

*Just*

# lesbian resistance

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 RESIST SHAME RESIST LIES RESIST PERPETRATION RESIST CHAOS RESIST RAPISTS  
 RESIST COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY RESIST PORNOGRAPHY RESIST OPPRESSION  
 RESIST HUMILIATION RESIST INVISIBILITY RESIST AGEISM  
 RESIST FORCE RESIST CHILD ABUSE RESIST GUILTY  
 RESIST FEAR RESIST HARM RESIST SUCCUMB  
 RESIST INJUSTICE RESIST INVASION NOISE RESIST TORTURE RESIST SURRENDER  
 RESIST GREED RESIST DEMISE RESIST APATHY RESIST ABANDONMENT  
 RESIST CARELESSNESS RESIST BATTERING RESIST MUTILATION  
 RESIST INTIMIDATION RESIST MANIPULATION  
 RESIST ANTI-SEMITISM RESIST TORTURE RESIST ABANDONMENT  
 RESIST MOLESTATION RESIST ASSAULT RESIST MANIPULATION  
 RESIST SEXISM RESIST RAPE RESIST RAPE RESIST MUTILATION  
 RESIST ANIMAL ABUSE  
 RESIST DESTRUCTION RESIST IGNORANCE  
 RESIST POLLUTION RESIST ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE  
 RESIST PERSECUTION RESIST MURDER  
 RESIST MISOGNY RESIST DISEMPOWERMENT

JOHANSSON 1972



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in the Arts and Politics

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 Notes for a Magazine

To resist implies someone is trying to get you to act in their interest and not your own. More than once I've heard Audre Lorde say, if you're not using your own power, you can be sure there's someone out there using it against you in your name.

The lesbians writing in this issue envision taking power in many ways: some advocate armed struggle, others believe in challenging systems from within, some speak for coalition politics, some for separatism, still others imagine resistance as changing the processes between us. I admire and encourage this fantastic lesbian resilience.

Still, I wrestle with despair. The news is so bad. The news from everywhere — Somalia, Berkeley. The increasing violence against women and lesbians. The overt and subtle daily horrors of racism. I feel my frustration on both a personal and global scale. We say: spit in the face of those who oppress you, plant a seed. But spit at the Serbian army? Seeds in radioactive ground?

I know "they" want me to feel this way — powerless, ready to take the first compromise that comes around. (Personally, I think giving in is voting for Bill Clinton. In 1982 a friend of mine had a button on her bulletin board: don't vote, it just encourages them. I don't know what she did in 1992.)

Compromise. I compromise and feel compromised. Every day I watch us give in — my friends, my allies, lesbians I admire, myself. We call it survival, getting along; anyway it's passé to make a scene. We say: don't let your anger eat you, make you ineffective. But I know that we have many (and different) privileges, and we're unlikely to choose an analysis that undermines our privilege. We want to fight back, to be on the side of "good," but not be inconvenienced by our rebellions. It's too easy to get hooked on the slogans of our time that boil down to: *you deserve it, baby, indulge yourself*. We are constantly seduced by capitalism and reduced by fear. The smallest rebellion is seen as outrageous radicalism. These days it seems like you can be accused of going out on a limb while you're hugging the tree trunk for safety.

I think this parable from Julia Penelope's article "The Mystery of Lesbians" bears repeating. Julia recorded what Emily Levine told her: "In carpentry, when one has several boards that she has to cut down to the same size, each succeeding board must be

measured, not by matching it with the board just cut, but with the FIRST board cut. By measuring the length of each board against the first one, the carpenter insures that every board ends up the same length. If she makes the mistake of measuring each successive board against the one cut just before it, she'll discover, when she finishes, that none of the boards are the same length. As the number of boards cut between the first one and the last one increases, so, too, does the extent of the error in measurement. Similarly the individual compromises we've made ... moved us imperceptibly away from radicalism..."

Lesbians I love use wrinkle cream, diet, work for the Democrats, keep their stock in GE, ignore disabled home-bound dykes, pay their taxes. (If we're not tax resisters, our money is taken from us and used against all the causes we support. Imagine if every lesbian put her tax money into the lesbian community instead of into the U.S. treasury. I pay taxes, and consider it the most immoral thing I do/have done in my life.)

Lesbians I love fight back, organize, recycle, write, circulate petitions, call each other up with encouragement, start lesbian funds, go to jail for their beliefs. We all do what we can — give in where we cannot imagine our best interest is in fighting; fight where we think we can be effective. It doesn't feel like enough, but it has to be enough. It has to be at least the start of enough.

Still starting in the '90s? Resistance is a life-long series of examinations of power and privilege. Really, I don't want to live my life resisting — I want to live my life creating, loving, building. But I live in a world where my creativity is, by definition, resistance — which means, in order to act I must always know I'm acting against something as well as for something. This isn't fun. Acting against the forces of fascism is wearing. Always seeking outlet, constantly blocked, maneuvering.

It grates on me every night when I go to sleep and every morning when I get up and when I go to work. If it grates on you, make a noise. Make the loudest noise you can. Use your strongest words. Don't be afraid of your anger or your mind. Don't be afraid

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\* "The Mystery of Lesbians" appeared in *Lesbian Ethics*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1, 2 and 3, 1984-85; as an edited whole in *For Lesbians Only — A Separatist Anthology*, ed. by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 1988, Onlywomen Press.

to make mistakes. Keep acting, keep demanding, keep your imagination alive. It's live imagination that changes us and the world. Now is always the time.

...when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive.

— Audre Lorde

from "A Litany for Survival," in *The Black Unicorn*

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## Upcoming Issues

**#49 The Lesbian Body:** An exploration and reclamation — will be out in April.

**#50 Lesbian Ethics:** What are our ethics? What does an ethical lesbian look/act like etc.? Is there a lesbian code of behavior? How do we treat each other as lesbians? What is our responsibility to lesbian communities? How do we handle abuse within the lesbian community? Is there a lesbian politic? How do we deal with judgement? What about ostracism, shunning and trashing? How do we impose judgement? What is the difference between influence and imposition? How does racial, ethnic or class identity affect your ethical outlook? What specific ethical challenges do you face because of your lesbianism, politics, etc.? How do you meet these challenges? What principles (if any) would you like lesbians to agree on for a system of ethics and in what ways are those principles specifically lesbian? Can you be ethical and have fun/be sexual? Editors: Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch. Deadline is February 1, 1993.

Terri Fredlund

## How We Decide

In order to effectively oppose oppression, we need to know which of our actions are resistance, which serve to strengthen ourselves internally and collectively, and which are symptoms of being caught up in petty bullshit. It's not always easy to tell the difference.

What do we and don't we consider to be resistance? How widely and how narrowly should we define it?

Is being a lesbian in and of itself resistance?

Is remembering and describing our victimization resistance?

Is taking revenge resistance?

Is envisioning using magic that we don't possess resistance?

Is not giving in to self-destructive behavior resistance? Is self-destructive behavior resistance?

Is recycling resistance?

Some of these could be considered internal resistance, or building the necessary foundation of strength for a more direct, immediate outer resistance.

Are only nonviolent actions, which incorporate the desired goal in its means, resistance? For example, planting a military tank with flowers to render it useless rather than putting sugar in the gas tank, as was debated in 1983 at the planning meeting for the German Wimmin's Resistance Camp.\*

To what extent is it helpful to explore the politics of theoretical actions? Reality often presents a different set of variables. The German Resistance Camp wimmin never got close enough to a tank to do anything to it, but did occupy a crane and succeed in halting military construction for an entire day.

If oppression is achieved through violence, is all violence oppression? Can violent acts be resistance? Is the violence of the oppressed different from that of the oppressors? Who has the right to violence in patriarchy? Does a woman have a right to defend herself if she's

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\*The purposes of this camp were to resist the stationing of Cruise missiles specifically, and patriarchy in all its forms, as well as to work toward creating new ways of living.



attacked by a rapist? Does a group of people have a right to riot if they are being continuously attacked by armed racists? Will oppressive conditions ever change if the oppressed never use violence? Who is responsible if the oppressors escalate the violence?

If one of the oppressors' strategies is criminalizing and incarcerating resisters, is not getting caught resistance? Are only secret acts of sabotage resistance?

Is withdrawing our support from the system resistance? Is disregarding the rules of the oppressors resistance? If so, is stealing resistance? Is whether or not we break the law a measure of the strength of our resistance?

Is becoming ourselves resistance? Is creating our own spaces, so we can become ourselves, resistance? Is setting them up so we are safe and at ease resistance? Is setting them up in a way that excludes less privileged wimmin so we can maintain our own comfort level resistance? For example: wimmin's music festivals which, after all these years, are still not adequately accessible to disabled workers and festival goers.

Is an internal process, in and of itself, resistance? Are external actions, alone, resistance? Is it resistance when we're just following instincts? Or is resistance only an internal process combined with external actions?

Is it possible to find a definition of resistance we can all agree upon, such as: "An individual or collective act of courage, strength and integrity in response to violence, threat of harm, wrongdoing or untruth"?

Does even the best general definition inappropriately include or exclude some cases? Rather than attempt a definition, perhaps it's more useful to consider context, as in: resistance to what? To oppression (of course!). Namely a system of unjust distribution of resources, opportunities, privileges, recognition; and the oppressive acts that hold it in place: manipulation, intimidation, lies of omission, fabrications, hatred, disrespect, invalidation of our reality, supremacist belief systems, and violence. Violence, or the threat of violence, is the means through which all oppression is achieved and maintained. These acts are committed by individuals with names and addresses, and by the institutions these people are a part of.

One might think that the more an individual has been oppressed, the more she would understand about oppression, and the more she would be able to resist and form alliances. But ironically, the effects of being oppressed also help create the conditions for continuing oppression. Namely, fear of the consequences of being our best selves; fear to act; self hatred; mistrust of our own perceptions, talents and strengths; identification and agreement with the oppressors.

Consequently, we find ourselves not only fighting the systems and institutions of oppression (such as corporations or the school system) and their acts of violence and injustice, we also find ourselves fighting our own unconscious internalization and perpetuation of oppression.

These three spheres—oppressive systems or institutions; specific oppressive acts; internalized oppression—provide the context for our resistance and our examination of it. The issues involved are interrelated and overlap in infinite variety. For example: fighting invalidation of my reality while someone is calling me on my ableism, is not resistance, though it may feel like it at the time. Can we agree that not everything that feels like resistance is resistance?

It's not always easy to distinguish between resistance and complicity. For example: If the patriarchy keeps us hooked through our need for money to survive, is it resistance to become as self-sufficient as possible, even if we are impoverished? Is living this way resistance, knowing that one of the main ways patriarchy keeps wimmin down is through poverty?

Is it resistance to be in the system in order to extract the money we need to create change? Is it resistance to work within the system because we can't wait for the revolution?

Is running a wimmin's press in order to not be silenced, resistance? Even if the press buys and uses a computer which was manufactured in bad working conditions by poorly paid wimmin in Asia, whose health is ruined by age 25?

Almost all of us are oppressed or oppressor at different times. What happens when privilege and oppression overlap? The phrase "unlearning oppression" is easily embraced, easily adopted as a goal by lesbians with good intentions. More difficult is the task of distinguishing between individual personality traits and learned oppressive behavior.

This task is a major challenge we face in our work, yet we have little to guide us. The phrase, "If it feels oppressive, it is oppressive," isn't always reliable. Recall for instance the ever-recurring cries of "reverse discrimination." Recall that many batterers really feel that they are defending themselves. As Estelle Crone once said, "You can feel threatened without actually being in any danger." At the same time, as Monifa Ajanaku points out, many things lesbians do or don't do, say or remain silent about, have actual negative effects on other lesbians.

Our emotional well being is necessary in developing to our full potential, both as individuals and as a community. We also need emotional honesty and clarity. How can we maintain a balance between being accountable to other lesbians, and not being manipulated by lesbians for whom the feeling of being victimized is really a vehicle for something else? How can we express our feelings without being hurtful or manipulative? In evaluating feelings, how can we balance openness and compassion with wariness? We need to be able to tell the difference between political issues and our emotional responses, and not confuse the two. We need to avoid taking our old hurt and frustrations out on one another. We are a movement, a community of wimmin who have all been wounded, some much more severely than others. We have suffered pain and damage for which we are not responsible, but we *are* responsible for our own healing, and for supporting each other in healing. How can we resolve conflicts of needs in ways that are fair to all involved? Coming from backgrounds that differ in culture and privilege, how can each of us become worthy of the respect, trust and understanding of other lesbians?

Individuals and groups will each have their own criteria for determining political validity; how can we coordinate our efforts and priorities? What is the right mix of collective and individual resistance? What really matters?

What matters is to educate and challenge ourselves to live by increasingly inclusive politics. By inclusive, I mean not only of as many different kinds of wimmin as there are, but also of the different conditions and nuances that affect wimmin's lives and politics.

Wimmin with differing life choices and experiences can hold differing, but equally valid, political views. It is presumptuous and

misogynist to think that we know what is best for other lesbians and have the right to enforce it. Besides legitimizing policing, this attitude, by extension, also calls into question our own ability to think for ourselves.

We need to realize that it is a dyke's actions, rather than her identity, which can harm other dykes. White lesbians can be ignorant, or committed to anti-racism. A class privileged dyke can use her privilege and resources to increase access for poorer dykes or she can be self-centered and arrogant. A lesbian raising a son can respect wimmin only space and separatists' choice not to give any energy to males, or she can insist on trying to include him in every sphere of lesbian culture. A hearing lesbian can ignore deaf lesbians or can make the effort to learn ASL. An SM dyke can have respectful behavior toward all lesbians or she can be disrespectful and abusive. So can dyke separatists, so can festival organizers, so can we all.

What matters is to learn each other's stories and understand, rather than label each other. A lesbian who has made even serious mistakes in the past can have changed and deserves respect, if her present actions are respectful. Good community depends on our being open and compassionate not only when it's easy and convenient but also when we disagree.

What matters is not to exclude each other through our carelessness or rigidity. There is enough dyke energy to respect and include each other in ways that can work for all involved. It's not only possible, but absolutely necessary. Otherwise, we will isolate ourselves from one another to the point that we can't even sit together in the same room at an event, much less sustain a community or any viable movement for change.

What matters is having integrity and inspiring each other.

What matters is that our resistance include more than our individual personal development.

What matters is to persist in the extremely exacting task of resisting in the face of the overwhelming forces that try to keep us down.

What makes it possible for us to resist and keep resisting?

1. The ability to overcome fear. There is much we fear. We are afraid of violence, of ridicule, of lack of money, of not being able to survive. We are afraid of incarceration, of rejection by our peers and family. We are afraid of losing our sanity.

We overcome fear by demystifying and learning to deal with what we are afraid of. For wimmin learning self-defense, this means coming to recognize the dynamics of threatening, manipulative situations, as well as learning simple, powerful, physical techniques. For wimmin doing an illegal political action, it means learning how to respond to police, realizing that we can be strong and continue political resistance in court and in jail.

2. Success. Taking risks and succeeding gives us self-esteem, confidence, the strength and incentive to keep trying. It can be speaking up at a meeting and being listened to. It can be telling an obnoxious and exceedingly tenacious man who is holding one's arm to let go, punching him in the nose when he doesn't, and experiencing the satisfaction of watching him walk away bleeding and whimpering, as did a disabled student from one of my self-defense classes. It can be successfully blockading, and speaking to every employee of, a nuclear power plant. It can be going to court and winning an anti-discrimination law suit.

There's nothing like success.

3. Support. Support gives us the strength to take new risks and gives us validation for our experiences, feelings and thoughts. It helps us utilize our collective strengths, intelligence and creativity, as well as helping us deal with hard times and failures. It also helps develop trust between us.

We can each be individually strong at different times. But mutual support allows the strength of our resistance, and the quality of our lives, to become more than the sum of our individual efforts. Our willingness to truly be there for sisters in need is a measure of the quality of our community.

4. Desperation. Desperation, as in: We've got nothing to lose. Desperation, as in: We just can't or won't take it any more. Desperation, as in: Nothing's changing and we've just got to do something. Desperation doesn't care about the consequences. It might sound negative at first, but on second thought, acts of desperation are often fearless or done regardless of fear. This, combined with a reservoir of justified anger, gives these acts their power.

One day, my friend put her fist under her incestor's chin and said, "If you ever touch me again, I'll beat the shit out of you." (He never did.)

Sometimes, acts of desperation can lead us to break oppressive rules, allowing us, for example, to scam the government or corporations for survival, rather than continuing to be “wage-earners” at jobs that threaten our health.

Acts of desperation can be spontaneous, such as breaking a police ribbon in order to drive a disabled friend to her destination. They can have explosive energy, as in finally telling off a jerk boss and quitting. An act of desperation can be very empowering. Though acts of desperation aren't always well-thought-out, they can be the start of breaking a cycle of fear, submissiveness and despair.

5. Choosing our battles. By evaluating the risks and our chances, before acting, we can cut our losses as well as keeping the costs of resistance within the limits of our ability to cope.

If we want to be able to continue to resist, what should our priorities be?

The answer, of course, is, “It depends on the form of oppression and on the individual variables affecting the one who is resisting.” Each of us can decide for herself, in accountability to others. How do we deal with all of us making different choices? It doesn't matter. As long as we act out of integrity and mutual respect.

You decide.



Diane F. Germain

Susan Rosenberg

## Links

"That no degree of pressure will cause us to repudiate our principles does not in any way lessen the heartbreak we suffer."

— Ethel Rosenberg

As I scanned the obituary of Judge Irving Kaufmann in the *New York Times*, I felt my burden lift, ever so slightly. A small but perceivable shift in the balance of forces that, as they play out, make human history. Not that his death brought anyone closer to justice. It didn't. The Rosenbergs have been dead for decades and that is an unalterable fact. Judge Kaufmann was mandated by the architects and beneficiaries of the anti-communist cold war to put Ethel and Julius Rosenberg to death. Judge Kaufmann agreed to it before they were convicted. His decision gave new and deadly meaning to the Queen's cry in *Alice in Wonderland*, "First the sentence and then the trial."

I grew up hating Judge Kaufmann and having full knowledge of the injustice of the execution of the Rosenbergs. When I went to one of the communist party camps for children in 1963 more people than I can now remember asked me, "are you related?" I always said no. And that was the truth. When I was 12, I saw the movie *Point of Order* about Joe McCarthy and Roy Cohn and the House Unamerican Activities Committee. I viewed it through very particular eyes. I knew that it was these men who were responsible for much of the pain and suffering of many of my parents' friends as a result of the blacklist. In 1969, after Martin Sobell, the Rosenbergs' co-defendant, was released from federal prison, I went to a rally to hear him speak. He had been in prison for 18 years, at Alcatraz and Marion. I cried so hard that day. Seeing him standing on the platform free and alive, but so changed from the pictures I had seen when he first went to jail, crystallized in the sharpest relief repression and its human cost. When I saw the movie, *Daniel*, made from the book by E.L. Doctorow, I had to walk out. Even though it was sympathetic and, in some ways, sensitive, its inaccuracies made me angry and it was too painful. When I saw it, I was living underground, having been subjected to a new form of repression.

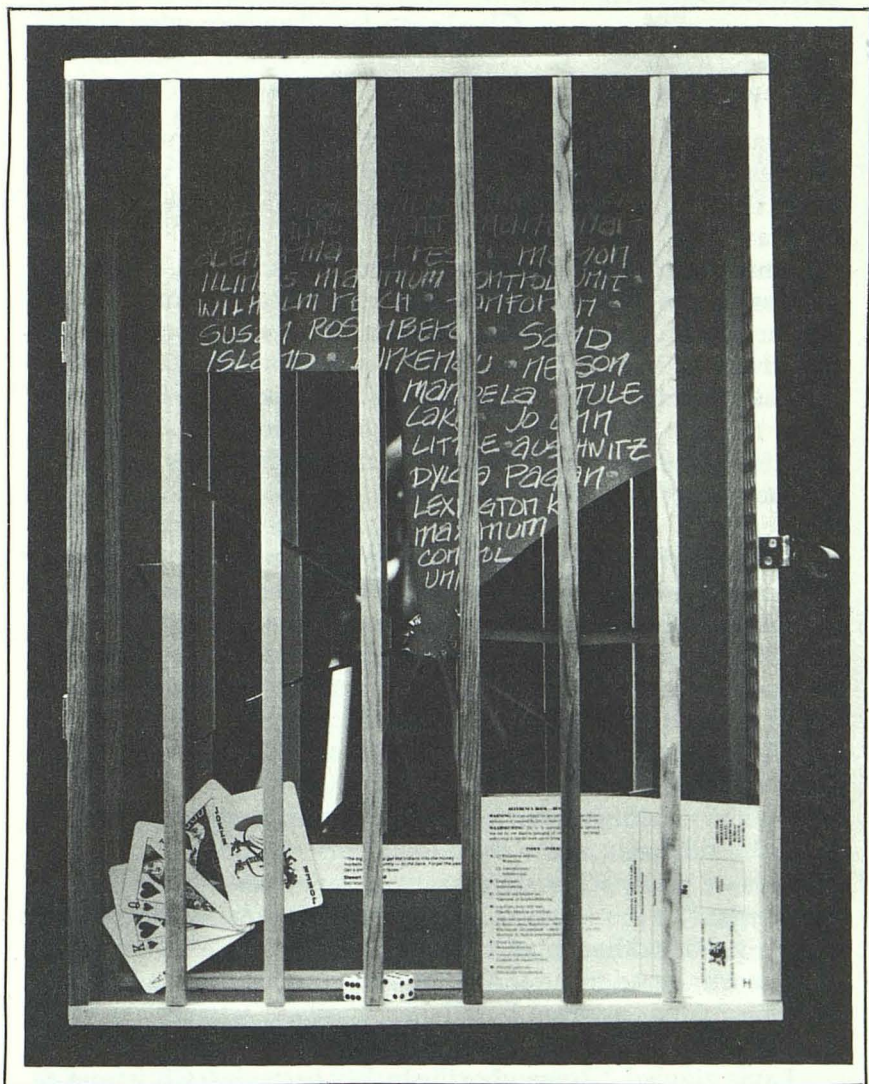
When I was sentenced and given 58 years for possession of weapons, on that day standing in front of our judge, I couldn't help but think of the Rosenbergs. The example that was being made of us with the longest sentence ever given in U.S. history for the possession of weapons carried a similar point, although it was a different time with a different set of conditions and dynamics. But I thought of them, as everyone in the courtroom gasped. Our lawyers had said no more than 15 years maximum. They were wrong.

