(s), etc.? How many? What would they be like? Size, arrangement, materials, colors, amount of daylight, heat source, furnishings, etc.?

**How long would you stay?**

**Would you be alone?** Group of others in similar situation? If so, how many? Someone(s) whose job it is to provide emotional or physical support? If so, what would they do? What would they be like?

**Would you want your friends, family, children, animal friends to visit or stay with you?** Would men be allowed?

**Would food be provided for you?** Would you cook? Clean? If not, who would?

**What would you do there?** Would you have goals for your time there? What would your healing process be like?

**Who else would be there for healing?** Who would decide who gets in? Who would run the place?

**Would there be any rules?** If so, what would they be? What about drugs, alcohol, suicidal or homicidal womyn?

**How would all this be paid for?**

Your response need not be realistic! Use your imagination! Your name will be kept confidential unless you say it’s OK not to, but please include address or phone so we can contact you. All responses will be appreciated! Judith Sara, 27 Daniel Square, Belchertown, MA 01007

*DISABLED WIMMIN'S NEWSLETTER* wants stories, drawings, articles, poetry, ideas by disabled wimmin. For information or to send your work, SASE to: 2 Sun Lane, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601.

*IN OUR OWN VOICES — FAT DYKES...BREAK THE SILENCE*, an anthology, is seeking contributions in all forms by January 1, 1989, to Toni L. Cassista, PO Box 2968, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. She is also seeking documented experiences of discrimination based solely on weight to amend current state civil rights laws.

*RADICAL DYKE HUMOR* is the theme for the next issue of *Lesbian Ethics*. Send contributions by December 31 (flexible — write them) to *Lesbian Ethics*, PO Box 4623, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

*THE NEW MOON* is a new quarterly non-profit, national multi-focus publication for lesbians. Send contributions, or for more info, to: 2 Kings Terrace, Ames, Iowa 50010.

*WOMEN WHO DIDN'T KNOW THEY WERE JEWISH UNTIL THEY WERE ADULTS* — an anthology HerBooks will publish, is seeking submissions in all forms by February 1, 1989. Send work with SASE to: Jewish Women's Anthology, PO Box 1174, Felton, CA 95018.

*BUBBE MEISERS BY SHAYNA MAIDELEHS* — an anthology of writings by Jewish women about their Jewish grandmothers, is seek submissions in all forms including recipes. Send with SASE to Leslea Newman, 50 Hawley St., Northampton, MA 01060. Deadline, May 15, 1989.

*LA BELLA FIGURA* — a literary journal for Italian-American women, with a special welcome for lesbians. Send SASE for guidelines and subscription info to: Rose Romano, PO Box 411223, SF, CA 94141-1123.

*LESBIAN BEDTIME STORIES* sought for anthology. Deadline: Dec. 31. To: Bluejay, Tough Dove Books, PO Box 528, Little River, CA 95456.

*OUR RIGHT TO LOVE: A LESBIAN RESOURCE BOOK* is seeking photographs for the revised edition. Send B&W photos (with releases) to Ginny Vida, 45 Plaza St., #1-G, Brooklyn, NY 11217.

*EIGHTH MOUNTAIN PRESS ANNUAL POETRY PRIZE* — for excellence in feminist poetry. \$1000 + publication. Booklength ms. accepted in Jan. & Feb. beginning 1989. No reading fee. Send SASE for details. 624 SE 29th, Portland, OR 97214.

*BERKELEY WOMEN'S LAW JOURNAL* is soliciting ms. for its 4th issue. Multidisciplinary treatments of legal arguments welcome. For info and guidelines: Boalt Hall, Room 2, Univ. of Ca., Berkeley, CA 94720.

*WOMEN'S FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* sought by Susanna J. Sturgis, who is editing a new women's speculative fiction series for Crossing Press. Deadline: January 31, 1989 for the first anthology. Full-



length novels also sought, send queries and anthology submissions to: S.J. Sturgis, PO Box 39, West Tisbury, MA 02575.

WOMEN AND CANCER anthology, being edited by Judith Brady for Cleis Press, is seeking submissions in all forms. Send submissions (2 copies) or inquiries to Judith Brady, 62 Sussex St., SF, CA 94131. Deadline: August, 1989.

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

PARALLELS & INTERSECTIONS: A conference on Racism and Other Forms of Oppression, April 6-9. For info, write: Women Against Racism Committee, c/o Women's Resource and Action Center, Univ. of Iowa, 130 N. Madison St., Iowa City, IA 52242.