I was held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan while on trial, and then while the Bureau of Prisons determined where to imprison me. When they transferred me it was a cold day in December. The U.S. Marshals were taking me to Harrisburg, Pa. to the Bureau of Prison Transport Air Lift. When high security, or high profile, or "dangerous" prisoners are moved it is a military operation, with SWAT teams and secrecy in command. I was released into the custody of the Marshals. I was allowed to put on my own clothes and then chained. They were so uptight that they handcuffed my cuffed black box (an additional medieval device that secures the hands so they're unable to move at all) to a chain that was handcuffed to a Marshal. They hustled me into an elevator and we walked through many descending levels of the detention center into the basement office of the Marshals' service. I was surrounded by a body of men and was pushed and pulled. We were taking the secure route to the garage. But as we got to the office the man I was chained to slowed down and said he needed to go to his desk.

Then everything else receded for a split second and time stopped for me. On the wall was an enormous glass case. There were three shelves within the case. In the center of it was a blown up photo of the front page of the *N.Y. Daily News*. The headline said "Ethel Fries Today," "Communist Traitors Put To Death," "No Reprieve." Under the headline was a picture of Ethel Rosenberg sitting in a car looking out the window with the faintest of smiles on her face. I looked at the man who was chained to me, and then back to the case. There were other things in the case I couldn't make out as well, or identify, except a pair of handcuffs. The man saw me looking at the case. His face broke into a big grin. He said, "I was there. She was one cold bitch. Never shed a tear." If I could have ripped his throat out.... Then he stopped because it clicked. The name.

He asked, "Your mother?" Before I could answer he said, "Figures." And I looked at him and said, "Yes," and in my heart I said: in spirit. And then we were gone.





*You Can Be a Prisoner, Too*  
mixed media, 1990  
Terry McClain

Joanna Kadi

## Shajaa<sup>c</sup>at

Sue sang along with the Lillian Allen tape as she connected the charges. The moment was too important to allow interruptions, so when the telephone rang she kept working and let the machine take care of it.

Ana's voice filled the room. "The center's having a film and discussion tonight for lesbians considering kids," she said. "I know you're into avoidance but I'm telling you anyway. Just don't get pissed at me."

Sue's heart missed a beat. Great, she thought, the issue we'll never resolve. She set the timer with steady hands.

At that moment, Layla burst into the room. "Sorry I couldn't get the phone but I had to write something down before I lost it. Who called?"

Realizing Sue was in the midst of double-checking the false bottom of a janitor's bucket, Layla rewound the tape and listened to the message. Afterward, silence hung in the air.

"Maybe we should go," Layla finally said, chewing thoughtfully on a fingernail. "It wouldn't be bad to deal with this once and for all."

"Everything's all set," Sue said brightly. "We have two hours and 20 minutes."

"When you think about it, we have worked through a lot of our issues," said Layla, more confidently than before. "It's kind of impressive, really. Class differences, families, sex, housecleaning standards. Not to mention our respective disgusting little habits that drive each other crazy. We only have this one left."

Sue wondered if she should be concerned about Layla's possibly misguided optimism, but all she said was, "We haven't avoided it completely. We've made a few jokes about it."

Layla giggled. "Remember the turkey baster last Christmas at your parents'?" Just before the whole family sat at the table, replete with linen napkins and real silver that marked out upper-middle-class territory, Layla had caught Sue eyeing the baster in the kitchen and said, "Cut the calculations, Sue. My decision is final." Wary

silence followed the remark. Finally Sue's sister asked, "What are you talking about?" Layla replied, "Turkey basters. Also known as lesbian baby-makers."

Sue laughed with Layla, and the knot in her stomach loosened. "I thought my father was going to have that heart attack men like him are so famous for."

"Then of course your brother started talking about the delicious food. Anything to keep the topic away from the L word. Oh God, I've got to get dressed."

Sue followed Layla from the tiny room that served as study and chemical storage plant into the tiny room that served as bedroom; Toronto's rents remained as unreasonable as ever. "You know," said Layla reflectively, "if our cats didn't hold the world's record for shedding, I could lay my clothes out on the bed. Like in the movies. But would *you* put anything on that?"

Their beautifully designed, vividly colored quilt was disgusting. Cat hair coated every part of it. Orlando and Fury sat in the middle, shedding complacently.

"I think they're shedding more these days because it's spring," said Sue.

"Oh, Sue, it doesn't matter what season it is, what particular trauma they've recently experienced, how old they are. It's just our cats. They never stop shedding."

The clothes were stacked neatly on the wooden dresser where the cats didn't sit. Layla put on the white undershirt, the light blue cotton shirt with the name patch "Bobbi" sewn on the left breast, the 50/50 navy pants with a crease down the middle of the legs, the heavy work boots, all worn from Layla's many years of cleaning.

"It's absolutely disgusting this works so well," said Sue, recalling last month when she had donned the clothes and been janitor for 30 minutes. "I still can't believe what I overheard those two women say about me. 'Oh yes, that janitor's been here for *years*. She's a very good worker.'"

"Yeah, well, I knew this would work. Hey, do you really think those chemical warfare files are irreplaceable?"

"There might be back-up copies somewhere, but it seems unlikely." Sue sometimes preferred the cautious approach.

"Ok, probably irreplaceable," Layla said cheerfully. "I can't believe we found a bogus towel rack plant where GE and the Pentagon

have a secret project. Right here in our own charming city. We don't even have to take a 15-hour train ride like we did last month."

"That was gross," Sue agreed. "And then Atlanta managed to live up to every horrible stereotype I have about the South. When that white woman stood up because an African/American kid sat next to her, I wanted to hit her."

"Your little comment was effective in its own way. Even though you *did* break our rule about not bringing attention to ourselves on certain days."

Sue had told the woman, "You know, pretty soon white people like you will be extinct. And no one will miss you." The bus was filled, as usual, with people of color who exploded into laughter. After the bus ride came the severe "alteration" of the centuries-old building that served as plantation home for a rich white family whose latest feat had been a behind-the-scenes lobbying number spelling death for a huge wilderness refuge. All in all, an extremely satisfying day.

At that moment the cats began meowing in the unmistakable way that signified they would continue until they received hours of undivided attention or canned cat food.

"Orlando, we couldn't take you with us. Your ego is far too big. You'd never be invisible," Sue said.

"Mrak." It was dangerously close to Orlando's bitchiest tone.

"Who raised this cat, anyway?" asked Layla.

"My ex-lover is completely responsible for all of her bad habits. I am completely responsible for all of her good habits."

"Such sophisticated analysis, dear." As Layla finished dressing, she carried out her last ritual, looking at the beautifully-lettered sign "Shajaa<sup>at</sup>." Yes. She had it. They had it. This would go just fine.

"Can we go now, so we don't blow ourselves up?" Sue asked.

"Hopefully Shadow will get us there," said Layla as they arrived in the parking lot. She cast a doubtful glance at the car, a 12-year-old Mazda with 200,000 miles and more rust than body paint. They had been sad about removing her many bumper-stickers when they began the bombings. The pink triangle had refused to come off, and they searched for an appropriate one to cover it. They chose a bumper-sticker Layla swore had been written by a working-class person: "My other car is also a piece of shit." Shadow wore it proudly.

Shadow turned over shakily and Layla asked Sue if she wanted to go to the parenting discussion tonight.

"I think I'll pass."

"If you didn't want a kid we wouldn't have to go." Layla couldn't restrain herself from stating the obvious.

"Well, I do want a kid. It's this deep-seated desire I've had for years. And it just keeps getting stronger. I've told you that before."

"And I've told you it sounds like a bad case of socially-constructed maternal feelings," said Layla airily.

"It is not."

"Are you sure?"

"Layla, we'd be great parents. Look at our cats."

"There's an example that's sure to sway me to your side. Hey, take it easy on these bumps. I don't want to die young."

"We have so much to offer."

"We'll get another cat."

"I don't want another cat." Sue swerved to avoid a driver who pulled into her lane without signalling. "Fuck you, buddy, where'd you get your driver's licence? Out of a Crackerjack box?"

"God, I just know someday we'll pay dearly for those two years in Boston. Your driving has never recovered," said Layla.

"Just think of it, we'd be such a cute family, you and me, the cats, little Nasser or Jameelah."

"Spare me the touching family portraits." Layla, second oldest in a family of seven, knew everything she ever wanted to know about raising kids, and more. "I want some things for myself if we are ever in a financially viable position."

"Financially viable? Is this my sweet Layla or my father discussing his stock portfolio?"

Layla glared at Sue. "That was a low blow."

"I'm kidding, dear." Sue squeezed Layla's thigh. "Look, when we're both out of school and working, we'll be fine. The fact that right now we have a grand total of \$337.42 in our bank account doesn't mean it will always be that way."

"That's true. *Plus* we could always knock off one of your rich relatives."

This time it was Sue's turn to glare at Layla.

"I'm kidding, dear," Layla said with a falsely-sincere smile.

They arrived at the plant, and swung around to a back door

discovered on previous trips. Perfect timing; at the end of morning break no one would think twice about a janitor coming from the parking lot. Sue kissed Layla hard and said, "I love you. Be careful."

Layla strolled casually down the hall, pushing her bucket ahead of her. She passed three groups of employees returning to their desks. No one so much as glanced at her. If I didn't need to be invisible, I'd jump up and down, waving my hands and screaming *look at me!* at the top of my lungs, she thought bitterly. Middle-class assholes.

She reached the end of the corridor just as the bell rang, signifying a return to work. Layla entered the large men's bathroom on the first floor, setting up the "Janitor at Work" sign and mopping the doorway. Then she examined the wall in the northeast corner. As usual with newer buildings, the dry-wall made it easy to knock out a small hole with the hammer.

She hummed a k.d. lang tune as she wedged the bomb securely in the opening and checked the timer. "Thirty minutes to go. Perfect." Mentally reviewing the outline of the building, she remembered the diagram showing the library with its carefully stored files just above this bathroom. It would suffer the most damage.

Layla cleaned a mirror for an added touch, then longingly eyed the extra rolls of toilet paper before firmly shaking her head. She left the janitor's bucket in a storage closet, swung out another back door and hopped into Shadow. Sue and Layla drove off, not quite triumphantly, since Shadow's days for that were long gone.

Last stop was the phone booth three miles away. Being the joyful bearer of bad news was undeniably the best part. Layla attempted to lure Sue into forsaking her turn.

"Darling," said Layla seductively, "if you let me call in I'll make it worth your while tonight."

"No way."

"You can do whatever you want with my body."

"No way." Sue opened the door.

"Wait, wait. I'll clean the litter box for the next two weeks."

"Layla, that's your job this month."

Sue dialed the number, covered the mouthpiece with a lavender bandanna, hummed a little. She asked for president Ron White. These names have got to go, she thought as she waited for his personal secretary to pick up. When she did, Sue said, "I need to speak to Ron," smirking a little, emphasizing his first name.

"Who's calling, please?"

"It's unimportant who I am. It's my message that's important."

"I don't understand."

"Just let me speak to Ron."

"I must know who's calling."

Sue enjoyed these moments. "Have you heard anything about Mohammed X on the TV news, miss?"

There was an audible gasp, a click, then Ron's voice, sounding a tad less confident than usual. "Who is this?"

"Ron, I think you better clear out your building. Unless you want your employees and yourself to be blown up with the bomb that's going off in 10 minutes."

"Is this a joke?"

"In one sense, I would say it is. One of those grand cosmic jokes about the strangeness of what passes for life at this moment in time. In another sense, I think *you* in particular would be better off to think it isn't a joke. Ten minutes, buddy."

They laughed all the way home.

The cats did not greet them at the door. This meant only one thing. A heinous act of destruction had been committed. Sure enough, the floor contained the remnants of the sign that read "Shajaa<sup>c</sup>at." Of course its pleasing visual effect had been somewhat marred by Layla's addition of "Look It Up Yourself," written after a particularly bad day.

They made the sign after meeting Abdul, a union organizer from the West Bank who had briefly toured Canada and the United States. At the gathering they attended, Sue and Layla had been struck by Abdul's babyface good looks and by his courage. Perhaps his brand stood out more because he down-played it, mentioning things like his four bouts of torturous internment in Israeli prisons only when asked. Their desire to emulate such courage provided the inspiration for the sign, and for other things. And now the sign was in pieces.

"Nasty little beasts," muttered Layla, surveying the damage.

"I'll make a new one, honey," said Sue.

She turned on the machine. Nasser had called to confirm he would meet Sue for coffee the next day at 10:00. "He'd be such a

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<sup>c</sup>Shajaa<sup>c</sup>at means courage in Arabic.

great sperm donor," sighed Sue, mostly for Layla's benefit, but Layla ignored her. Next, a potluck Saturday night for Queers Against Racism. A message from Kareema about a demo at the Israeli embassy Tuesday at noon. Sue's brother telling her to call. And of course Ana's message had not disappeared.

They looked at each other. "I don't want to go," Sue said firmly, hoping to quell the butterflies in her stomach. "I can hardly talk to you about this. How am I supposed to talk to people I don't even know?"

"Besides," added Layla, whose own stomach was sending messages, "it'll most likely be a group of white 'professional' dykes."

"You're probably right. Let's just stay home."

They wolfed down baba ganoush, hommoss, tabouleh and grape leaves in silence. They they looked at each other, having reached the same conclusion. It was time to face the music. But they wished the cats had not chosen this particular day to destroy the sign.

"I wonder if a therapist will facilitate this," Layla said as they walked to the center.

"Oh, probably," said Sue. "But we can manage that. *We have* been in therapy."

They had in fact been to four sessions of couples counselling to work through their toughest issue to date: whose cleaning standards to use in the apartment. Not even their different backgrounds, upper-middle-class WASP versus working-class Arab, had caused such serious problems in the relationship. This was in large part because Sue chose common sense and political action over wallowing in guilt, an attribute that had added fuel to Layla's already-intense crush.

There were three other lesbian couples waiting for the film to begin. "Oh, Christ, it's the Briefcase Brigade," whispered Layla, "I think I'm going to throw up."

Sue elbowed her, then responded politely to the greetings from the doctor and lawyer couple beside her. The lawyer pulled a leather-covered notebook and a fountain pen from her briefcase and prepared to take notes. The woman beside Layla introduced herself as Kathleen, an executive for Smith, Smith and Smith, then asked Layla what she did.

"I'm a graduate student in ethnic studies."

"How interesting." A slight pause. "So you probably spent today poring over books in the library."



"Yes, that's exactly what I did," responded Layla.

"Oh well, once you're through, the pay-offs in terms of your career will be well worth it."

"Absolutely. I'm not settling for anything less than tenure at Harvard."

Sarcasm was lost on this woman. "That's the spirit," she beamed approvingly as the lights dimmed.

The film did not contain award-winning material. In fact, even among the world of gay cinema where allowances could be made, it ranked low. Leaving the deplorable politics aside, the filmmaker's most unforgivable fault, thought Sue, was her failure to understand the reasons for and merits of editing. In repetitious scene after repetitious scene, earnest lesbians explained their reasons for having or not having children. The sixth time someone began her speech with "I really think it's important to let the rest of society know we're just regular people who want to be part of a meaningful family experience," Sue found herself debating who to visit next, the company furthest "ahead" in genetic engineering or the group responsible for this film. She blinked in surprise at this impressive example of her cynicism. Once upon a time she had paid cold hard cash to see films like this. Meanwhile, Layla tried to figure out the odds of a woman of color appearing in this film. One in a million, she thought. No, too low. Maybe one in a trillion.

The film ended with a group of lesbians offering the placenta from a recent birth back to Mother Earth. Sue felt slightly queasy after a close-up of the placenta. Linda, the facilitator, asked for general comments about the film and the lawyer said, "That one woman really summed it up for me when she said, 'I feel I have so much to *offer* a child. I'm secure enough at this point in my career to make this important decision.'"

Layla coughed and Sue smirked, but this did not mean they could avoid the discussion forever. Linda wanted to hear each person's feelings about having a child. I knew it, thought Sue. Don't these therapists get enough of feelings after hearing them all day? Don't they have anything better to do at night than make the rest of us share feelings?

However, before she could think of further questions for the therapeutic community, Sue was called upon to put forth her feelings. She stared blankly at the circle.

"Well, I, I don't know exactly what to say, I mean, I..."

Linda said gently, "Do you want a child?"

Sue nodded. For some inexplicable reason tears welled up in her eyes.

"It's ok to cry," Linda said, again in a gentle tone.

Damn these therapists, thought Sue, as she began to sob. She pulled her lavender bandanna out and blew her nose. After a moment, Linda asked what the tears represented.

"I'm scared, I'm just scared, I don't know what to do, Layla doesn't want a kid and I do."

"Don't try to figure it out, just stick to your feelings."

"I'd rather figure it out," Sue sniffed from behind the lavender bandanna.

"You'll never resolve the issue until you get through these feelings. Just stick with the fear."

More tears. After what seemed like an eternity to Sue, Linda said they had to move on. She turned to Layla, who stuck out her chin defiantly.

"Layla, could you share your feelings about not wanting a child?"

"A child represents something quite different for working-class people of color. Burdens, no time, no freedom, one more constraint, someone to grow up and work on the assembly line if he doesn't get shot down on the streets in the drug wars set up by the white male elite."

God, Layla thought, I sound like a Marxist-Leninist. She comforted herself with the fact that these women probably wouldn't know one type of rhetoric from another.

"I think all of that is quite true," said Linda. "But how do you feel?"

"You do?" asked Layla in amazement.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Layla, I'd be happy to have that discussion after the meeting. For now, let's stick with the feelings."

Layla sat. She said nothing. Then she threw out her arms. "I feel, I don't know how I feel, I feel lousy. The whole issue makes me sick."

"You might want to spend some time getting more in touch with your feelings," suggested Linda.

The rest of the discussion provided a sure-fire cure for insomnia, the six statements as repetitious as the six in the film. "Security ... so much to offer ... we're not that different ... career and family ..."

Get a life, Sue thought as the doctor outlined her feelings concisely and reasonably. Middle-class asshole, thought Layla.

Sue and Layla walked home with their arms around each other, arriving just before the 11:00 news. They ran up the stairs and removed the sheet from the couch, being careful to avoid touching the top of it, caked as it was with cat hair. Fury and Orlando came running, planning to shed as much as possible on the couch while they had their chance.

"You are gross," Sue told them.

They glared at her before engaging in All-Star Kitty Wrestling for a few minutes to let their moronic humans know just who they were dealing with. Then Orlando and Fury arranged themselves comfortably at either end of the naked couch. The cat hair began to fall. Meanwhile, Sue fiddled with the antennae of a TV set well past its prime. The national news came on.

"When are these jerks going to get off the air?"

"Don't expect miracles," Layla replied. "I think capitalism itself may topple before that happens."

Just then the top-breaking story of the day came on. The backdrop unfolded to show the remnants of the building they had visited that morning. "Excellent," Sue murmured. "Adding that extra bit of TNT was just right."

The voice droned on.

"Quite obviously, this is the work of Mohammed X, the ARAB terrorist who has so far destroyed eight buildings throughout the United States, and one in Canada. We are unsure why this building was targeted, since it is a small manufacturer of towel racks. (Whatever happened to the days of investigative reporting? thought Layla.) However, the mark of Mohammed is unmistakable.

"Police now believe that he is working with a large team of engineers and chemists with highly specialized training. 'No one else would know how to assemble such a large bomb,' the police chief told us."

"Don't laugh so hard," Layla admonished Sue, "I can't hear what he's saying."

"As well as this large team of engineers, Mohammed is working with a woman who calls in the bomb threats ten minutes before they go off.

"Police are confident that they will apprehend Mohammed X soon."

The story faded out with the face of the police chief, trying to look authoritative and confident, as if capture was moments away.

Sue turned off the tube, saying, "It's a good thing these guys know one Arab name, otherwise we'd just be X. Although I suppose now they also know the name Saddam."

"Sexist creeps," said Layla. "It doesn't cross their teeny-tiny minds that we're women. Let alone that the bombs are being put together by one woman who figured all this out with the help of a childhood chemistry set and ecotage manuals."

"I do have a bachelor's degree in chemistry, Layla."

"What do you suppose our families would do if they knew about our day's activities?" asked Layla.

"I'll tell you what they would do," sighed Sue. "Your family would hug you and tell you to be careful. Then your mother would get us some food, and your father would tell us which major corporation to hit next. On the other hand, my family would sit in terrified silence for a few moments. Then they'd change the subject and never bring it up again. Just like the time we got arrested at that demo."

After that event, Layla's mother had been furious. "They arrested *you*?" she asked indignantly. Her father said, "Those fat cats. They're the ones who ought to be in prison," and Layla had decided to tackle questions of sizism and speciesism at a later date. Sue's parents hadn't said a word for three whole minutes (she timed them). Then her father asked, "How's the car running?"

"My family is pretty amazing," said Layla.

"That," Sue said, "is a classic understatement."

The press would never have known the "ethnic" background of Mohammed X had it not been for Layla's insistence on leaving behind a particular souvenir at the first bombing. Eight months ago, she had "done her duty to the community" and given a presentation on anti-Arab racism to a group of local businessmen. They had not only met but far exceeded her worst fears. One man, obviously considering it his duty to live up to stereotypes about white businessmen, had delivered the final blow. He questioned her statements about the inevitability of a Palestinian state, saying with a leer, the world hadn't lost anything when Palestine vanished.

His comments helped convince Layla and Sue that property destruction really was the way to go. Two weeks later his handgun

store had vanished and, as Sue said, the world hadn't lost anything. Layla could not resist leaving the decal of the Palestinian flag. Risky, but she had banked (successfully, it turned out) on the fact that he would never remember her or the presentation.

The decision to carry out that action at night had been their first and only mistake. They telephoned but Mr. Businessman didn't take the threat seriously *or* he was classist as well as racist and didn't care if the night security guard died. Luckily the guard had been at a pub down the street, although only Layla and Sue knew that. He told reporters he'd been in the one corner of the building that remained intact, had soaked his former employer for a bundle, and retired at age 43.

"How do you explain that whole thing?" Layla had asked. "Did the spirits tell him to get out, or was it that great working-class gutsiness that had him ripping off the company for everything he could?"

"It could have been a random chance event," said Sue.

"I thought you'd stop being such a *scientist* once you switched fields," complained Layla.

"Excuse me for *living*."

Layla and Sue snuggled together on the couch, until one hug turned into a long passionate kiss that prompted Sue to straddle Layla and bite her neck. Layla's heavy breathing was all Orlando needed to hear. She sat up from her deep sleep, and made her way deliberately from her end of the couch to wriggle between the two bodies. Orlando settled in and purred furiously.

Sue and Layla looked at each other, then at Orlando. "Is she purring because she's happy we've stopped kissing, or because she's getting off on the sexual energy?"

"This cat is a pervert, Layla. We've got to face facts. Every time things start to get hot, here she is. Voyeur and chaperone extraordinaire rolled into one."

Layla sighed. "Fury, get over here and entertain your girlfriend, will you?"

Fury slept on, oblivious to events around her.

The next day over breakfast, Sue and Layla sat quietly, a purring cat on each lap. Whether the cats were interested in affection or the cream container was a matter for discussion. Then Layla and Sue spoke at the same time.

"What do you think?"

"How about?"

"You go first."

"No, no, you go first."

"No, I interrupted you."

They settled it by flipping a coin. Sue lost.

"I thought that maybe we should see Linda four times to talk about our feelings some more. Then maybe we could make our decision about having a kid." Sue said it very fast, worried that if she stopped she would lose both shajaa<sup>c</sup>at and momentum.

"Really? That's what I was going to say."

"Really?"

They looked at each other, then grimaced and said, "But all those *feelings*."

Sue thought they should call Linda right away, before they lost their nerve. Layla suggested waiting a while, to make sure they had made the right decision.

"Layla, you're just playing for time because you know you have to phone her."

"Me! What are you talking about?"

"I had to go first just now. So you have to do the next unpleasant thing."

They spent 10 minutes debating whether the coin toss influenced the question of who would call Linda. Sue made a strong case for a definite relationship between the two. Layla tried to refute her but in the end she phoned, thanking her lucky stars Linda's answering machine came on.

"Now," said Sue, "have I got a great idea about a fun outing next month."

"All right! Let's hear it."

Sue pulled out her small pocket notebook. "I've found the headquarters of a company that has been union-busting for years. Now it's closing its Montreal plant, laying off 300 workers, and moving operations to South Korea. It manufactures ... "

Kathleen O'Donnell

## For Thelma and Louise

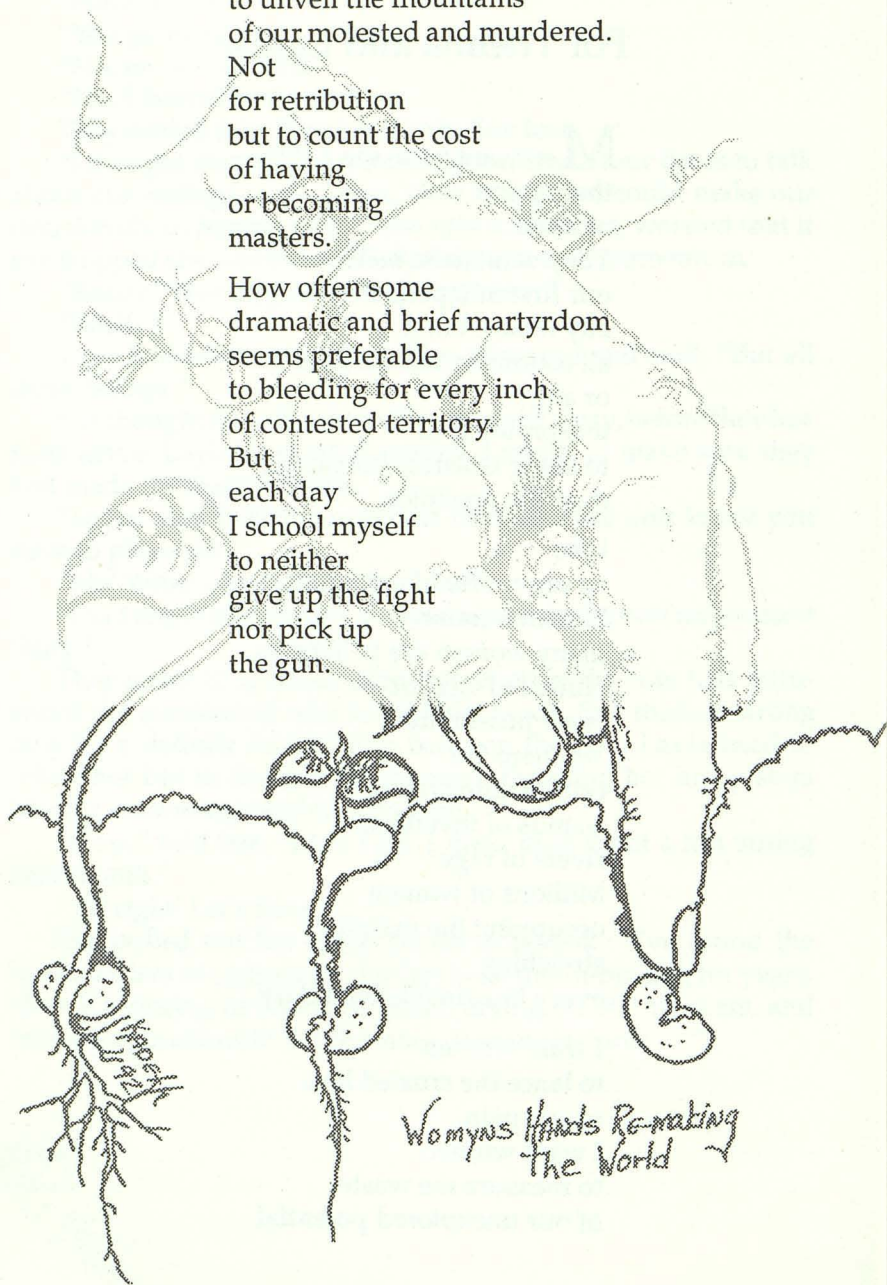
Men want us to see a cliff —  
their game  
or none.  
They want us to believe  
our first independent thought,  
any female bond,  
all actions in self-defense  
or anger  
inexorably lead  
to being isolated, hounded  
over the precipice.

I see  
an unreported landscape.  
In men's country  
many women are in harness,  
blinker against  
other possibilities.  
Yet there are  
cells of subversion,  
islands of inversion,  
rivers of rage.  
Millions of women  
occupying the margins,  
stretching  
every imaginable boundary.

I want women  
to lance the crusted lava  
of our pain.  
I want women  
to measure the waste  
of our unexplored potential.

I want women  
to unveil the mountains  
of our molested and murdered.  
Not  
for retribution  
but to count the cost  
of having  
or becoming  
masters.

How often some  
dramatic and brief martyrdom  
seems preferable  
to bleeding for every inch  
of contested territory.  
But  
each day  
I school myself  
to neither  
give up the fight  
nor pick up  
the gun.



Womyns Hands Re-making  
The World



Janice Gutman

## Speech on Hate Crimes

*In January 1990, the Center for Democratic Renewal sponsored a conference about hate crimes in Seattle. I was part of a panel discussion about building bridges between ethnic and gay and lesbian communities. What follows is excerpted from the speech I gave on that panel.*

I was born in Chicago in 1948 and raised Jewish and female. I've known since I was a kid that there are a lot of people who consider both my religion and my sex reason enough to hate me. In my late teens I got involved in anti-war movement, then marxist-leninist politics. That led me to the women's movement and I came out as a lesbian at 23. A lot of those same people now had two more excuses to hate me, first for being queer and second for being a commie. I never called myself a communist but I know that's how many people still see me. I've been part of a lot of organized political activity for the past 20 years and most of it has been in the women's and lesbian communities. But from to time I have decided to work with other communities, because some issue has moved me to want to make connections with other people. In these instances, I have tried to figure out who my allies are and to build bridges between us so we will have strength in numbers.

In the late 1970s, when five people were killed in Greensboro, North Carolina at an anti-Klan rally, my anger and fear pushed me to learn more about right wing groups in the Seattle area and to figure out how we could protect ourselves from that kind of thing happening here. I heard about a newly-formed anti-Klan network and I started going to meetings. The coalition was made up of representatives from various groups, such as a national anti-racist organization, a local progressive Jewish organization, and socialist organizations. There were also individuals in the group, not representing anyone in particular. I joined as an individual. We were a mixed group in many ways: sex, race, sexual preference, class and religion, to name a few.

Early on, it became apparent to me that a lot of decisions were being made outside the network's regular meetings. The anti-racist organization which dominated the coalition would discuss the anti-Klan network at their own meetings and come back with decisions

already made. It was never clear which decisions got made by committees and which by the entire coalition. I began to feel more and more voiceless and left out of decision making.

In 1979, the network planned a community educational on the Klan and other hate groups. The first speaker was a man from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who spoke about racism and the activities of right wing groups in the South and throughout the country. When he talked about what to do about it all, he turned to God and Jesus Christ. It was very alienating to me. As an American Jew, I never like anyone preaching to me about Jesus Christ. I feel as though I've had Christianity shoved down my throat since I was a kid, saying the Lord's Prayer every day in public school. And, as a political activist, I feel it is up to people to change things — and that we can't rely on faith alone.

We also had a speaker from the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee (NAROC), the group that dominated our coalition. NAROC's focus was on racism in this country and our need to organize against it. The speaker from our coalition, who also happened to belong to NAROC, gave a very similar speech. The only issue they talked about was racism. No mention of Jews, queers, commies or any other issue.

I was appalled. How come the Klan and the Nazis are always lumping us together? They have no problem blasting Jews, gays, communists and all people of color in one breath. But *we* couldn't make the connections between all of us. Our coalition had been talking for months about what we had in common as minorities in this country. We educated each other about the issues in our own communities and the need for us to support each other in order for anything to change. But now we were doing this public presentation and none of this was said. One of the members of the coalition who was in the progressive Jewish organization called an emergency meeting during a break in the program and proposed that another person speak for the coalition immediately to represent those of us who felt invisible. It was a good solution for the moment but it couldn't correct the weaknesses in our coalition. I left that coalition.

Later, looking for some direction in my work, I spent a while writing about political work I'd done, why I did it and what I got out of it. One thing I figured out was that I did want to keep doing coalition work and making connections with people who are different from me. But I needed to have support to do it. I didn't want

to join a coalition as an individual again. I wanted to be part of a lesbian organization and to have support as a Jew.

More recently, I've been doing work around peace in the Middle East. It has been important to me to speak up as a Jew in criticism of the Israeli government and to support Palestinians in their demands for self-determination. A lesbian group I joined decided to use the word lesbian in its name (Lesbian Work Group). And we always talk about the fact that some of us are Jews. These issues are very connected for us.

As a group, we joined a coalition of individuals and organizations called No Aid to the Occupation. It was a diverse coalition which included men, women, straights, lesbians, communists, socialists, Arab-Americans, American Jews, Pakistanis, Christian and Moslem Palestinians, and an Israeli Jew.

We planned a demonstration for the first anniversary of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising. In a discussion of how to define who was in the coalition, only Jews, Arabs, Moslems and Christians were mentioned. Members of the Lesbian Work Group wanted to list lesbians too, but there was so much argument that we ended up saying we were a group of Christians, Jews, Moslems and others.

After the demonstration, we decided to bring the issue up again. We wanted to include the word lesbian if we were describing who was in the coalition and we wanted our name listed as a member of the coalition. We tried to explain why it was so important to us to be visible as lesbians. What followed was a rather tense, but lively discussion. We barely said another word. Some people in the room argued for us, while others argued against. We got support from people of different sexes, sexual orientations, cultures and religions. That part felt great!

On the other hand, some people were clear that they would not pass out any sheet of paper that had the word "lesbian" on it because it was against their beliefs. Several white Christian North American men were afraid to challenge the Palestinian men in the group who were against using the word lesbian. We could not agree and we decided we would continue to discuss it next time it came up.

It has not come up again because the next December, when the coalition got together again to plan a demonstration for the second anniversary of the intifada, no one told us. We found out about it by seeing a leaflet advertising the event with a long list of sponsoring organizations — none of which mentioned lesbians.

Looking at my experiences, ten years apart, things do not seem

to have improved much in terms of building real coalition. We were able to bring up the topic of invisibility and push it enough that at least we had a discussion about it. It's a step forward.

I've been talking about groups where I have been in the minority position in building bridges as a lesbian and as a Jew. But often I am in the majority position. I have white skin privilege, I'm able-bodied, relatively thin, and not exactly young or old. These privileges have responsibilities, and I often come face to face with my own ignorance and insensitivity. It's my job to educate myself, become sensitive to the shit that other people have to take, and work for justice.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about my class background and current resources. It's an area that ties things together for me. I come from a mixed working/middle class background and I continue to be in that position. On one hand I have always been angry at a lot of rich people I've worked with and at a whole class of people in this country because of their ignorance and arrogant attitudes and at the control they have over my life. At the same time, I have resources that many of my friends and other poor people don't have at all. Being from a mixed class, my class status is more complicated than my sex, race, or religion. I am not simply in the majority or the minority, but rather, privileged in some ways and oppressed in others. Being in this position has helped me understand there is a kind of continuum of privilege and oppression. Most of us are in different positions at different times on different issues.

There is a lot we can learn from sometimes having the power and sometimes not about how to work together with people who are different from us. When I think about what I've learned from my experiences in coalitions, it all sounds pretty basic. But I think that's where we're at — getting the basics down. I have learned that we must confront and be confronted about our differences. And we must be able to listen to each other with respect. It has to be ok for us to get angry and talk about our pain, or for us to be silent. And it's even ok to be nice, polite, and want a mediator present; there's no one way to bring something up. Sure, when we are confronted we all get defensive. But we should fight that defensiveness — admit our own ignorance, and say, "I was wrong." And we have to be willing to change, to say, "The old way isn't working, I'm going to do something different." And keep going from there.

I have often been a part of all-women, all-lesbian, all-Jewish-lesbian groups and understand the need for people to separate off with others like themselves. When I was having a difficult time

talking about lesbianism in the No Aid to the Occupation group, I got a lot of support from a lesbian organization I was a part of. But six months later, I was turning to Jewish lesbians for support about anti-Jewish issues coming up in that same lesbian organization. I say get support where you can.

It's important to be clear and up front about the power and influence that groups can have in a coalition. When these issues are discussed openly the group can add a lot to the coalition. It's when they are ignored that they can become dangerous. At the same time, it's important to insure that those who join a coalition as individuals are encouraged to participate and have a voice.

Another issue that comes up a lot in coalition building is refusing to work with certain groups or individuals. People are afraid of each other and of one group or individual trying to disrupt or take over the coalition. But I think that ignoring or excluding certain people or groups is a bad approach. We need to learn how to build strong enough coalitions that no one person or group can have that much influence. Also we need to check out all our potential allies on an issue when we come together. And when we avoid working with groups and individuals that are hard for us to work with, we aren't building coalitions at all.

I see the U.S. government as the major hate group in this country, a very well-organized, well-financed and well-defended hate group — financed by taxpayers like me. Then there's all those independent hate groups: The Order, the Klan, Operation Rescue, the Moral Majority are just a few groups from the far right. As a lesbian and a Jew, I often feel threatened by the rhetoric and actions of these groups. Some safety comes from large numbers of people realizing we have to support each other to survive. So it's going to continue to be really important for us to get our shit together — to learn how to respect each other and work together and build bridges over our differences.

The coalition work I have done in the past has taught me a lot about people and communities different from my own. And hopefully I have taught others some about issues that are important to me. The bottom line is that even if people don't learn from each other, it gets clearer who can be counted on for support and who can't.

It's been really hard and painful for me to do coalition work, but, as hard as it's been, I know I'm going to keep doing it because, as far as I can see, it's my survival.

Naomi Guilbert

curse poem

**f**or all those who have dragged me in the dust and broken my heart  
expecting me all the while to save them  
for all those who have aligned themselves with whiteness  
who have confused trust with safety  
and talked with ease of liberation  
only to gorge themselves later  
while some of us were starving  
for all those who still refuse to see  
this poem is for you

i am writing this because i am a woman and lesbian  
and not white  
i am writing this because it needs to be said  
and i am wanting to say it for once  
not with grace  
but with vengeance  
listen:

this is the sound of your own hopes  
crumbling  
these are your words  
the four winds are blowing them back to you  
empty now and without meaning  
these are your fears coiled in your gut  
like a rope  
they are waiting  
to be set free

what did you expect?  
don't you know  
there is nothing more  
i can say  
that i'm still not talking  
about hatred  
that in the end  
only this poem  
will not  
betray you

Amber L. Katherine

## Lesbian Politics and the National Lesbian Conference

Sometimes it's said that dykes aren't so political anymore, that lesbians who used to protest *Penthouse* have moved to the suburbs, set up house, and are having litters of baby boys. As annoying as this reality may be, I don't think it should rank among our communities' more serious concerns. But if it's true that dykes really aren't political anymore, that would be a matter of serious concern. Is it true?

I'll admit that I haven't hit a porn shop in about five years. I've stopped keeping a spare can of red spray paint in my truck. And I really do prefer my Melissa Ethridge concert tee to my "Take Back the Night" shirt. Perhaps these are the markers of a diminished political commitment. There does seem to be less angry protest, less hard line conviction, and less of an apparent drive to destroy the heteropatriarchal system.

What's happened? In my case, I began to analyze the focus and goals of my protest-oriented activism in the context of my growing understanding of oppression. With the realization that the heteropatriarchal system is not just a target "out there," but also a reality "inside" me, has come a recognition that the process of destroying the system needs some thoughtful re-consideration. Acknowledging that my identity is constructed out of my *privilege*, as well as the ways I have been *oppressed*, has forced me to deal with contradictions created by my hard lines. I still get angry, but my anger pales in comparison, as a motivating force, with my desire to create a world with lesbians.

This process hasn't made me less political, or less of an activist. But I no longer believe that political commitment can be measured simply by how many sexist billboards you can "improve," or by the slogan on your tee-shirt. I don't think that being angry makes you more political, nor do I agree with the opinion that if you aren't marching, then you're "sitting around doing nothing." And I've decided that politics and fun shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

Maybe those who say that dykes aren't so political anymore just think that it's not politics if it doesn't eventually result in

burnout. Of course, we wouldn't be where we are today if dykes hadn't been willing to do almost unbearable amounts of tedious and/or frustrating and/or unpaid political work. And if organizing ever stopped being hard, at least some of the time, it probably would cease to be politics. My point is the perception that dykes are getting nothing political done is based on a particularly narrow (mainstream) idea of the "political."

I think the National Lesbian Conference\* got a bad rap, in part, because of this narrow conception of politics. I heard it said that NLC was "a failure," "a complete mess," "a waste of time," "a joke." Admittedly, there were some big problems, namely racism and accountability. The criticisms I heard and read which dealt with these issues were mostly thoughtful and well-founded. But there were other critical voices which were, in my view, less constructive. For example, some complained that the anti-oppression training went nowhere and that the NLC's failure was undeniably demonstrated by our inability to crank out a document, stating "our" positions and demands, with which we could march off to Washington, D.C. In other words, because a political agenda of a particular kind was not developed, some concluded that lesbians do not have much of a political agenda, that we have no movement of our own.

We *are* a political movement and the NLC was an important demonstration of the uniquely lesbian kind of politics many of us practice. What's unique about lesbian politics, in my view, is that we refuse to be a "special interest," we refuse to have our dreams of what could be reduced to a list of needs which we ask (demand? beg?) the white men of congress to meet. We have begun with a rigorous critique of oppression built out of our experiences, and a belief that other worlds are possible right now. Lesbians have been working for at least the last quarter-century to create anti-racist, multicultural, intergenerational, accessible lesbian realities. Of course we're not there yet — systems of oppression were not built in a day. Bringing other worlds into existence — deep change — will undoubtedly take lifetimes.