6th Annual Graduate Women's Studies Conf., FEMINISM AS CATALYST: Bridging the Discourses of the Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. March 4, 1989. For info write: Women's Studies Program, Mill Building, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.

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LOVE ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT, Jewish Lesbian Feminist Poetry by Leslea Newman now available. Send \$6.00 plus \$1.00 shipping to HerBooks, PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

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THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES has to match a \$10,000 grant from the Chicago Resource Center for a video project on the Daughters of Bilitis. DOB was founded in 1955, they're asking you to send \$19.55 to PO Box 1258, NY, NY 10116. Make checks payable to LHEF, Inc.

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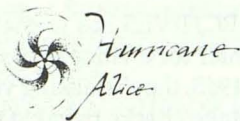
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- #32/Special Focus on Illness, Death, Mourning, Healing, the Disappeared, Hunting Season, Dealing with Suicide, Cancer, New Ritual Observances**
- Maia, Allegra, Sears, McDonald, Waters, Hansell, Rosenblum, Butler, Stinson •
- #31/Special Focus on Sex and Fiction, Coming out in the South, Found Goddesses, Waiting, BoBe Mayse, Sex and Socialist Feminism**
- Smukler, Blackwomon, Romano, Davenport, Dykewomon, McNaron •
- #28/Special Focus on Women & Work; Body Image, Size & Eating, Aging, Comedy about Outlaw Lesbian Communities, Courage, PC/PI, Letter on #26**
- Clarke, Heather, Klepfisz, Sturgis, Gould, Boucher, Gomez, Sardella, Moran •
- #27/Special Focus on Girlhood, Sexuality and Violence, Office Work, Navy Dykes, Feminism & Snobbery, White Trash, Passion, Poetry/Performance, Women of Color/Women in Israel/Women in Lebanon, Ed. Statement on #26**
- Adnan, Felman, Grahn, Schalet, Bogus, HaMa'avak Touch, Quintanales, Anzaldúa •
- #26/Special Issue: *To Go To Berbir* by Jill Drew, a book-length journal written by an American nurse working in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion**
- #25/Butch/Fem in the 50's, Women's Peace Encampments, Erotic Satire, Native American Roots of White Feminism, Palestinian, Haitian, Puerto Rican Struggles, Jewish Radical Identity, Welfare Motherhood Sexuality, SciFi**
- Allen, Cotrell, Root, Stecenko, Love, Paz, Smukler, Hall, Lipstadt, Brant •
- #24/Violence Against Women & Resistance, Alcohol, Fighting Racism, Dyke Culture, Black Lesbians, White Working Class Identity, Censorship**
- Harjo, Derricotte, Nestle, Lynch, Sylvester, Pratt Moirai, Parkerson •
- #21/Separatism Revisited, Jewish Survival & Defiance, Black Lesbian Writing, Photos of Dykes in Drag, Suicide, Bars, Letters about Anti-Semitism**
- Klepfisz, Arobateau, Segrest, Simpson, Tornes, Addison, justice, Foley, Crawford •

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### **Submission Guidelines**

All written work should be SUBMITTED IN DUPLICATE. Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Five poems or two stories maximum submission per issue. We prefer you type (or send your work on Macintosh discs). Legible handwritten work accepted, tapes accepted from print-impaired womyn. All submissions must be on white paper, with the author's name on each page. SASE MUST BE ENCLOSED. *Selection may take up to nine months.* If you want acknowledgment of receipt, enclose a separate, stamped postcard. Graphic artists should send B&W photos, stats, or other duplicates of their work. Let us know if we can keep artwork on file for future use.

We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as women of color, ethnic women, Third World, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that effect our work, joy and survival. See p. 8 for details on upcoming issues. The themes are intended as guidelines, not as rigid categories. If you have work that doesn't fit an upcoming theme, but belongs in *Sinister Wisdom*, don't hesitate to submit it.

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Because of these things,  
because of the nurse  
who said I was only a patient  
and the woman  
who needed a hand to hold,  
I have never forgotten.  
Nor will I ever forget,  
because of the pale hospital walls  
with the secrets they hold  
of the lives of so many women.  
I am amazed those walls stand  
silent year after year.  
I am amazed that blood  
doesn't leak through the paint  
like a Rorschach  
of terrible roses

—Margaret Robison  
from *Because of These Things*