The anti-oppression trainings at the NLC were a useful marker of where we are as a movement, something I think feminist and

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\*A five-day conference held in Atlanta, Georgia in April, 1991, at least three years in planning, with over 3,000 lesbian attendees.



lesbian press coverage of the event failed to bring out. The trainings highlighted the fact that, we are, as a movement, at this time, deeply concerned with understanding the differences among kinds of oppression, and with the ways they intersect inside us individually, and in our collective interactions. At the NLC care was taken to examine our use of language, to point out privileged assumptions, to name and preserve our different racial identities and cultural practices, to figure out how resources might be shared among us, and to tell others how they can be our allies. These projects reflect a profound understanding of where deep change begins.

Much more needs to be said about the meaning of the NLC, the lessons we can learn from it, and its repercussions for us today. My record of the trainings is intended to spark others to continue this exploration of lesbian politics.

On Thursday I went to the first event in the series of anti-oppression trainings, the anti-racism fishbowl for white lesbians. The fishbowl format has several variations. In this one, an inner circle of about 18 was formed by calling for white anti-racist activists from different u.s. regions to volunteer. Those in the inner circle were asked to respond with a brief insight, from personal experience, to the question: *What is hard about doing anti-racism work with other white women?* After each activist spoke, a member of the outer circle, made up of over a hundred lesbians, was called on to reflect back what she had heard. It's an exercise in active listening designed to bring out defensiveness, distorted interpretive-listening and denial. If the reflector, from the outer circle, heard wrong or missed the point, then others were called on until the point was reconstructed accurately.

The points made by activists who formed the inner circle ranged from the frustration of dealing with the attitude of some white wimmin that they can't do anti-racism work without wimmin of color, to the defensiveness manifest in being called the "isms" police and being asked, "how many tickets have you given out today?"

This is a slow process. One advantage to the pace is things can be said and reflected upon because they're not emerging out of heated "I'm anti-racist/you're racist" arguments. I found it gave me time to think about how a speaker's insight fit with my experience. Had I exhibited *that* attitude? Where, inside me, does it come from? How have I responded to these racist/defensive atti-

tudes in others? What diffuses my desire to work with other white lesbians against racism?

After the fishbowl, some were saying it had been “elementary” and hadn’t really gone anywhere. But in about 45 minutes, a couple hundred white lesbians who didn’t know each other got something important done. It’s true some of us had heard and said much of this before. But how these things were said and heard, and the fact that they were acknowledged as barriers to effective anti-racism work *in a community forum* was significant. It *was* elementary in the sense that as a group we are just beginning to lay the foundation for white/Anglo lesbian anti-racism politics by trying to identify and deal with the shit that gets in our way.

Immediately after the anti-racism fishbowl, lesbians were asked to self-identify their level of anti-racism work, and sign up for small groups scheduled to meet early Friday morning. Over 30 anti-racism activists from around the u.s. had been contacted to facilitate these groups — a pair (one lesbian of color and one white lesbian) to each group\*. Level 1 workshops were geared for those relatively new to anti-racism work. Level 2 was for those who had done some anti-racism work. Level 3 was for long-time anti-racism activists and community organizers. During the self-identification process, the largest number signed up for level 1, the smallest for level 3.

The content and direction of the individual groups was decided on by the co-facilitators, so every group was different. There were about 17 in the level 3 group which I co-facilitated. The questions we worked with were: What motivates you (and might motivate others) to do anti-racism work? What are the Third World communities in your area and issues which you have organized around? What have you done that has worked, i.e. has changed things?

The workshop got me asking myself questions: What forces, besides social conscience and interpersonal caring, are strong enough to fuel this work? How do we positively encourage our white sisters to choose to take it on? The workshop also confirmed my sense that dykes are working against racism on all four of the levels identified in the NLC statement: “1) Internalized beliefs and

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\*An organizational meeting was held for facilitators on Wednesday, so we had two days to work on our small group formats with our co-facilitators. This was well-organized, as was the whole series of anti-oppression trainings, by Coral Inza.

attitudes (conscious and unconscious) — this would include internalized racism; 2) Inter-personal relationships... behavior, how we treat each other; 3) Institutional structures... laws, access to education, employment, decision-making power, money; 4) Systemic... the cultural norms that pervade all levels." Sharing our experiences of what works (and what doesn't) contributed to my growing confidence that white dykes can be effective, and of the distance we still have to go.

After the anti-racism small groups, there was an Ageism fishbowl late Friday morning. It was facilitated by the Old Lesbian Organizing Committee (OLOC), following a format similar to the anti-racism fishbowl. The inner circle addressed the questions: *How do you oppress me as an old lesbian? And, what can you do to be my ally?* Their answers touched on topics from housing, to sexuality, to being set up as "mothers" and role models among lesbians.

At one point in the process a lesbian from the outer circle who was supposed to be reflecting back the point that allies don't think of old dykes as "mother earth," instead offered the view that "you are not old, you are no age." At this point the facilitator responded, "We are old! We are struggling to get the fact affirmed that OLD IS GOOD! Don't deny it. Denial comes from your fear of getting old. You can be an ally by looking at your own fears..." It was obvious from the charged atmosphere created by this exchange that many young dykes were hearing this for the first time. The fishbowl was an effective format for confronting ageism. Having old dykes demand that their work and politics be respected, rather than their age, interrupts stereotypes that associate old age with indifference and passivity.

The anti-oppression panel scheduled for 8:15 Saturday morning was supposed to be a major community event — nothing was scheduled at the same time except a session for Two Spirited Thunder People. By 8:30 there were less than 100 lesbians present in the ballroom set up for over a thousand. Was it just too early? Was it frustration with the general chaos? The crowd grew steadily through the morning to over a thousand by noon.

There were at least thirty panelists, divided into three tiers, which each had a turn on stage (i.e. ten panelists at a time, three times). There were two lesbians representing each identified oppressed group. Both of the lesbians had been asked to prepare short

statements responding to the questions: *What is the oppression you face? How does it intersect with other oppressions? What do you want from allies?* Open mic for audience response was supposed to follow each pair.\*

The panelists, in order of their presentations, included: Latinas, African Americans, Asians, Native Americans (who chose not to participate on the panel), fat, old, (one) white lesbian of poverty, deaf, Arab (a Lebanese and Armenian lesbian)\*\* , disabled, (one) young, (one) Jewish lesbian. All the panelists not specifically representing a racial group were white or white/Jewish, with the exceptions of an African American/Puerto Rican deaf lesbian and an Asian disabled lesbian. Many lesbians expressed the frustration that lesbians of color weren't representing more of the other oppressions.

This was a fast moving and often emotionally charged morning. The scope, the substance, the passion of the panelists, and the attentive participation of the audience combined to make this a lesbian forum which should go down in our herstory books. I'm sure nothing more revolutionary happened at Seneca Falls in 1848.

It's impossible to describe here all that was said and the energy that was raised in this session. But I think that some of the last panelist's comments captured this energy. She began with anger in her voice,

I'm overwhelmed, listening to all of these other panelists, waiting to speak. I'm a Brooklyn Jew, a member of a small and hated community... My grandmother is Jewish and Chinese, my mother was disabled. You don't know who the hell I am! ...My life is the intersection of oppressions.

Her voice began to mellow as she continued,

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\*In fact, the open mic arrangement didn't start working until after the second tier of dykes started their presentations. The first tier had all been groups of lesbians of color talking about the specifics of their situations; when the responses started to come to dykes in the second grouping, one of the facilitators interrupted the process to clarify the procedure to be followed. After this happened, there was a lot of audience participation through the open mic. It was suggested, by an Asian lesbian, that the silence after the first tier was not only due to procedural confusion.

\*\*The Armenian lesbian was invited by Arab lesbians to fill the empty slot after an Iraqi lesbian decided the NLC was not a safe place to speak due to pro-Gulf war sentiments among some conference goers. While part of the Middle East, Armenia is not an Arab country.

Lesbians are the only ones who care about access, racism, ageism, etc...I want a rainbow to happen here. So what if the NLC organizers made mistakes. We got it together to be here. It's a miracle!

The room full of lesbians roared with applause. One of the individuals who took the open mic identified herself as the last panelist's 18-year lover. Near tears she said,

...What has to come out of this conference is some resolutions about how we are going to live together. We — lesbians and wimmin — are the only hope for the survival of the whole universe! I want solutions and I want them now!...  
(More applause and cheering followed.)

The morning had been long and stressful, necessary and appreciated. Although many of us were not aware of it, *Off Our Backs* reported that during this panel "many other groups met elsewhere to try to deal with the issues raised at the Friday night plenary." (See *OOB*, June 1991, for conference coverage.) The sense of connection created during this anti-oppression panel carried over into the emergency plenary session which followed the same afternoon.

Coverage of the NLC which did not include the anti-oppression trainings failed to acknowledge some of the most important work done at the conference. Many of us used what we were learning as instances of racism came up. Anti-oppression work gives us the tools to be accountable for our mistakes in the present and to do things differently in the future.

Lesbian anti-oppression politics — with our emphasis on the intersections among oppressions, individual and collective differences, recognition of an accountability for privileges, healing, empowerment and struggling for radical change — is the stuff that holds us together and makes different futures possible. The feminist and lesbian press reported that a national lesbian agenda did not emerge at NLC. Certainly there is no document to march to Washington with. But I didn't leave the National Lesbian Conference with any doubt about what's on our political agendas.

Sauda Burch

## Excerpt from novel-in-progress

*This is a working draft of a novel in progress*

And so it was that Grace found Sarah  
and Sarah found grace  
and Grace was one with Sarah  
and Sarah was one with Grace

Sarah was a slave  
and Grace was a slave  
and they knew little of love

much more of lives  
spent losing something or somebody  
or having nothing or nobody  
but themselves  
and now each other

Grace moved Sarah  
and Sarah moved Grace  
and they moved each other  
beyond their lives

stole by moonlight to each's waitings  
still nights on musty cabin floors  
dripping desires  
awakened hauntings long discarded  
as useless  
to owned lives

Grace nurtured the thought of freedom  
reveled in its nectar  
rolled it round  
her ebon fingers  
molded it into her image  
and supped on it

raised it to blackberry lips  
and kissed it goodnight  
had nightmares about not having it  
saw the sun rise with it  
and survived another day  
only because of  
it

she needed Sarah to want it  
so that she could  
keep wanting Sarah  
for freedom and Sarah  
meant nothing without  
the other

Sarah wanted freedom  
but dared not dream it  
she couldn't taste it

for she slept with the memories of  
those  
dead because of it

but her Grace stirred the need  
for it  
again

Sarah bade Grace goodnight  
sweetly

that night she dreamt of it  
savored it  
for this  
was nothing without Grace

And so it was that Sarah found Grace  
and Grace found Sarah  
and they chose freedom  
and so it was  
and so it was  
imagine.



If you have no connection to your ancestors, to your history, then a history will be given to you.

What, I asked the wind would the lives of two lesbians who were slaves look like? Look to yourself, it answered. I search slave narratives, academic writings to find myself, cloaked not only in my Blackness, but as importantly in my lesbianism. I do not find myself there.

I asked for them and they came. Frequent dream visitors, Sarah and Grace speak to me, sometimes in voices I cannot understand. My trust that they will continue to come grows daily, and with that, they reveal themselves in vivid colors and with poetic tongues. Two beautiful Black women, defiant, in love and slaves. My dreams explode with visions of their lives and loves. I am at once enraged, frightened, joyful and confused. I am the avatar of their story.

“it’s me”

I say

“it’s us”

rocks echo

— “Oracle,” Francisco X. Alarcon

I waver between writing a herstorical account of the lives of Black lesbians who were slaves and a wild, raunchy, fantastical journey to myself. In my fantasy *the* lesbian is a Southern Black woman (she is not a slave) in a knee length white dress, hanging laundry, sweat gathering between her breasts ... something about hot pie on the table (handcrafted), waiting to be eaten (the pie on the table, not her — though that might work) ... chirping frogs in the background ... green green hills ... and then there’s the bed with the handstitched quilt on it ... candles ... me ... her and me....

Where in the hell did you get that shit from girl? If it’s a Black woman, if she’s doing laundry, she doing more than sweating. She’s got better things to do than to wait on you, baking you apple pies ... your lazy self is doing what? ... watching? shit, what happened to your politics?

Sarah and Grace allow me to envision. But they caution me against romanticizing their lives as if they were free. We were slaves. Remember that. We loved each other. We made the most with what we were given. And what we weren’t given, we took. We laughed. We made love. We feared that we would be taken from each other. We moved beyond that fear.



Even the most generous allotments, however, left the slaves with little opportunity to wash and change their clothes more than once a week. (*Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, p.551)

Nineteenth-century propagandists notwithstanding, West Africans enjoyed a great reputation for personal cleanliness, whereas Europeans, including if not especially the English, suffered from an equally emphatic and well-deserved reputation for avoiding soap and water at all costs. (*Roll Jordan Roll*, pp.553-54)

I am not interested in a chronicle of torture and angst. I imagine far flung love and passion.

How far have we come from owned lives? Is it so hard to imagine that two slave women could have ever been happy? How do we manage to be happy now?

## Freedom

... She was asking me to go with her. Wasn't nothing holding me here. All my babies had been sold a long time ago. But when I think about running, I think about Thomas hanging from that tree, about the whip, about blood and more blood, and women with vacant eyes. "I'm drowning in a red river," I said. "And I can't see my way past it to see freedom." Then I told Grace I figure I just didn't know how to get there, and then, because I was so shame and plain tired with not knowing how, I cried. Where those tears came from, I don't know. I thought I had emptied myself a long time ago. Grace just held me. She said maybe I couldn't see cause I ain't never ran. She said, "How you know how bad this is, if you never tasted that?"

What does she know. The day she came here, I knew I was free. But I didn't tell her that. I just let her hold me, and looked out on a nothing patch of yellow growing on the side the cabin.

What happens when you witness others trying to escape and fail? When do you lose your vision? Can your vision be revived? What is freedom? How do you get there? Is there a bottomless well of tears? What's a nothing patch of yellow?

I am fueled by the struggle to know self, to connect with my ancestors. As Black women, much of our lives has been stolen or erased, until we are left believing lies that would rate our love for each

other as less-than. In that, there is little room to talk about love on the margins. Slavery was tragic enough. Everything else complicates.

But my survival is the challenge of meeting barriers and resisting the oppressive use of power; the quest of wanting to belong, dealing with the complexities of owning and ownership, and living with the fear of losing fierce love. I struggle for acceptance, potentiality and right relations. This is everywoman's journey.

### Touching

Grace rose from the mat, and moved to the side of the cabin where Sarah lay with the children. She had been awake all night, listening to the frogs singing in the creek, watching the slivers of moonlight as they slipped beneath the cabin door. Getting to Sarah wasn't easy; she didn't know if Sarah would take her in. A sudden fear that she would be turned away stole her breath. She paused, gathered her will and moved closer to the sleeping forms on the cabin floor. Three very small children slept at Sarah's side. Three that weren't hers. Grace thought that if Sarah could still care for these, after all hers had been sold, she might have some room for a different kind of caring.

Her eyes lingered on the sleeping babies. The youngest, secure on Sarah's chest, took its breath with Sarah's. With each breath Sarah drew, the child's head rose and fell, rose and fell.

Grace moved the child behind Sarah with the other children. Then she lay down next to Sarah, her breath quickening ... Sarah opened one sleepy eye and then the other, and then she closed both....

Grace kissed Sarah's closed eyes and her forehead, she kissed each cheek, behind each ear and one on each side of her neck. She tasted Sarah's saltiness and her desire. With each kiss she lingered longer. Sarah's mouth was open, as if caught in some happy surprise ... her lips gently parted ... her lips, the color of blackberries and the fullness of plums. Before kissing her lips, Grace lightly glazed her own with her tongue, and savored Sarah's desire mingling with her own. She took Sarah's head in her hands, caressed her face and put her lips to hers....

### Witness

... That she would witness it. Sarah stood, legs apart, rooted like the willow. She felt heavy and useless, her arms hanging

limply at her sides, watching as Grace's dress was torn from her body. She fought to close her eyes, but her love for Grace, and her need to witness, forced them open. She wanted Grace to know that her pain would be noticed. She needed Grace to want to survive. Sarah flinched as the tattered dress fell around Grace's feet. Grace's back, after dozens of whippings, was a raised map of her long history of defiance, a history of her runnings and her captures.

Sarah could hear the voices of the other women around her, and the mutterings of the men. Even the smallest children were forced to watch. And the older ones, who may have had their own short history with the whip, shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and stared blankly in front of them.

The scars covering Grace's back were long and thick. To many of the slaves, they cautioned that Grace had failed to make freedom. They would never run. But, to a smaller number, watching intently, the scars reminded them only that freedom never came easy. There would be attempts to freedom that very night, long after Grace's limp form had been cut from the post and the small children, in terror, were soothed by their mothers to sleep.

If the person being whipped could find nobody to look at, would she be more likely to break? To cry out? To whom? Would the other slaves understand that they too were alone? With only the fields to look out upon, fields where they labored, would they figure that that was as far as their freedom went?

... Nor did the slaveholders think that they were committing a crime by whipping their slaves. Throughout the South whites submitted to public whippings for minor crimes ... white men whipped their wives and parents their children. Frederick Douglass observed that in the South everyone seemed to want the privilege of whipping someone else. (*Roll Jordan Roll*, p.64)

Grace was still. Life stopped the moment she was tied to the post. Now, she was aware only of the wind and the sound of the overseer testing his whip against the tree next to her. Out of the corner of her eye she could see the whip wrap itself around the tree, and although outwardly, she didn't move, her insides jerked with each lash. Her heartbeat quickened and her breath became shorter and faster. Grace felt the sweat rise off her body, and her tears,

which never spilled, well behind her eyes. She had been to the post many times, but each time was like the first. If her body had held the memories of even one of those whippings, she would never have been able to run again. Now, the wind, caressing her face, was her only comfort. It promised to stay with her, to match each lash with gentleness, and to finally carry her spirit away with it.

Then the only sound she heard was the whip, as it was hurled toward her back. She felt the old scars give way and open; she felt her blood flowing down her back, then her legs, until it settled into a warm pool beneath her feet. Hadn't Sarah mentioned something about drowning in red? She was drowning in her own blood. And because Grace would not move, and because Grace would not scream, the hurling became more furious until the wind, true to its promise, screamed for her. The whip, the wind and nothing more.

Sarah saw Grace's spirit begin to leave the post. Freeing itself from Grace's body, it took its form in the wind. She glimpsed around at the others, but it was her witnessing alone. The spirit was reluctant to leave its host, but with each lash of the whip, its will strengthened as Grace's will gave in ...

Sarah would not recall the events of the next few moments. She last remembered her fury rise from the pit of her being and make way, like rolling thunder, into her throat. ... She was told that she opened her mouth to the sky and screamed, "No," and fainted. ... When Sarah awoke, Grace's battered but breathing body was lying across from hers.



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*Joye*

gelatin silver print, © 1991

Xenia

L. M. Kenney

## Some Notes on Resistance

As long as there has been patriarchy, there has been women's resistance to its structures and ideologies. One of our most powerful acts of resistance is talking back, ending the silence imposed upon us by our oppressors. The control of mass communication — radio, television, publishing — by men has meant that much opposition to government policies has not been heard. The wave of feminism which began in the late 1960s and into the 70s started to change that. Women began alternative presses and publications, created women's bookstores and entered radio and television as writers and producers, putting forth feminist ideals in their projects. After years of silencing lesbians and women of color in the name of "sisterhood," the mostly white, heterosexual, middle-class women of the Women's Liberation Movement began to hear our different experiences under patriarchy. Radical feminists spoke out against tools of oppression, including the institution of heterosexuality and its normative status within our society. We were breaking the silence imposed on us by the patriarchy of our time as our foremothers had done in theirs.

Silence for women goes beyond a lack of access to the modes of communication. More profoundly, it is the taking of our voice, our belief that we have a story to tell. It is the fear patriarchy instills in us for talking, the ways we are told our voice will not be believed or doesn't matter. It is the violence we experience when we do talk back, even in a whisper, about unequal pay for our equal work, about incest or about rape. This silence happens many times, in many ways, every day; in our workplaces, on the television, when a woman who has been raped is asked why she didn't stay home or wear something else, or say something sooner or louder.

There is a powerful hand being pressed over the collective mouth of women; it silences us through all the ways we are told "it doesn't matter," what we do has no effect. It does not matter whether we say something, or do something; the outcome is inevitable. This is demonstrated in very visible ways — in Senate hearing rooms, courtrooms, and state legislatures. Yet, even in the midst of all this we resist, speak out, talk back. Every time one of

us is raped or sexually abused and it is reported, we commit an act of resistance. Every time we approach our employer to demand equal pay for equal work, we commit an act of resistance. Every time we reject society's notion that we can never be "too thin or too rich," we commit an act of resistance. Every time we make love to another woman — rejecting society's compulsory heterosexuality, we commit an act of resistance. Resistance is all around us.

I take myself back, fear.  
 You are not my shadow any longer.  
 I won't hold you in my hands.  
 You can't live in my eyes, my ears, my voice  
 my belly, or in my heart my heart  
 my heart my heart.\*

Every time a woman writes or speaks of her experience, she is talking back, speaking in the presence of fear. Whether she is talking about racism or sexism, capitalism or heterosexism, she is reclaiming her voice and telling her story. We saw in Anita Hill a brave, articulate woman: breaking the silence. The rape victim of William Kennedy Smith, speaking out against the violence she experienced, even though she was confronting the wealth and power of America's royalty: breaking silence. The four women who sought to testify in the Kennedy trial, declaring that he had raped them as well: breaking silence. Karen Thompson proclaiming the reality of love and relationship with Sharon Kowalski in a court system hostile to our existence — breaking silence.

Silencing the voices of women happens in many ways: questioning our sanity; denying us a venue from which to speak; creating a system which demands that we spend our time surviving, thereby refusing us the right of reflection and/or activism; attributing to us certain characteristics and then devaluing/pathologizing them; discounting us; colonizing us, so "we take from the oppressor the instruments of hatred and sharpen them on our bodies and our souls."\*\*

### **At The Borderlands: The Interweaving Threads of Oppression**

Lesbians, particularly lesbians of color, understand the interlocking force racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism have under

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\* Joy Harjo, "I Give You Back," in *Making Face, Making Soul*, p. 152.

\*\*Aleticia Tijerina, "Notes on Oppression and Violence," in *Making Face, Making Soul*, p. 172.

patriarchy in this country; the interweaving of these "isms" form an experience of oppression greater than the sum of its parts. Each layer of oppression geometrically expands, compounding the effects of oppression the individual experiences. The authors of the Combahee River Collective Statement contend that the synthesis of oppressions creates the conditions of their lives. Their objective, then, is to forge a politic to "combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face." They go on to say that if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.\*

I would add that if a lesbian woman of color is free it would necessitate the liberation of all. All forms of oppression are necessary to maintain the stations of privilege.

Pat Parker once wrote in "For the White Person Who Wants to Know How To Be My Friend," "the first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black. Second, you must never forget that i'm Black."\*\* White women have had difficulty knowing how to both "forget and never forget." Confronting racism is something we must do, not because it is the politically correct thing to do, but because it is necessary for our survival. We must celebrate and value women, all women, and racism separates us, cutting us off from the knowledge, experience and passions of one another. To the degree that we diminish anyone for their difference, we are diminished for our own. To the degree that we buy/condone/participate in this society's beliefs that people of color are inferior to whites, we also accept the belief of women's inferiority to men, the superiority of heterosexuality to homosexuality, and the right of the middle and upper economic classes to domination of the poor and working classes.

### They Don't Want Us All At Once, But Hour By Hour, Piece By Piece: Economics Under Patriarchy

Sixty-two cents on the dollar. Unequal pay for equal work. We understand the economics of patriarchy. Capitalism is a powerful force in maintaining the control of women. It reduces our expecta-

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\*Combahee River Collective, "Combahee River Collective Statement," in *Home Girls*, pp. 272 & 278.

\*\*This poem by Pat Parker is found in several sources, but was originally published in a collection of her poetry, *Movement in Black*, p. 68.



tions, causing us to consider ourselves "lucky" when we have a job that pays the bills, or a workplace where we suffer minimal harassment. Men who leave their families and never pay the child support ordered by the court are not considered guilty of child abuse; they are treated as more akin to those who do not repay their school loans.

Yet we resist. Lesbians throughout the country are fighting for fair compensation, work environments that fit the worker rather than forcing the employee to fit the workplace, and entrance into professions once designated for men only. Because of the work of lesbians and gay men, a few companies are beginning to extend benefits to our partners. Many of us entering the workplace today have unprecedented opportunities because of the work of our foremothers. However, what is needed is for us to develop an economic system which eases our burden and the inequality we experience, while not placing additional shackles on those similarly oppressed in society today. Charlotte Bunch, in her article, "Not for Lesbians Only" describes what she considers the relationship of lesbians to our capitalistic system: "It is not okay to be queer under patriarchy — and the last thing we should be aiming to do is make it okay. Nothing in capitalist patriarchal America works to our benefit, and I do not want to see us working in any way to integrate ourselves into that order. Our very strength as lesbians lies in the fact that we are outside patriarchy; our existence challenges its life. To work for acceptance is to work for our own disintegration."<sup>\*</sup>

Our resistance is not a fight for acceptance. Our objective is not to gain privilege at the expense of others. Ours is a challenge to differentiate between assimilation and equality in our efforts to create a more just society. Our challenge is a difficult one and necessitates a great deal more conversation than it has been given recently in our communities. So much more is necessary if we are to understand the *need* for the interlocking systems of domination in our society to maintain the status quo. Any radical, revolutionary change, any form of true liberation, will come from this understanding.

### "You've Come a Long Way Baby" — Then Stop Calling Me Baby

The appropriation of our bodies has been a cornerstone of male domination with devastating effects, extending well beyond our

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<sup>\*</sup>Charlotte Bunch, *Passionate Politics*, p. 181.

actions and into our thoughts and beliefs about ourselves. Recently, in a class I was taking, the students — all female and mostly lesbian — had a discussion about our bodies. The discussion began when the instructor, who has had both breasts removed because of cancer, said that she found a freedom in not having breasts any longer. Women responded by declaring their anger that they must conceal their bodies in clothes two sizes too big, to feel safe; their sadness that women's bodies have been so objectified that they cannot see their own bodies clearly; their rage that being female means that they must think twice about where they go, who they're with, and what time it is, to determine whether or not they are likely to be safe.

We are justified in our fear. It seems every woman is a victim of either rape, incest, sexual abuse or harassment — or knows a woman who is. The arm of appropriation extends even further as our bodies, our right of self-determination, is legislated. With *Roe v. Wade* (1973), women believed that our right to privacy had finally been won. But that right has been eroded. We need to remember as lesbians that the appropriation of women's bodies is not just a heterosexual women's issue, but an issue for all of us. Appropriation is about control and this lesbian's body and yours are no less important to those who preach "family values" and impose the values of the reactionary right than are the bodies of our straight and bi sisters.

Yet change is all around us. Laws have been changed and enacted to protect women from abuse, including those regarding birth control and sterilization. Women have begun speaking out — and pressing charges — against those who commit incest and sexual abuse. An "underground railroad" has been established where women whose children have been sexually abused by their fathers go to protect them when these fathers are given custody rights. Women are fighting back.

We are resisting. Our individual and collective action does make a difference. Lesbian feminists have made an important contribution to the analysis of systems of oppression. We are in our homes, the workplace and the courtrooms, fighting the appropriation of our bodies, our sexuality, our persons. We are angry because consciousness leaves us no alternative. But we also have hope. Oppression may be alive and well under patriarchy, but so are the acts we commit in resistance to it.

Susan Rosenberg

## Redefining Moment

When we were arrested the government and all its agents knew we were revolutionaries. They knew it because of the materials they captured along with our bodies. We had guns, explosives, and false I.D. There had been a three year hunt for over twenty Northamerican radicals, and this was the first big break for the government. Despite the fact that they knew what category of prisoner we were they did not know who we were. We wouldn't tell them our identities. We wouldn't say anything. We were not cooperating. They fingerprinted us but they had to fly our prints to Washington D.C. and wait for the central FBI identification. For some reason unknown to us it took over fourteen hours for this procedure. In those hours of waiting they kept us in separate rooms, each one of us chained to a chair. They screamed questions at us for hours on end. They played "good cop," "bad cop." They offered us water but refused a bathroom. I had to wait five hours for them to locate one of two women who were New Jersey State Troopers to take me to the bathroom. It was every bad detective novel come to life. It was a very long fourteen hours. Perhaps the longest I have ever spent. We wanted them to make the identification of us and go public so that our comrades would know we were in State custody and they would retreat. More than anything we wanted them to get away.

Finally, when the head of the Philadelphia FBI office walked in the room, he just stared at me. He darted his eyes back and forth across my face and then his eyes locked onto mine. His lips curled and then he started. He said "this bitch is a kike, get the fugitive posters and find the kikes." As they brought the posters in and held them to my face and matched poster after poster my Jewish blood ran hot and then cold. The same man came back into the room and said "I can always tell a kike. At least now we know it's the kikes with the niggers." Within minutes they had identified me.

Like so many times to come a freeze frame of one image after another passed through my mind. Everything in the physical world receded and slow moving pictures replaced the dirty windowless room, the stale air, and the overwhelming ache to urinate. My body

still chained and the odor of my own fear, and anger, and loss filtered to my nose. But my mind was gone, into its own world. The images took me on an inner journey that the men in the room couldn't begin to understand, or see any outwardly visible signs of.

I was catapulted backwards to an earlier time, to a 20 year old memory of my best friend's mother handing me a tuna fish sandwich and her sleeve riding up her arm to expose the tattooed number on her wrist. And my eight-year-old questions to her. "What is that? Why is it on your wrist? Why don't you wash it off?" Her answer, "It's from the concentration camp. I will never forget that, and I can't wash it off." And I, persistent, "Why? What was that?" Her answer, "Because we are Jewish." Later my Mother explaining to me what the camps were, who the nazis were, about bad people hating us because we were Jewish. And my questions: "Did we do something bad? Are we bad? Did we kill them first? Did she know other people in the camps?" Her answer, yes, she knew other people, many of them I knew too. And, yes, many of the people from our family had been "exterminated" in the camps. Exterminated? Like the termites in the house in the commercial? Her answers didn't make me understand, but learning about genocide when one is eight years old informs the rest of one's life, even if it lies as an inner memory. Chained to the chair, I remembered that I thought about the tattoo for a long time.

And as one image led to another I remembered, after learning about genocide against my own family, the image of a young Black man hanging by the neck from a lynching and rehearing my aunt explain to me the Billie Holliday song, "Strange Fruit," and the tattoos and concentration camps were the same thing. White people treated Black people the way the nazis had treated the Jewish people.

A tumble of images came one faster than the next. Images and memories of being Jewish that I had forgotten, or so I thought. Sitting in the Synagogue upstairs in the back with the women and wondering why we had to sit upstairs. Watching my grandfather pray one morning when he didn't know I was standing in the door. Standing on the boardwalk watching hundreds of old people walking into the water to throw away their sins and remember the dead. Lighting candles for the dead. Sitting at the table listening to a mix of Yiddish and English with my grandmother's food spread before us.

And then other memories, conflicting memories that emerged as I sat there. The ideas and events that shaped me into an anti-zionist. How my Jewishness was assumed because it was simply who we were and the community that we lived in. Being Jewish was as much cultural and social as anything else. It was not religious. The tumble of images of the Israelis occupying Gaza and the West Bank, and other parts of Palestine. The use of racism and oppression against Arab peoples justified in the name of fighting the holocaust and anti-semitism. Participating in demonstrations at CCNY where the JDL split Arab students' heads and called us self-hating Jews. The bombing of Lebanon and the photographs of the victims. Bombs made and dropped by the United States. I remembered the fights among Jews about U.S. and Israeli policy. And all this was a hypocrisy to me. A hypocrisy because how could we as Jews do to another people what had been done to us? Freedom at the expense of another's is not freedom. And so I put distance between me and my Jewish self. In the American Jewish community throughout the 1970s and 1980s, supporting the State of Israel became synonymous with being a "good Jew," and for me rejecting that position entailed forgetting part of my own memory. I failed to see a connection between racism, which I had so vigorously opposed, and anti-semitism. I failed to see that I could support Palestine and still be Jewish. And even if I didn't relate to myself as Jewish, there were always anti-semites who would. Anti-semites who didn't give a damn about my position on Israel, or its role in the Middle East. In fact those very same Ku Klux Klanners and racists who were organizing against Black people in America were saying Blacks and Jews in the very same breath.

Sitting in the barracks in New Jersey, waiting to be identified, under interrogation, my own relationship to my Judaism was irrevocably changed. What came to me was "this is Jew hating." This is the beginning of a captured life. And an internal vista opened in my head. Years of rejection and denial came unchained and I smiled at those hateful, racist, anti-semitic white men, those government agents, because in their bigoted selves they had enabled me to find a wealth of inner resistance. An anti-zionist, anti-racist, very Jewish self. When the FBI agent said "Rosenberg," I said, "That's right."

Laura Whitehorn

"Fourteen Days, Loss of Privileges"\*

*DC Jail*

I don't do well with the prison authorities.  
Told to move,  
I stand stock still.  
"Stand still," they say —  
I move.

Ornery  
Bad  
Disobedient  
Unrepentant  
I like me that way.

After the Confiscation of GCN #2

*Lexington, 1992*

There's been a terrible mistake.  
You've just informed me  
That homosexuality  
is not permitted  
in this institution.

I now inform you  
That I am a homosexual.

Therefore, I am not  
permitted  
in this institution  
and must be  
immediately released.

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\*Jail language for two weeks in the hole.

Jo Ann Starr

## A Society of Captive Women

Nearly two thousand women prisoners live at the Federal Medical Facility at Lexington, Kentucky. Leona Helmsley spent a long two weeks here. Lynette Fromme and a handful of Puerto Rican freedom fighters were buried in a cellar under this prison until the ACLU won their transfers to more humane quarters. Kim W. of *Rush* fame served her sentence here, as well as many other names familiar to the American public.

Here, we're all the same. We abide by the rules, wear the same drab blue uniforms, and try to hold on to our individuality. We're women, jealous and emotional, strong and proud, young, old and in between, all the shades, shapes and temperaments found in any society. We are all oppressed by a male-dominated judicial system. Some of our sentences sound like longevity statistics. Most of our sentences were doled out in extreme prejudice simply because we are women. Women get longer sentences than men for the same crime, and do more time on their sentence. It isn't fair, but it's fact.

F.M.C. Lex is a highly concentrated, slightly exaggerated example of the oppression of women found anywhere in society. The guards, staff and work supervisors, mostly men, feel their power more strongly and use it more freely because we are prisoners, but the treatment is the same as we've had all our lives. It's only more clearly defined, more obvious and more frequent. We are talked down to. Our needs are ignored or disparaged. We are threatened, bullied, cursed, and fondled (it's called a "pat search") every day. Sometimes the abuse is so subtle the abused doesn't notice it or recognize it as such. Some are so conditioned to abuse that it feels natural, perhaps like foreplay, and they giggle, flirt and encourage it. But that attitude is held by only a few...or is it?

During the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas fiasco, we crowded the TV rooms every day. I was stunned and outraged at the superior, sarcastic attitude and the animosity shown by the members of the senate committee to the brave, calm, well-spoken, obviously

intelligent Anita Hill. I was even more shocked and dismayed by the reactions of most of my fellow prisoners. These women, themselves victims of similar harassment and abuse, were belittling and ridiculing Ms. Hill, while praising and glorifying Judge Thomas. Didn't they listen to the testimonies? Or are women so beaten and subdued that we see this kind of treatment as normal and right? Have we forgotten how to think and feel? Don't we remember?

We are women in prison! In the not-too-distant past, we faced a judge and a prosecutor, again mostly men, and we cried in our hearts to be heard, understood and believed. We heard witnesses perjure themselves against us. We read newspaper accounts branding us as vile creatures. We, of all people, should have recognized the honesty and truth in Anita Hill, yet so few of us did.

They must change; we must change. The Equal Rights Amendment has lost ground during the past two administrations, and we women have allowed it to happen. We must fight to regain this lost ground, but the change must come from within each of us first. We must change our self-image, regain our self-respect, self-confidence and self-esteem. Then we must teach, through love and example. Prison gives us the perfect opportunity for awareness of the problem, and the time for necessary growth. We can use the system to fight for our rights here and take our lessons home with us. Even in prison, we can make a difference. We should remember Anita Hill and the victims of Mike Tyson and William Kennedy Smith and all the other women who have stepped forward against adversity, who have valued themselves above the reproach and criticism of the nation. We should set their courage as our standard. Only then can we be truly free.



Sheila Gilhooly  
barbara findlay

## pièces de résistance

*This piece speaks to our individual resistance to, and transformation of, the experience of mental hospitals. But more importantly, the working through of it is something we did together. It is literally and visibly true that the strength of our individual resistance comes from the strength of our relationship as survivors with each other. That is what resistance is.*

(Sheila's voice is in serif type; barbara's is in sans-serif type.)

### twenty years gone: the conversation poem for sheila

did they give you shock?

no. not shock. drugs. my  
nipples leaked. i couldn't  
see. my tongue got thick.  
finally  
i couldn't write: paradoxical  
reaction

they never ever said that there were side effects never  
said you might lose your memory from the shock might  
hallucinate from the meds (the  
first time i hallucinated i said: too much meds  
they said no dear that's  
what the drugs are for  
and gave me more)

were you  
committed?

"if you don't sign yourself in  
I'll commit you"

and they call that voluntary

you?

sometimes/ i was committed. other times  
(i had to work hard on those times:  
i had chosen, after all) other times/

i signed myself in

one time  
i signed someone else in i  
committed her. i said  
(she was hallucinating getting  
herself  
arrested) i said  
if you carry on like this i  
will commit you  
and she did  
and i did

my parents came. and some of  
my brothers & aunts & uncles. later, years later,  
after i'd been on TV, they quit talking in  
loud voices like i was deaf & asked me  
instead what it was like, to be on TV

my parents  
never came  
nor anyone else

do you still/ever/wonder  
if you're crazy?

all the time

*can i see your slash marks?*

### the shock of forgetting/the shock of remembering

I'm not sure why it feels so important to write it all down and make sure I have the details as clear as I can get them. It doesn't matter why I need to remember — maybe some because I'm so surprised and shocked and some frightened that I did forget. I tell myself — I was having shock treatments, designed to make you forget. Shock burns things directly onto the brain by creating so much misery that the image goes and only the misery of the image is left behind after the acid bath. That's what burned that image out for me. Nothing to do with me — only to do with some thoughtless (or perhaps not so thoughtless) cruelty that uses someone's ugly and horrifying suicide as a weapon against another, namely against me.

I came back from shock and after supervised-time-in-the-dayroom, it was late morning. I went to my room and over to my bed to lie down. My head always ached bad on those days and I would be confused and shambling and kind of stunned. The closet was to my left. The doors were open and as I went to fall on my bed I looked over and saw. She was hanging from the clothes rail and her eyes were all bugged out and white and her tongue was pushing out of her mouth and making her mouth this ugly protrusion that didn't even look like a mouth. Her face was all puffy and bloated-like. And the smell caught in my throat and all this shit and piss was on the floor and on her legs and her nightgown. She would often throw tantrums and refuse to dress in the morning and thus refuse to go to dining hall. Since she was there for anorexia they would force feed her with tubes and she would snuffle all the day long and whine about how mean everyone was to her—not a very likeable woman but she did have her point of view and they weren't very nice to her.

I remember retching violently.

After that I only remember being locked in seclusion and feeling humiliated and like I had brought it all on myself and how could I be so self-centred and indulgent as to get upset when she was like dead and as one of the nurses pointed out to me it's not like we even got along.

This memory will never surprise me again. It will never haunt me with its left-over of shame and guilt for something that wasn't my fault. I always knew that the pain around that wasn't mine. But for twenty years the only way I could know that was to forget what happened. Now I know that they caused me the pain. Now I will never forget. I will remember Denise.

### ancient history

i asked if i could turn out the light.  
 you reached over me, your breast  
 brushing my face, and clicked us into darkness.

relieved, i rolled over, took you in my arms,  
 more confident the slash marks on my  
 wrist  
 would go unseen.

i had forgotten about them, forgotten to  
buy a bandage, make up a story to see myself  
through the possibility that we would  
end up in your bed.

as i held you i ran my mind over the  
chance  
that your fingers would find  
what your eyes couldn't see, wondered  
to myself what i would say.  
i held the words in my mouth  
like stones:  
i cut myself

a fissure opened,  
deeper, bloodier, more  
painful than the cuts.

i have no explanation. no story to offer.  
i have no memory. only the talisman of  
some other time, recent  
by the healing of the scars

which will fade

this morning i stood beside you, naked,  
looking into the mirror  
my arm hidden behind you in a hug.

the scars will fade.

only the fissure

will remain.

but i still have the knife.

## What is the Matter?

In the Matter of

A Complaint to the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons  
Re: Donald H. Upton, M.D.

I, Barbara Findlay, lawyer, adjunct law professor, and L1M candidate, of 5-2023 Grant St., of the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia, make oath and say as follows:

1. I am the complainant herein and as such have personal

knowledge of the matters hereinafter deposed to except where stated and, where so stated, I verily believe them to be true.

2.(a) I was a patient of Dr. Donald Upton from approximately October 1966 to approximately August 1968, except for the summer months May to August 1967.

(b) In October 1966 I was seventeen years and four months old.

3. During that time I was a scholarship student in first year, and then in second year, at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

4. During that time Dr. Donald Upton was a psychiatrist with the Queen's Student Health Service.

5. During the time I saw Dr. Upton he had me in psychoanalysis.

6. For the first period of several months or perhaps more than a year, I saw Dr. Upton three times a week. I saw him in the second year at least twice a week, perhaps three times a week, as I recall.

7. During approximately March 24 to approximately May 1 of 1967 I was hospitalized by Dr. Upton in the psychiatric ward of Kingston General Hospital.

8. When I returned to Queen's in the fall of 1967 Dr. Upton advised me that he had been consulted by the university as to my fitness to continue school and he had told them that I would be alright provided that I continue therapy. He communicated that to me in such a way that I believed that if I discontinued therapy with him it would jeopardize my schooling.

9.(a) While I was in psychoanalysis, I believe in the fall of 1967, Dr. Upton requested that I babysit for him and his wife. I agreed.

(b) Dr. Upton and his wife picked me up at the student residence where I was then living, driving their station wagon. I got into the back seat with his three children. I discovered that two of his three children were deaf.

(c) Dr. Upton had not told me that two of his children were deaf.

(d) When I later asked him why he had not told me that his children were deaf he said he wanted to see how I would react.

(e) While he had me in psychotherapy, Dr. Upton told me that he thought I should make my career working with deaf children. To that end he told me he wanted to introduce me to a friend of his who worked with deaf children in Belleville, Ontario. However though he carried the idea and the promise in front of me, the meeting never happened.

10.(a) During the summer of 1968 Dr. Upton hired me and another of his patients, a male student, to work on a project for the summer.

(b) The project was to do research and a survey related to the ability or lack thereof of women students successfully to perform in

engineering schools. The hypothesis was that women were unable successfully to do engineering because of an inability to conceptualize spatially.

(c) I was to be paid \$1000 for the work over the summer.

(d) The other student and I were assigned reading to do, and left to work together. Dr. Upton asked me during therapy how I was getting along with the male student, and suggested to me that I should draw him out. He said that this student was very shy, and was also a scholarship student, and it would be therapeutic for him if I drew him out. I later discovered that he had told the male student the same thing about me.

(e) Dr. Upton never paid me any money at all for the work of the summer. When I asked him in September 1968 about being paid, he said he was not going to pay me. I do not remember his explanation.

11. On one occasion while I was in therapy with Dr. Upton, he told me something about his life of which he was ashamed. He told me that if I ever repeated what he said he would deny having said it.

12. During the entire time that I was in psychoanalysis with Dr. Upton I believed that I was seriously mentally ill and that my only hope of redemption lay through working with him.

13. I remember very little of the content of the psychoanalysis that I did with Dr. Upton.

14. I am a lesbian. I discovered that I might be a lesbian at the time I was in psychoanalysis with Dr. Upton. He refused to acknowledge the possibility.

15. I have been treated subsequently by psychiatrists and by lay therapists. I was hospitalized for six weeks in 1968.

16. I have not made a complaint about the treatment I received from Dr. Upton before now because it was not until I was relating my psychiatric history recently that I realized that his behavior was professionally inappropriate.

17. This affidavit is sworn to the best of my information, belief, and recollection.

18. I swear this affidavit is in support of a formal complaint to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario with respect to the conduct of Dr. Donald Upton as herein described and sworn.

Sworn before me this \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 1991 at the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia.

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A commissioner for taking oaths in  
the Province of British Columbia

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Barbara Findlay

## dear shari

well, old friend, i'm at it again.

here it is, 26 November 1991 2:20 am, writing away in a hot blaze of anger and pain. i have just written a four page affidavit so that i can swear a formal complaint against dr. upton, that shrink i saw yea, these many years ago. remember him? he's the one that put me in the hospital that first time, when you were in alliston and i was in kingston.

this summer i went off to see if i was (still? again?) crazy. i didn't tell you at the time since you were on your way to australia for the fall and i didn't want to weigh you down with worry (are you mad? don't be). the expedition was a complete and utter waste of time as the psychiatrist behaved just like a psychiatrist — said, when i asked her what benefit she thought i would get and how long she thought this would take, that she wondered why i wanted to know that. because i don't take my car in for repair without knowing that sort of thing, i said. and what kind of work did she do? i went on. as in, whose work did she value. well, she said, i could tell you that but i don't think it would be appropriate. it is clear that you have an issue about control, she continued.

no kidding. i couldn't believe it. it was out of a 1950 parody of psychiatry.

however it was in the course of relating the treatment i'd had from upton (and her response, which was that it was abusive) that i suddenly realized how awful it all was.

(and if i am still crazy, well, i am still crazy. i take comfort in the thought that i am also the sanest person i know.)

so here i am, months later and in the middle of the night (at this rate of processing things i'll still be up at 3 a.m. when i'm 102) FURIOUS. i think of myself: a CHILD, for christ's sake. and the way he treated me!!! he would have been about the age i am now. i can't imagine treating a teenager, a teenager completely dependent on me and absolutely trusting of me, like that.

i don't think i can convey the depth of my rage, which is deeper than deep because it has taken so long for me to see that what he did was wrong.

i really hope that i don't discover that he abused me in ways i don't yet remember. i couldn't possibly handle that much anger.

i have had many kickbacks of self-blame as i composed my dry affidavit: this is no big deal. lots of people had it worse than you. what

are you whining about? it's your fault anyway — you dingbat, why didn't you raise a stink at the time if he didn't pay you for the work he hired you to do? what a fool. no one is going to believe you now anyway. you know your memory is the pits — how can you be so absolutely sure of these things (and i am) if you can't remember any of the rest of it? if you tell them this they will just discredit you as a pervert/sick/whatever (i put it all in the affidavit — being a lesbian, having subsequent treatment — say everything, they can't get you on nothing, then).

what good is it going to do now, anyway?

my mind races to a cross examination:

now, ms findlay, you say you have had extensive shall we say emotional or mental treatment over the years?

i have seen therapists, yes.

could you detail, please, for the court, who you saw, for how long, and for what purpose?

OBJECTION, my lord. the issue in this case is, first, whether the defendant did or did not do what the complainant ms findlay alleges, and second, if he did, whether the conduct contravenes the ethical standards of the college. i fail to see how questioning the complainant about her intervening treatment goes to either of those questions.

with the greatest of respect to my learned friend (they always say this when they're being sarcastic) she continues to miss the point she is making. *of course* the issue is whether my client did or did not do something twenty-three years ago. if he did not, then there must be a reason that the complainant says that he did. perhaps she believes he did but is deluded (shades of anita hill — did you get that story down there?). perhaps she has had the idea suggested to her by her latest psychiatrist. perhaps her memory is selective, or partial, or simply mistaken. i want to explore all of those possibilities and i submit i have the right and the duty on behalf of my client to canvass each and every one of those possibilities with the utmost thoroughness. if a professional is to be held to account for actions or inactions past the time of any limitation act for civil action, if we as a society are to conclude that the pro-fessional's liability extends that far, and that he or she may be disciplined or even lose his or her licence on the basis of allegations that are this old, then surely we must be scrupulous about permitting the defendant in that situation every latitude in cross examination.

my lord, this is one of those cases, like rape cases, like sexual harassment cases, where the conduct of the case itself is as impor-



tant to the outcome as substance of the complaint. if you permit my learned friend limitless cross-examination, in effect requiring the complainant to reveal all of her personal history for the past twenty-three years, as a condition of a successful prosecution, then the message you will be sending to all patients who may have been or may be mistreated by their physicians that the price of complaining is far too high. there must be a balance.

once again, my lord, my friend has tripped over her own point. we had a rape shield law. presumably it was enacted out of the very sentiments the crown refers to. it protected rape victims from cross examination about their prior sexual history. but, my lord, as you will be aware, that law was struck down only a few months ago in the *seaboyer* case. so much as i appreciate the concerns of my learned friend on behalf of the complainant, and indeed much as i sympathize with the situation of any complainant in proceedings such as these, in my respectful submission the law cannot substitute sympathy for justice.

the judge: i have your objection, madame crown counsel, and argument from both of you. i shall take time to consider my ruling. court stands adjourned till tomorrow morning.

etc etc etc etc etc (in whose favour would YOU rule??? actually i think the crown isn't a very good lawyer. i imagine a young woman, maybe 5 years experience, up against some high priced senior grey haired male litigator...)

fortunately i recognize the self-blame kickbacks for what they are — but it makes it only marginally easier. fuck it is hard and fuck it is infuriating and fuck it is unfair to have to live my life in the face of a global expectation that i will not be believed. it occurs to me that that is why i am so honest most of the time!!! they don't believe me even when i tell the truth, they'll NEVER believe me if i lie.

anyway. my stomach is churning my jaws are clenched and i can see sleep will be a while to come yet. fortunately for me i just happen to have 100 or 200 hours of work here, so no problem. and i don't have to get up in the morning.

to the "why bother" question, which is the one that keeps recurring, the answer seems to be: i have all these credibility papers for something. i have a responsibility to use them. in other words if *i'm* afraid they won't believe *me* — socially certified credible as i am, what with all these degrees — who WILL they believe? and who COULD have the courage.

anyway. it's now 26 November 1991 3:03am. writing that little cross examination has amused me and brought my rage level down to manageable proportions. i'm actually feeling sleepy.

take care. love to both of you.

ps. 26 November 1991 9:43am

i phoned the ontario college of physicians and surgeons to file the complaint.

donald howard upton died a year ago.

## November 28, 1991

Dear barbara

I told you I would remember how it went so I'm writing it all down before going to sleep in case anything gets lost before morning. Then I can tell you about it if you forget, and you can also have your own record.

So it went like this. You read me the affidavit, the cross-examination, the letter to Shari — all about Dr. Upton. I asked you how it felt to have all the details clear and remembered. You said you felt bad but that it all seemed very puny to you and maybe you were just whining about something that wasn't so terrible. (you, who are so *not* like that. it's amazing how they make us question even the things that are most true about ourselves) I said I didn't think it was puny, you asked me to say more about that — so I did. I said i thought he had used you and abused your trust and cheated you, and all the while claiming to be the only thing standing between you and madness. You said, "I could have said something about it then." I reminded you that you were 17 years old and dependent on this man and he manipulated you. We talked about how being manipulated left one feeling like "maybe it was all my fault," and we talked about how much shame went with that. Then I'm pretty sure I said "he should be ashamed, not you." You then said DON'T SAY THAT most emphatically. I asked what part, and you kept repeating "don't say that" and sounding more and more distressed each time. Your breathing got faster and very laboured. I asked again what not to say and you said something about shame that I didn't catch, and your breathing got really raw. Then you said "it hurts" with such anguish that the words seemed to be squeezed out of you. You asked me to talk to you

and I did and all the while you struggled painfully to breathe. You cried out in pain and you said several times that it hurt too much. I kept talking and you kept breathing like that for some time and you said NO with great distress many, many times. After a while, your breathing started coming back to normal and I said your name and you said "I'm okay really I am" and then you asked me what was happening with me. I talked a bit about that but was more interested at that moment in what was going on for you. But before I could ask, you asked me what had just happened, and said you couldn't remember any of it. So I told you all this as well as I could remember the exact order of things. You had no memory of it and were trying to figure out when and why you left the conversation. We talked about shame as we had been talking before the pain started. You started again that you could have protested back then (though I don't see how) and that he could have done worse and you were pretty sure he hadn't. You said nobody would think it was a big deal, or even believe it ever happened. I told you I believed you, and that it felt to me like a very big deal. You asked me what I was feeling and I said very tender about you and very angry at him for what he did to you, for all those details set out in the affidavit, and I started to review them and then you said "He did worse." I asked you to tell me about it and you made a couple of starts and then your breathing started to go very raw again. You cried out in great pain and kept saying—"no, don't do this." This time was shorter but seemed more painful and much more fearful. Breathing seemed to hurt just as much but when you said NO it seemed more about another fear than the pain. The first time had seemed all about the pain or at least that's all you spoke of. You didn't say so much this time except no but I could feel the terror in your voice and that terror was real. Again your breathing went slowly back to normal, and again you asked me what was going on for me. You didn't accept "I'm fine," so I elaborated some and kind of made my way back to what you had said about Dr. Upton doing worse. You told me you had no words left and that you wouldn't remember any of it. I told you I would remember it for you. You apologized for whimpering at me and I told you that you never had to be sorry for that. You thanked me for being there for you. I tell you again and as many times as you want to hear it — I'm right here, I'm not going anywhere. I have a strong stomach, I'm not afraid and I love you very much.

Sheila

L. A. Dyer

## If Only Resistance Counted as Forbearance on Student Loans

Resistance to heteropatriarchal domination feels like an eternal catch-22, caught between a rock and a hard place, damned if we do and damned if we don't. I am tired of being the maid with her broom, endlessly sweeping, yet the mess gets bigger and nastier and more dangerous with each passing day. If we don't continue our work, surely the toxicity will overpower us. Meanwhile, the very act of cleaning up the world's garbage, created primarily by patriarchy's destructive institutions, poisons us as well.

Where do we begin to unravel these damaging, prejudicial systems so that we are capable, as wimmin and as lesbians, of remembering our wholeness? How do we step outside abusive environments, which we are dependent on in many complex ways, to create something different? A womyn's healing remains a political issue as our internal lives, our very psyches, mirror the conditional and oppressive man-dates of our external world.

This is an intensively personal issue for me since recently completing a masters in holistic psychological counseling. Throughout the course of my studies I came to see that traditional psychology, as a whole, is based on incredibly sexist and classist criteria, values and assumptions. How then can a feminist/lesbian therapist base her therapeutic interactions with wimmin on widely accepted, male-defined psychological truisms? (How can she not?) Is even the endeavor not a contradiction in terms? Questioning the validity of psychotherapy, and specifically my role in contributing to the emotional growth and spiritual evolution of wimmin, is the form my political resistance has taken.

Thanks to the pioneering work of feminist psychologists, the field has finally begun to acknowledge basic and significant gender differences in terms of healthy psychological growth and development. New models of understanding, which honor female ways of knowing and being, if not yet embraced, are at least being explored. Feminist research indicates that most wimmin, when

given the opportunity, will attempt to create nurturing and egalitarian interactions through the use of empathy. Studies further reveal that unlike males, we actually seek and require mutually empathic relationships in order to fully develop\*.

Sadly, our culture is not based on these egalitarian principles. It's rare for wimmin to have the opportunity to create a cohesive network of friends — too much time and effort are required merely to survive. So we go in droves to therapists, attempting to individually heal the atrocious violations which wimmin collectively sustain. We go alone: to express our remorse and shame, to understand and overcome our phobias and addictions, to vent our rage and confusion, and to cure our depressions — all of which often come from, and are exacerbated by, our isolated oppression.

We have been conditioned for many centuries, on the threat of death or worse, to mediate our survival by avoiding conflict with the dominant gender. We have learned well to not make waves. So rather than engage in a potential conflict with one another, we take our difficult and frightening feelings to "emotional issue professionals," telling maybe one, or maybe none of our friends, the truth of our lives. At least not until we have our "issues" more "worked out" and somewhat "under control," able to speak more calmly, often in the past tense — adopting a more rational, less emotive style.

Yet almost every womyn I've ever spoken with, personally or professionally, has expressed a deep longing for emotional contact. Most of us only dream of living in communities which are supportive, challenging and spiritually evolving, and with which we feel a sense of acceptance and belongingness. How could such deep connections possibly develop if nobody tells anybody, except a therapist, her worst fears, or lingering doubts, or deepest joys?

It's true that we're not very comfortable accepting our many differences. Most of us hardly accept ourselves in terms of personal needs or style of expression. Our programmed feminine inferiority cuts deep, encouraging lonely and judgmental seclusion. Learning to effectively communicate after so many centuries will take much empathy, much acceptance — of self AND other —

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\* Jean Baker Miller and the Stone Center — various papers/books; Belenky, et al, *Women's Way's of Knowing*; Chodorow; Gilligan; Alice Miller, etc.

and much compassionate honesty among ourselves.

After spending most of my life in pursuit of these qualities, I studied psychology because I saw it as a possible bridge towards a more feminist reality — towards living with greater consciousness. Now I find myself asking, how does one do this work without compromising basic ethics or personal integrity?

One of the biggest issues I am faced with is what “good” therapy typically costs. It’s no more than what other professionals charge, but then who calls the plumber, or visits a lawyer or doctor, every week for many months or years? And what of all the wimmin who cannot pay \$20, much less the more standard fee of \$60 for 50 minutes? What percentage of us have \$240 expendable income a month?

Am I supposed to believe the therapeutic rhetoric that if they, or I, truly value ourselves, we’ll somehow come up with the cash? Or are we simply to postpone this assumed necessary growth until we can better afford it, thereby discounting the struggles and potential of those who never can? I thought feminism precluded using convenient rationalizations to justify the continued abandonment of less privileged wimmin.

Of course, if I don’t charge the going rate for my counseling services, then how do I support myself? Imagine the financial pressure of being a working class dyke, \$40,000 in debt for a degree which ostensibly promises 40 to 80 dollars an hour to practice. Ironically, practice may indeed be an accurate word because, to my knowledge, no study has ever shown that psychotherapy in itself leads to wholeness. Yet I and many others look desperately for a “good enough” therapist. So I became one.

But how I embrace it as my life’s work is a maddening dilemma. I get frustrated, angry and very confused when I hear so few “feminist therapists” addressing the classism inherent within the basic precepts of conventional therapy. In this and other, more insidious ways, I see psychology destroying feminism by continually translating social and political realities into personal pathologies.

Our focus on the private inner life of individuals takes that focus away from external oppressions, easily promoting a false sense of individual control and responsibility for institutionalized injustices. This heavy load often proves incapacitating rather than motivating, draining wimmin of the energy for active self-deter-

mination. We hide our all too common secrets, acting like things are basically fine, while too many relationships amount to "sure, let's do lunch sometime." Surely it's male conditioning which causes relational beings to so painfully isolate themselves.

Are we implicitly accepting that only a paid listener cares to hear the pain of our truths — or the ecstasies of our unions? We don't speak of it in these terms, but what else is it when we hear a womyn in pain, or delirious in love, and think, "Oh shit, I can't handle this. She needs to see a therapist."? Have we come to believe that we are incapable of connecting and empathizing, or interacting in a respectful and focused way, with the depth of another's experience?

I seriously question this insistence on expensive, individual process as the best solution to our ascribed subordination and abuse. If ten of us combined the standard \$60 an hour, individual therapist fee for one year, we'd have approximately \$30,000 toward the creation of a more nurturing environment in which to live. We clearly have the capacity to do this. In social animals such as ourselves, community naturally evolves when life experiences are shared and accepted. When we do this, we begin to step outside the toxic, societal belief systems which cause much of our suffering. Would this not speed the healing of many of our deepest wounds?

Unfortunately, many of us think that we don't know *how* to begin establishing such a radically different world. That belief, along with many others, will forever keep wimmin dependent and isolated. Perhaps therapy could redeem psychology by challenging these beliefs. Therapeutic group forums, focused on healing through active community building and rooted in feminist principles, would go a long way towards promoting our collective, and thus individual, wholeness.

It's as simple, and as hard, as meeting together and insisting on increased class, race, and female consciousness, while empathically examining our assumptions and interactions. It takes energy — which too many of us have too little of — fighting the patriarchy takes too much.

On a spiritual level, I know it's possible for wimmin to move beyond this world's destructive social programming. Other realities do exist — other ways of living are not only possible for us, but I believe they are inevitable. Emotionally however, we are a long

way, individually or globally, from living in supportive societies based on mutually enhancing relationships. In my opinion, perpetrating accepted, male-defined psychological growth theories contributes greatly to our continued disenfranchisement.

Can any of us really believe that 50 minutes a week with a feminist therapist could heal this? True, at times it has helped me immensely, yet I question the validity of charging wimmin for what we would naturally create, if we became a more cohesive network — *knowing full well that this remains an improbability so long as we take the truth of our experience to a therapist's office instead of to friends or peers.*

Admittedly, it may be hard to hear someone complain about the same thing 70 times, waiting for the moment which allows her to feel differently. Maybe she simply needs another to point out what she's doing because she doesn't consciously know it. Or maybe she needs to hear somebody say, "I don't get it. Tell me more." This is primarily what therapists do. \$40,000 later, I discover that most wimmin, when given a safe enough environment, intuitively attempt the same thing.

By deeply connecting in this way with many wimmin, we would not need therapy to acknowledge, or to begin healing from, terrifying childhood abuse, or racist attacks, or classist assumptions of oppression, or yesterday's binge.... Of course, I'm probably overreacting, talking myself out of a lucrative job because of an immature, feminine fear of success. This presumption is one way psychology pathologizes our resistance, calling us names when we don't play the boys' games. However, by refusing them, I believe we can step outside heteropatriarchal values and begin to create new social systems which nurture and sustain us.

Community happens when wimmin work together to express and accept differences, as well as common values and compatible goals. I don't know how much psychotherapy can facilitate this process. I do know that I want to be part of such communities. Perhaps therapeutic group work, if based on empathic and egalitarian feminist principles, could be a bridge — could help create a reality where more wimmin spend more time consciously living, instead of endlessly sweeping.

Maybe that reality is one worth practicing for.



Lenore Baeli Wang

## On Killing Insects

*for Sue Hettmansperger*

At 9 trauma struck  
My father smashed a fly  
who flew in our living room  
    buzzed and dodged  
by lamps, by  
    my grandmother's elbow

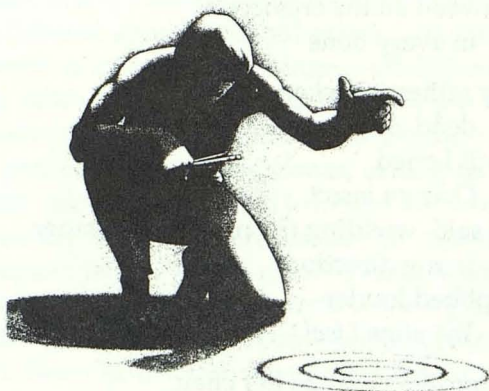
She clung to our chairs  
    her housecoat  
clung to her arms  
    like skin  
that just as surely  
    was sucked inward  
between all the crevices  
    in every bone

My father whacked that fly  
    dead  
until I cried  
    *Over an insect*  
he said, wielding the rolled newspaper  
    in my direction  
I sobbed louder  
    *You stupid fool*

Grandma clung to her chair  
    never saying a word

Years later I met you  
    who showed me  
A spider or fly  
    can be removed—  
a piece of cardboard, a glass

And all those years  
I'd been killing them  
Although I only knew you  
a while  
each spider I cup in a glass  
each fly  
rushes its way  
back into the world  
where somewhere  
you then and now  
enact the same kindness



© 1987 Hansen '87

*Repercussions*  
pen & ink, 1987  
Janice Hansen

Jasmine Marah

## The Process is the Product

Out into the garden, 6:30am. It's rained the past two nights and all of yesterday, so it's still cool, an uncharacteristically grey day. It will be hot, hot by 10:00.

Wet has a character all its own and even in the city when it rains during the summer, I sometimes catch a whiff of strawberries, as though they could soften the sidewalks with their color alone.

In this garden, strawberries crawl over the straw, intertwined with flamboyant squash plants. I lie down on pavers that form the pathway. Gardening, I scooch on my tuchis or crawl on hands and knees. I can't bend, I can't get up and down, and this is a good solution. The paths make the communal garden accessible to wimmin in wheelchairs and easier for carts.

On the path, I roll close to the prickly-stemmed squash plants. Under the leaves are tiny tendrils, delicate as steam wisps. The blossoms are astonishing, new every time I look at them. Clear, pure orange fluted into a simple trumpet, they stay attached to the paler yellow crooknecked squashes, diminishing, becoming small brown navels on the ready-to-pick squash.

I lie with my cheek on the warm moist straw, my head under the vaulted space created by the huge translucent leaves. The enfolding peace is what I have worked for, but to keep it I must keep working.

The work is tiring and, as it often is with work, endless. I find myself up at first light many mornings. Wanting this project to succeed as though my life depends on it drives me. I started this community, never knowing if it would succeed. But I'm stronger now than I have been in 25 years. Work, mixing physical and intellectual work every day helps me. Most of all, the frequent emotional support and appreciation of my work from the other wimmin heals me.

There are, of course, days I'm drained by seemingly endless processing, and I can feel that everyone is weary of dealing with me, too. Today was one of those days. I was almost at the end of two hours of weeding and snail-picking when Melody rolled in. Last woman out of the 72 on the land I wanted to see, I'll admit. I loved

Melody once, but now, just when I get one thing right, she's got another complaint. Problem is, she makes a lot of sense, and I want to give her what she needs — but there must be a better way for us to communicate.

"Sarah!" Melody peered down at me frowning. "You promised the EI girls that you'd make sure we could move freely on the land!"

"O, god. Did I make such an enormous, unrealistic promise?"

"You did, Sarah, you know you did. And now the healing house is full of camphor or menthol or something. It's totally unacceptable. You are responsible for seeing to it that the healing workers respect our needs!"

"You're right, Melody. But I've been busy. I'm sorry. I guess they were doing treatment for Stone, who fell yesterday while she was working on the theatre deck..."

"That's no excuse. Do able-bodied dykes get preferential treatment around here because their work is visible? Or because their healing is so much quicker?" Melody's voice got squeaky. "Just because the health care workers can't help me to be healthy, can't get immediate gratification seeing one of their patients get fixed ..."

I knew how she felt. I have been disabled since childhood and have chronic illnesses. I'd struggled for years, but I'm lucky. I'm finally healing even though my underlying, orthopedic disability is mine forever.

"I'm sorry. You really have a point. For today would you accept treatment in your own house while we clear the healing house?"

"You'll never get it, will you, Sarah? I don't want those wimmin in my house. And how do you propose to clear the healing house in one day?"

I wanted to scream, run. But I stayed on the ground, knowing the situation would only get worse if I didn't take care of it now.

"How about if I ask the building crew to erect a temporary shelter to be used by EI dykes only until the healing house is safe again, will that work?"

Melody shrugged. "I don't know. But at least it's a start. I have to ask the others and see how they feel."

"And would you be willing to meet directly with the building crew at breakfast to say what your needs are?" I was not expecting Melody to agree. She tires quickly, and usually eats alone, so I was surprised when she said OK.

"I'll get together with Honey and Jane now — I know they're up. Then we'll meet the building crew at breakfast."

I thanked Melody, and as I watched her wheel away, a rush of tenderness came over me; those old feelings come up easily. Now I just had to find one of the building crew and hope she'd get the others to meet with Melody.

There are only five dykes left on the building crew. Still hot here, very hot, so many of the city wimmin who visit and work for a week or two have gone instead to the coast. The young, still-going-to-school dykes are back at school. These five dykes are part of the long term community, or want to be. Toni is the newest here, and committed to a nine-month stay.

I'm very attracted to her perfectionism, her small, tough body. Toni's quiet most of the time, but in community meetings has clarity, gained from working in the wimmin's resistance camps here and in Europe, and teaching wimmin's self defense. She's not attracted to me, though, and I wonder if it's because I'm too big or too busy. Toni says she's had fat girlfriends before and it has nothing to do with it. So I'm already uptight when I approach her house.

"I'm up, Sarah, come in."

"OK. Hi, Toni. I came to ask a favor."

Entering Toni's house reminded me of lying with my cheek under the squash leaves. The space seems vaulted and cool, peaceful. It is a small house, tidy and full of filtered light.

Toni came on land with five dykes, friends, who helped her get her cabin together in a little over a week. She'd done auto mechanics for them for about six months, as a trade, looking forward to this time.

I was very impressed with her from the beginning. She had a plan for her domicile, blueprints. The details pleased my architect's eye. Small operable windows, mixed between cupboards and open shelving, seemed to bring light in from everywhere at once. Yet there was no glare.

Now, with flowers and dried leaves and weeds in jars and bowls, and with Toni's lively graphics on the walls, it was really a jewel.

She was lying in bed, stroking her cat, Harlequin, with only a sheet covering her. I'm shy, know I'm responding inappropriately. I just wanted to crawl into bed with her. So I get quite gruff. Everything's coming out wrong.

"Toni, Melody wants to meet with the building crew at breakfast. Will you and the others meet with her?"

"I'm not on call here, Sarah. You can't just use your power to direct my day. I want to start my day my own way." Toni was never good in the mornings. It took her several hours to "come into the world," she said.

"Toni, I know you're right, but I need your help. I've been up for hours," I added childishly. "Someone treated Stone in the healing house with menthol or something and now the EI wimmin can't have their usual treatments there, nor can anyone who's doing homeopathy, because neither group can be around strong aromas."

"So, why is that my problem?"

"Well, I offered to have one of the temporary shelters put up for healing work for the EI wimmin while the healing house gets aired out, and I asked Melody to meet directly with the building crew to discuss needs. I'm sorry. ..." I began to apologize before Toni could respond. Suddenly, I wanted Joan, Charlene, Tanya and Carmelita with me, the other members of the negotiating crew for this quarter. Carrying a message was now becoming a complicated interaction. I could see Toni needed support, but I didn't feel able to plead with her and support her at the same time. I needed support, even though I was in the responsible position. I decided to try once again before I made negotiation an offer to Toni.

"Toni, I imagine that you have your day all worked out, and I realize that getting interrupted makes tasks more difficult. But Melody is right. She and Honey and Jane and the others need to have treatments every day...." I flushed. This conversation, asking her for something she didn't want to give me, made me feel like I was asking Toni all over again if she would be sexual with me. But I couldn't admit that.

"You wimmin who have been mothers. You are so parental with everyone. And, Sarah, you're so controlling. Just because you had the opportunity to start this wimmin's community. You'd better start realizing that without us you'd have nothing: no community." She swiveled her legs over the edge of the bed and got up. Harlequin jumped and, landing near my feet, started a playful attack.

Toni went into her bathroom, slamming the door behind her. Oh shit, now surely I'd blown it. There was nothing to do now but wait for Toni to come out and offer her negotiation.

But Toni surprised me. "Sarah, I'll meet with the EI dykes and I'll let Stone, Tatyanna, Mima and Molly know about it. I can't say if they'll come or not. But this is the second time in as many weeks

that you've called on the building crew to solve a problem that we didn't create."

I was defensive and grateful all at once. The juggling of different people's needs was stressing me. I wasn't going to be able to go on doing this. It all felt too much like being a mom, only there were too many kids. The wimmin I was interacting with would hate it if they knew I felt that way!

"And Sarah, there is another thing." Toni was talking again, and I'd better pay attention. "This problem that the EI dykes are having with the healing house, that's really the fault of the health workers. Why don't they have to have pre-breakfast and breakfast meetings? Are you afraid of them because they are all middle-class girls?"

"Well, it could be that I am, but I'd like to ask the negotiating team to meet with the EI girls, the building crew, the health workers and me, and find some resolution. We could coordinate schedules and do it, not in a rush, but when it's convenient for everyone."

"That's a good idea. I'll see you later."

I was apprehensive about the negotiation, but looking forward to it. I didn't feel that I could sustain this intense responsibility for much longer. The community needed to find a way to problem-solve that didn't involve me every time. Here I was, living in the country, a constant yearning since childhood, living with other dykes, whom I sometimes resented, and who were often angry at me, so I was not always able to enjoy it.

The rest of the day, until just before evening meal, I worked. The usual work shift was four hours, five days a week. I'd always felt we all need to have free time, creative time, rest time, dreaming time, loving time.

Mima came up to me as we were walking into evening meal. She put her arm around my shoulders and gave me a squeeze. I'm very close with Mima, she's warm and understanding, and had been once the director of a wimmin's self-housing project in Manhattan. Mima's mother is Jewish, and so was mine, but that's where the similarity ends. Her father was the first African American lawyer to be appointed to the special subcommittee in D.C. My father was a gardener. Mima's never lacked for material comforts. I've never had many. I'm fat and disabled, she's athletic and curvaceous. I'm 45, she's 30. We've had a lot of things to deal with. She calls me on the racism behind some of my assumptions, and I push her to deal with classism. Despite this, we've been great support

for one another, setting aside two hours each week for intense personal work.

"The negotiation's tonight at 8:00 pm in the common space work room, if that's OK with you."

"OK with me? But how'd it get set up so fast? And is the topic clear? And who's coming?" Usually it took days of back and forth to fix a time and place. And almost always that was days ahead of time.

"Sarah, chill. You have too much power. You can't keep on complaining about something you, yourself, created. The whole situation needs revision. It will work out. I'll be there, and everyone will be represented."

At 8:00, everyone was present. We include a note-taker and a dyke who pays attention to the tape recorder and hands around drinks, neither of whom expresses opinions. They also keep confidential all of what they hear.

Our method of negotiation originated at Rhythmfest, and has evolved from that. Each of the parties to the dispute is represented by an advocate from the negotiating team, from outside the group they represent. All the permanent members of the community rotate into duty as negotiators/advocates while they keep their regular jobs. A quarter, 3 months, is the term.

Mima forfeited her voice as a member of the building crew to do "time and temperature." That meant making sure that no one talked more than exactly the agreed-upon limit, and that no one violated the rules of safety.

Twenty-five dykes in one room trying to negotiate differences! But the room itself helps: a wide oval, almost a circle, with a large table in the center that seats twelve. Behind are three raised tiers, padded, with cushions everywhere, so that wimmin who need to lie down to be there, do. The first tier has a ramp curving all around the room. Wimmin who prefer not to transfer from their wheelchairs can still be higher than floor level.

The advocates meet with the dykes they're representing before the whole group gathers. They also meet for a half hour or so with each other to check in about the issues.

The negotiators have bonds of common purpose. Meeting together before the negotiation and after hearing the complaints lets them get a sense of where to look for compromise. Sometimes two opposing sides really have hidden agreement. Talking over issues, but keeping emotions out of it, goes a long way towards resolution.



Mima started by reading us the rules for this negotiation. Summarized, they propose that every dyke shall state her case, and the advocates will do the actual negotiation. If no resolution is reached, there will be a new negotiation in three days. Mima let out a breath, and turned the page.

"Our format for safety is: We will describe behavior, not label it. We will stay strictly to time limits. We listen, not interrupt. We won't bring up extraneous grievances, will try to own our own feelings, and respond to challenges or questions."

The EI dykes spoke first. They pointed out that for many of them there is no other safe community in which to live. That we, as a community, have a commitment to making the land as accessible as possible to all dykes, including EI dykes and other disabled dykes.

The building crew spoke next. Their point was that the operations committee had set goals with them for specific building projects to be completed by certain dates. They can't keep their commitments if they are interrupted.

The healing workers were next. Their statements had a lot more "feelings" in them, but the gist of it was that they were dedicated to helping all dykes move toward good health. They said there may be a genuine need for menthol, camphor, or aromatic Chinese herbs, or some other treatment not compatible with allergies. There had to be some way for it to be OK for all dykes to have treatment. That an able-bodied dyke who was hurt has as much a right to treatment as the disabled dykes. They said something about emergencies, and mixed it with their right to control their own work space.

Thank goodness they only had 10 minutes altogether. Even so, when Mima called time, River went on talking for another half-minute, and only stopped after Abbe, one of her co-workers, told her to shut up.

Then it was my turn. I basically owned that I shouldn't have offered something to Melody that I personally couldn't deliver. I said also that I felt swamped, pushed to my absolute limits to see that everyone's needs were met.

We started the round with the negotiators in a very tense atmosphere.

They pointed out that EI dykes can't go elsewhere for daily treatment; that the building crew have a job to do, "and it doesn't include problem-solving for Sarah;" that healing workers need control of working condition; and that Sarah needs relief from the pressure.

I also began to hear, "Sarah is not available enough." "Sarah is too available." "When we go to Sarah to solve our problems, it gives her too much power." "It seems like Sarah is using her position to control what happens on the land." "Sometimes I feel like I'm at home with my mother when I deal with Sarah."

Some things were said that Mima ruled out of order. Labels. Like when Kendra, the health workers' advocate, said it was hard to work with "whining dykes."

Mostly, I felt attacked and misunderstood.

After the break, solutions were offered, compromises. But there was still a nagging feeling that I was under attack. Finally, there was a direct question put to me, something that, by protocol, I could answer.

Toni asked Carmelita to voice it. "Sarah, what exactly were your motives in starting this community? Some of us wonder if there is a loophole that will allow you to sell the land once it is developed. Or was it because you could never get any work as an architect and you wanted somewhere to work on real buildings? What kind of privilege did you come from in order to be able to do this?"

The room was very quiet. I flushed hot all over. So much suspicion. I didn't know if anyone would understand me. I stood, and my motion broke the spell a bit. Dykes turned to focus on me.

"First of all, you know the land is in trust. I can't sell it, even if I wanted to. All of the permanent community together must decide to sell it, and even then it's a long process.

"I started this community because the need for it was clear to me. I realized when I was working in Berkeley as a lay social worker that even helping people get on welfare, get food stamps, SSI, section 8, special ed for their kids, get away from abusive partners, join unions, form unions, create rent control, have urban gardens and farming — I realized that this is not enough. I have not had privilege. I was raised in an abusive, incestuous household, part of the working poor. I was the only Jewish kid in my public elementary school, darker skinned than anyone around me, with 599 white goys. I know what problems are! And I am disabled, have been since I was a kid. I don't consider that privileged!

"I saw that we all needed new forms for our lives. The very shape of the houses and apartments, the cramped cars and vans and buses that shelter families, the poor food, the polluted air and water were the burrs and spurs under the skin of every struggling

womon. Schools that don't teach our children anything that is for them, that take their natural power and punish them for it. Medical care that's available only to the privileged, or when available, in clinics, exhausted the health care workers.

"And events! Dyke events — that are inaccessible, or too expensive! No place for us to gather without paying money, often no child care, or they're inaccessible to wimmin with EI, or other disabilities.

"What, I asked myself, does the patriarchy do to us to make us submissive? They kill us, rape us, lock us up. I have been physically hurt a lot, but I didn't think I could do anything about it but stay out of their way. Now that Toni's teaching the self defense class for disabled wimmin, I'm beginning to see it differently. But when I started to organize this community, I thought there could be another Hitler, but aside from that, if the boys simply made it hard for us to get bare needs met — food, clothing, shelter, health care, meaningful occupation, the right to free assembly — then they could bribe us with these commodities to do their bidding.

"Then I realized that they were already bribing us. But there was still a narrow chance of slipping out of the system. If we all could produce our own food, clothing and shelter *and enjoy doing it*, we could be safe from their pressure. If we could assemble in manageable groups, diverse clusters of 20 to 500 wimmin, we could have variety and closeness, entertainment, art, perhaps even happiness and well-being. I was in an accident, and used the settlement to start this community. For the first few years, there were only a few of us here."

I ran out of steam, just at the same time as Mima flashed me the two minutes are up sign.

It was very quiet. I couldn't help looking at Toni. She looked right back at me, said in a relieved and yet comical voice, "Oh, I thought that was it," and smiled.

The laughter and hoots and smattering of applause and hand-waving that followed broke the tension, and helped us get on to the conclusion. It's like any of the practical magic. You know, when you make photocopies of all your important papers, and extra copies of your keys and then go traveling, nothing is wrong. But watch out if you don't!

The humor drew us all together, but the hard work that had gone before was the substance around which we coalesced. I felt that because I had taken such a personal risk, other dykes were more willing to.

We settled down to resolve our differences with a kind of excitement and hope that I hadn't felt for a long time.

The building crew made the first concession, took the first risk. Carmelita said, "The building crew is willing to split into two teams if they can get some more members, one team can complete ongoing projects, while the other does maintenance and handles emergencies."

Kendra said, for the healing workers, "We'll do healing work for EI wimmin in a separate space even though it's inconvenient."

Joan replied, "The EI wimmin will agree to get treatment in temporary shelter if a new EI healing area can be built, and they want to have input into the design."

Cath reported, "Sarah will be quite willing to have some other way of dealing with crises, perhaps a team could problem-solve."

Toni said, "I'd like to meet with both the EI wimmin and the healing workers during the design and construction process."

We decided to change several policies. First of all, we wanted to even out the power and the responsibility. So we created a job called "fixing it." Like the building crew, the five wimmin serving as negotiator/advocates would have no other job during their term. Problems would be brought to them, not to me or any other individual. Because the negotiating committee would rotate every three months, the group itself would not become a power-over group. The risk was that this would not be seen as a real job, and that the crews they left would miss them. Our law will still be set by policy, policy by negotiation, negotiation by the population. The group cannot write or create policy. They can only mediate with interested parties when an issue arises. Our rotation system will stay intact.

I know I'll have a hard time really letting go of the power. But I'm looking forward to doing other work. I also know that this has to be, for a community to be.

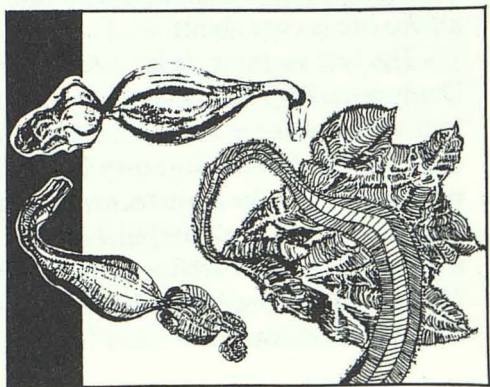
The second agreement is that a temporary shelter will go up for the EI wimmin's health needs. This will stay up as a new annex to the healing house is built. It will be for EI, asthmatic and allergic dykes only, and have a small "hang out" room. We build with rammed earth here, and the cost is not great. Melody, Honey and Jane all are feeling well enough — and Abbe and River, from the healing workers, will give up some of their free time — to meet regularly with the building crew and the designer. It is a risk for the three EI dykes to expose themselves so much, and to represent the

more restricted dykes, but they are enthusiastic and committed. It feels good to know that the users of the space will plan the space. It's not nearly so chancy!

The third decision is that the building crew will split into two groups and take on five trainees. One crew, the three experienced members and two trainees, will work on ongoing structures. The other group, with two experienced dykes and three trainees, will be on call. They'll be responsible for putting up temporary buildings, and for maintenance. Both are excellent schooling for builders and designers. The groups will switch every quarter.

There are, however, not 5 dykes on land now who have expressed an interest in belonging to the building crew. Carmelita suggested that we advertise a training program for dykes in the urban alternative papers. We will offer room and board and wages. That keeps it accessible to poor and working-class wimmin. We will make it clear that no men are ever allowed on land, and we figure that the non-dykes will drop out of the application process.

I'm tired. And I don't have a warm body to cuddle next to. That's not something that can be solved by policy. But I feel pretty good, peaceful. And that's really what I've been working towards.



Jasmine Marah

Irena Klepfisz

## The Politics of Snails: A Parable

*The landlord's instructions:* Crush them with your heels or between two rocks. If that's not appealing, use the powder — it doesn't kill — just keeps them away (this *has* to be a lie — anyone indifferent to mashing them beneath their shoes is not about to go humane). I'm half asleep when I hear these options. Barely take them in — though clearly they register because my first morning alone I will recall the calm voice.

But now it's dusk. The back garden: red and pink roses firmly rooted and pink and red geraniums in steel boxes hanging against the prefab fence. Everything vies for turf. What's new? Under my negligence by summer's end red geraniums will flourish in the ground, challenging the supremacy of the rose. Unfamiliar blue flowers will threaten the geraniums. A garden in which I can do the impossible: sleep and dream in peace while around me: war.

A pretty house ... with mixed messages. The surrounding condominiums: mortar and cement. Each garden the same: less foliage, more hexagonal bricks supporting the iron-wrought furniture and methodically boxed soil. "You'll need to weed it," I'm told during training. Translation: maintain control — which, after all, is all *this* life is ever about.

*The first morning alone:* I slide open the door and step out. Dampness. Fog, dew. I spot my first one on the stem of a rose. It looks snug between two thorns. I'm taken aback. It's enormous. An inch-high shell. Nothing fancy. But the body! Sleek gray flesh spills out and around the plain brown wrapper. Entirely exposed — the back tapers into a delicate tail. And the front? I catch my breath! The sumptuous bosom arches high into the finely shaped head. Ah! The wonder of the horns! And are those eyes that plot its course, that reflect its soul?

I look around. See others — on the fence, on a red brick, on a dark wet leaf. They're different sizes — some the shells mere specks, the bodies barely visible; others slim and solid like the first.

Surely no one can expect me to murder *these*?

There's only one choice: I harvest them. They hardly struggle — at least not from my perspective. But then it's not exactly an even match. To my fingertips their resistance registers only as a hesitation, a moment's confusion, before they curl inward and vanish. I search under leaves, on the damp soil, the fence. It's a challenge. They're masters in the art of passing — as pebbles, wooden chips, broken dried stems. But I catch on and in minutes — more than two dozen are in the bag. Occasionally I peek and see them fully present climbing up the sides — horns and eyes exposed. They use each other as step ladders, as free rides — whatever. They're determined to get to the top — and out.

And then it's over. The flowers saved, the snails safe — and there I am holding the bag asking the ultimate question which unreflective altruism never answers: speaking practically, what am I to do with them next? A friend who's lived here for years is sympathetic, though she has a native's perspective. "If the garden meant food, you might feel different," she tells me serenely. Still — she's kind. I'm new. So she drives me to a special spot to view the ocean. It's a perfect refuge for the snails.

*Two days later:* The same question. I can't hustle them off to safety every morning. I don't have a car. Besides, I have a job. I have to report for work. Besides again — how did all this come to be? I ask another friend, a historian who contextualizes the current crisis: a nineteenth-century Frenchman wanting to make native a delicacy of *escargot*, a desire he fulfilled, but in the process, life triumphed over appetite and death and now we're stuck with the present situation and impossible solutions — grind them down with your heel or crush them with stones.

*A week later:* I'm still harvesting, amazed at their numbers. My urge to rescue is transformed into repressed rage. How and when did they become *my* responsibility? Why, I ask myself, must I find an escape for them?

There's no one to turn to. I'm angry — at them, at myself for my failing commitment, for losing face. I comfort myself: You can do

only what you can do. But I know — in the meantime, the world — or more precisely — the garden — withers.

So, determined not to be defeated, I collect weary paper bags and fill them with endangered snails. Determined I appraise the terrain, establish escape routes, safety zones. On my way to work I release them at bus stops, on unkempt weedy highway shoulders and hope they'll sense the right direction — away from death. But life's crowded and I'm conscious I've never brought them to the ocean again. In my mortar garden I sleep and dream of that first day's liberation — the openness of sky, the ocean somber in the sunlight, salt in my mouth, the snails among the tall grasses. I wake and wonder who it is I'm trying to save.

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*untitled*  
Billie Miracle



Dawn Rudd

## The Enemy

**B**ra  
Girdle  
Dress shields  
Panties  
Stockings  
Hold my mother hostage  
before her clothes become  
her captor to the world  
Bent all the way over  
Foot in right hole  
Foot in left hole  
Now pull  
Fingers tense and resentful  
Full body unwilling to yield  
to this foreign force  
Force  
that spandex, lycra  
polyknitted cotton content  
piece of rubberized slavery  
up those calves  
Past the knee  
soft like dough  
Up, upward to the thighs  
Screaming and pleading  
Bleeding  
from this external enemy  
waiting to become one  
with the internal enemy  
Hate  
She rests a moment  
Long enough for  
perspiration to form

causing dreaded sweat stains  
God bless dress shields  
looped and fastened tightly  
around her arms and shoulders  
There is safety now  
There is safety now  
It is 1969  
The country is on fire  
My mother is on fire  
Fighting for equality  
Fighting for justice  
Fighting for freedom  
Fighting to fit into clothing  
designed for a thin, flat  
white woman  
Fighting large breasts  
that spill out of her  
eighteen hour bra  
Protruding buttocks  
defiantly protest  
Thighs demand their right to be  
Walter Cronkite delivers the numbers  
How many killed  
How many wounded  
My mother marches  
Clenched fist held high  
Buttocks held high  
Breasts held high  
Tummy tucked and  
Thighs constrained  
Fighting for freedom  
Fighting for freedom

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A line was inadvertently left out of our first printing of this poem in #47. We're reprinting it here in its entirety. Our apologies to Dawn Rudd and our readers.

Toni L. Cassista

## A Question of "Civil Rights"

*"Discrimination against individuals termed overweight simply on the basis of their weight, cannot be rationally supported. Even if we were to accept the notion that potential ill health is a sufficient reason to discriminate against people, in all fairness, we ought to use potential for ill health as the criterion for judging them — not fatness per se. This would mean screening all people for a variety of risk factors and basing our judgments on those that are the most important: smoking (first and foremost), alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, diabetes, a family history of heart disease and certain cancers, possession of firearms, use of seatbelts, and, perhaps, weight. To single out weight is really just to choose a visible characteristic — and one that is relatively minor among the predictors of ill health ..."*

— William I. Bennett M.D.  
Associate Editor

The Harvard Medical School Health Letter

On September 29, 1987, Community Foods of Santa Cruz, California, made a decision not to hire me, based on my body size. Without any knowledge of my physical abilities, and without any verification of medical evidence, I was told they "did not think I could physically do the work due to my weight." After I caught my breath, I sent Community Foods a letter suggesting that they do some education in the area of fatphobia as an effort towards preventing anyone else from being discriminated against because of their size. Upon receiving my letter, Will Hildeburn, Personnel Director, called and asked if I would meet with members of the Community Foods Collective, so they could explain the reasons why I was denied employment. At this meeting they added insult to injury by questioning whether or not I could work a forty-hour week, stand on my feet for eight hours a day, or fit down the store aisles. I felt like someone had hit me with a two-by-four. I was in

shock. I felt sick to my stomach, and was shaken for months to come.

A judgment had been made based solely on a "visible characteristic" — my body size. Community Foods exercised their authority, their power, and became the "humble oppressor" — I was told that they thought I would "appreciate the honesty." But this was not a question of honesty. Rather, it was one of fair employment practices.

Fatphobia is so ingrained in our society that most fat people stay at home, isolated and lonely. A fat person's self-esteem is attacked externally with "if only you would lose weight," then internally with "If only I would lose weight." If fat people venture out and are blatantly denied employment because of their size, they go home feeling guilty and blaming themselves. No report is filed, no complaint is lodged, the employers go about their business as if nothing has happened, but the fat person is emotionally devastated and temporarily ravaged. Fat people's physical and mental health is at risk, because the thought of going out and the fear of what they might be subjected to becomes frightening. Life is a constant threat of physical and verbal assaults that never seem to end, and the only escape is the safety of one's home.

I could not bear the thought of one more fat person having to experience what I had to endure. I was verbally attacked by those who praised Community Foods for their political, nutritional, and progressive consciousness. I was asked, "How could you do such a thing to a group of people who have given so much to the Santa Cruz community?" I refused to remain silent, no matter what the cost. Silence not only condones accepted behavior, it encourages and perpetuates it. If friends and family participate in or contribute to racism, sexism or homophobia, I feel responsible to confront and challenge them to change their attitudes. People must take responsibility for their actions that contribute to fatphobia.

In 1988, I sent a packet of information to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors requesting that they pass an ordinance that would prohibit discrimination based on weight. I was informed that the Board had turned my request over to Personnel Director Robert R. Palmer for analysis. His response was:

"... The County guidelines state obesity is associated with increased morbidity and mortality — of particular importance are the strength and stamina abilities, working conditions involving extremes of temperature and the ability to function in confined spaces..."

Mr. Palmer's response is a perfect example of how our society systematically oppresses fat people. We permit and accept the above language without a question of a person's civil rights. The fat person is so used to hearing negative judgments that they believe it themselves.

On September 13, 1988, my attorney, James Moore King, filed a civil suit citing employment discrimination as nature of case with Superior Court of California, County of Santa Cruz. My case finally saw the shadow of the judge's bench on April 9, 1991. Jury selection was extremely difficult, because fat prejudice is so accepted. The judge, at one point, asked my attorney to use the word "overweight" instead of "fat" when directing questions to the jury. The word *overweight* implies that there is something wrong with my body. I do not use this word, and refuse to allow others to use it when describing me, including the judicial system. The case took three days. The jury deliberated for a little over two hours coming back with a verdict in favor of the defense. I left the court room that day somewhat numb from my experience, although much wiser because of it!

I could not accept this verdict. There was no justice in the trial court's decision, and no message to employers about their responsibility when hiring. I found a law firm in San Francisco, Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi (RKMC) who offered to provide me with legal services on a pro bono basis, which means that I will not be charged for time spent or expenses incurred by RKMC attorneys or other personnel working on my behalf. This is an enormous relief because of my limited finances. The attorney from RKMC representing me is Stefanie M. Brown. She filed my appeal on June 15, 1991. For the first time in four years, I have hope. Stefanie is very supportive and encouraging, without making any promises. She has a wonderful sense of humor, and a great laugh. It is refreshing to get the affirmation I so need regarding the legitimacy of my case.

The Sixth Appellate District ruled on July 8, 1992, that "the trial court erred in instructing the jury that Cassista was required to prove that 'but for' her weight, she would have been hired. Because the error was prejudicial, the judgment is reversed and a new trial is granted."

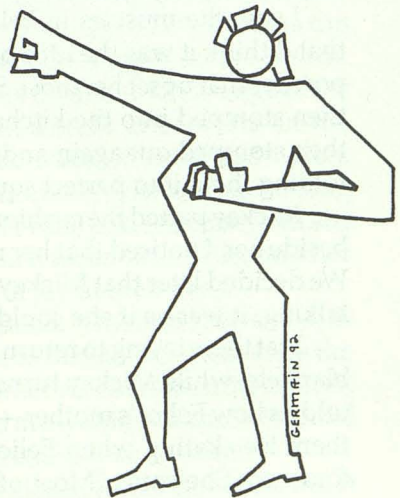
The decision reached by the Sixth Appellate District in *Cassista vs. Community Foods* is of monumental importance. The appellate ruling will set precedent and change the way discrimination suits are handled by the courts in the State of California, as well as being referred to and cited by attorneys throughout the country. In really simplistic terms, what this means is that in a case where there exists a legitimate and an illegitimate motive (mixed motive) the "burden of proof" would shift to the employer to show that it would have made the same decision in the absence of the illegitimate motive. In my case, the illegitimate motive was that they perceived that I was handicapped. Now the burden of proof shifts to Community Foods to show that the legitimate motive (which they claim was my lack of experience) was in fact the only reason I was not hired. I won my appeal because of the brilliance, caring and commitment of my attorney. Finally, as of this moment, Community Foods has filed a petition for review before the Supreme Court of California. So now we wait!

I realized from the start that my fight for fat rights would be a long drawn-out battle. I am a little weathered, but still standing. Although there are times when the pain I feel gushes to the surface unexpectedly and I find myself crying in the check-out line at the market, or riding the bus to school. I have even thought of dying at times, because I could not bear to hear another person place judgments on my capabilities, my worth, or my intelligence. As a fat womyn, I am surrounded by prejudice in every facet of my life. Finding my voice in a society that would sooner see me disappear is difficult when I am at my best, and excruciating in the midst of the battle. How easy it is to forget the importance of having a supportive safe environment—a place to express what I feel, sharing similarities, respecting differences of opinion, and remembering that my survival as a fat womyn depends on a collective unity.

Now, for the very first time, in a very long time, I feel myself breathing freely. I feel the warm caresses of tears as they trickle

down my cheek. I feel joy, sadness, affirmation and validation. I feel a renewed source of energy, of strength, of truth. I stood up for my beliefs — that every person, no matter what her size, should be evaluated in the same way when seeking employment. If there is a question of physical strength, then every applicant should be given the very same test. An applicant *should not* be eliminated from the hiring process because of her size; employers *should not* judge a prospective employee based on a “visible characteristic.”

I will no longer accept what everyone else will tolerate. I have paid a costly price because I chose not to be silent, not to allow an employer to deny me my constitutional right. They tried to tell me I was weak, that I was not capable of doing any physical labor. They tried to steal my pride, my worth, my life. I am forty-three years old and insisting to be heard! I am angry! I am demanding fair employment practices! I am strongly urging all people to strive for health and fitness, not dieting! I am very proud, and very strong, and will not tolerate or accept any more abuse! I am fighting for me, for you, for all of us!



Diane F. Germain

Susan Stinson

## Sabotage

*This is an excerpt from an unpublished novel, Fat Girl Dances with Rocks. The narrator, Char, and Felice are seventeen-year-old lovers. Mickey is Felice's aunt.*

The day was almost gone by the time we got back to Mickey's little white house from the camping trip. Mickey was watching a baseball game on TV when we got there.

Felice brought in an armload of blankets and sleeping bags. "Mickey," she said, "we were bombed."

I was surprised that we were going to tell Mickey about that, but as long as we were, I wanted to get the facts straight. "The ground shook. The army had a roadblock. Maybe it was a bomb."

Mickey glanced back at the TV screen as somebody got a hit. "Oh, where did you go? Mt. Estrella?"

She knew all about it. The army did tests out there. They were supposed to be secret, but Mickey had talked to a guy she'd met in line at the bank. He was stationed at Fort Estrella, and had money to burn. According to him, they were setting off bombs underground.

I saw the muscles in Felice's face tighten when Mickey said that. I think it was the idea of hidden minerals being blasted into powder that upset her most. She dumped the blankets onto a chair, then stomped into the kitchen. She rattled some dishes in there, then stomped out again and started picking up the blankets and folding them into perfect squares.

Mickey patted the cushion of the couch, inviting me to sit down beside her. I noticed that her red nail polish looked a little chewed. We decided later that Mickey was lonely, because once she started talking, it was as if she couldn't stop.

I sat there trying to return to reality, watching Felice subdue the blankets, while Mickey turned down the sound on the game and told us how Felice's mother — Mickey called her Ida — used to take them ice skating when Felice was four and Mickey was almost fourteen. She said, "Most of the mothers who came to the rink didn't skate. They sat in the warming house drinking awful coffee from styrofoam cups. But Ida got herself out on the ice."



"It was something to see," Mickey said to Felice. "Ida would take your hand and skate out to dead center where the figure skaters worked on their jumps. She would arrange her scarf into a circle on the ice, then lift you into the middle of it and let you dance. You were cute, all eyes and red wool, sliding on your double runners and laughing. Ida would skate around the small circle of her scarf, waving her hands and wiggling with you, and even the fancy skaters would stop glaring for the pure joy you had in each other. The two of you had eyes for nobody else, so I got to do whatever I wanted most of the time."

Mickey looked at Felice, who was shaking out the sleeping bag. Her arms were making swift, sharp motions in the air and her face was shining in the light from the TV.

"You remind me of your mother," Mickey said.

Felice raised one eyebrow and scowled. She thrummed her fingers against the wood of the coffee table. Her nails made a loud clicking sound.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," she told Mickey.

Felice went back to folding blankets and Mickey kept talking. I couldn't concentrate on her story because every move Felice made seemed to gather all of the light in the room to her, and watching the lines of her arms made me shiver, while Mickey told about being good at the grapevine, her legs going in and out, in and out, leaving a pattern on the ice like hourglasses stacked one on top of the other. I could feel Felice's warm weight on me again. Mickey's girlfriends used to hold onto the board at the edge of the rink, squealing. I watched Felice put a stack of blankets on the shelf, her hands disappearing in the folds of wool and nylon. Mickey remembered the boys in their smooth black skates, taking the corners hockey style. They would brush past too close, and she would wobble. I tried to imagine what it meant that Felice and her mother had looked at each other with joy in their eyes.

Mickey touched my elbow for attention. "One time I even sat with the guy who ran the popcorn machine in this silver Plymouth in the parking lot. Ida came looking for me on her bare blades on the asphalt, and when she found him with his hand in my shirt, she hauled off and started kicking his tires as hard as she could with her skate."

Felice, her arms still in the linen closet, rolled her eyes, but it wasn't funny. "I took off running and hitchhiked home. I felt bad

later than I hadn't taken you with me, Felice, because when Ida got that mad, she spread it around."

Felice said, "I don't remember a thing about any of that."

Mickey took a long drag on her cigarette. "Ida didn't speak to me for months." Mickey sighed and got up to shut off the TV. "That was a hundred years ago," she said as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom.

Felice took my hand and pulled me up off the couch. "We should do something," she said.

I felt dread — please, god, not a disco. "I don't have any money left," I told her.

She slid open the door to the patio. "Let's go outside."

I followed her out. We sat on the grass. It was already night. The big moon gave me shadows to watch. Felice was restless. My eye caught on the line of her shin, sharp and shining in the dark. I touched her hand, and she let me, but when I bent to kiss her, she said, "Not here," and jerked her head back towards the house.

Felice leaned and whispered to me again about Mickey's wet-rimmed glass that she pressed to bedroom walls. I didn't think Mickey was that interested in us, but Felice was not persuaded. She rubbed her heels back and forth in the grass until she had cleared two small round pits down to dirt. I rolled onto my back and gazed at the moon. It was waning, but I still felt intensity in the light. Felice started bombarding me with bits of grass. I sat up.

"Stop," I said, "I'm allergic."

Felice threw a whole handful of grass into the air. It looked to me as if she were aiming at the moon. Most of it fell back in her face. She shook it off.

"We should do something," she said again.

I blew a piece of grass off her cheek. "Like what?"

"Sabotage," she said. "Defuse the bombs."

I flopped back down on the ground again. "We're not going to do that."

She had her arms crossed tightly on her chest. I could see that she was serious. "Why not?"

I had plenty of reasons. "Because they have guns. Besides, it's too far away, and we would have no idea what to do. And I'd be too scared."

I looked at Felice's moonshadow nodding her head. "All right," she said, "something close." I snorted. She put her warm hand on my

head. Her shadow arm looked like a stem that connected her to me.

So we decided to target a neighborhood cop. Felice didn't have anything against this particular guy, except that he looked at her hard when she ran on the highway, but he was as close as I was willing to go to the armed forces. As it was, I was miserable while we talked about it. I was even more miserable once we were walking to the street where Felice knew he lived, with a paper bag full of powdery white ornamental gravel that we had scooped from around the bushes of one of Mickey's neighbors. It wasn't much past ten o'clock, but there was no one out on the streets. We walked past a yard where the sprinkler was going, and I nudged Felice.

"Remember sneaking into Mrs. Peterson's garden to eat the morning glories?"

Felice nodded, intent on the job at hand. "We were young," she said.

We left the sound of the sprinkler behind, and turned a corner into a silent street. I could see the outline of the squad car in the moonlight. Jeff had a Matchbox car just like it when he was a kid, down to the little red light on the top. Even as an envious kid sister, I'd never wanted one. We stood on the corner and peered at the house where the squad car was parked. My hands were shaking. "I can't believe I'm about to become a vandal," I whispered.

"One light on," said Felice. "Probably the bedroom. Let's go." She started walking calmly down the sidewalk towards the car, swinging the bag of gravel a little as she moved. I tried to match her pace, increasingly overwhelmed with the worry that neighbors glancing out of their windows would be able to identify me later by my fat silhouette. And I'd never be able to run as fast as Felice to get away. She didn't really need my help, so what was I doing here? We stopped beside the hedge that bordered the cop's yard. Felice and I squatted down, shielded from the window, and opened the bag. She shifted the gravel into one corner to use as a spout. The crackle of the brown paper sounded like gunshot to me. She gave my hand a squeeze. "Keep watch," she whispered. She crossed the driveway in the beam from the window, then knelt in the shadow of the car. I saw her open the gas tank and raise the bag to pour the gravel into the tank. It made a strange, soft sound, like rice being poured into a pot to boil.

I was getting fuller and fuller where I crouched, too, fighting queasiness and excitement, until I had to stand up to give the

feelings more room. Maybe I rustled the bushes, because a dog in the cop's house started barking. Felice pulled the bag to her chest, and froze there kneeling next to the rear tire. A hall light went on, then the front door swung open. I could hear the thud as a big, black labrador threw himself at the screen door. A woman in a velvety red bathrobe stood behind the screen, looking out across the yard. The dog bared his teeth, barking loud enough to wake the neighbors. The woman put her hand on his head, talking softly. She gave the yard one last look, then she shut the door. I thought that my mother would probably like her. I hadn't dared to look at Felice while the door was open, but she was stock still in the same kneeling position. She didn't move until the light went out in the hall. Then she reached for the handle of the passenger door which opened miraculously, just like the ones on Jeff's Matchbox car, except this one gave a loud creak. I was horrified — what was she doing now? She ducked her head into the car for a moment, then scrambled back to the hedge, keeping well below the line of sight from the window. She stood beside me, breathing hard, but when we looked at each other, I knew we had to get moving, because I could barely control my sudden desire to laugh.

We didn't run until we were out of sight of the house. I caught up with Felice when she stopped to dump the rest of the white gravel back at the bush where we'd gotten it. She waited until we were safely in her bedroom before she reached into the pocket of her shorts and showed me the pair of mirrored sunglasses that she'd stolen off the dash.

She put them on, and gave me her best Clint Eastwood profile. "The revenge of the earth," she muttered.

I laughed until she hissed, "Shhhsh. Mickey." It took me a long time to come down from the tension, but Felice was ready to crash. So I lay in her bed with my heart pounding, holding the edge of her pillowcase, feeling both freed and caught. She had been breathing even and slow for a long time when she reached back and pulled my arm around her, so that when I finally slept, I was holding her close.

Denise Nico Leto

## And Everything We Do?

**M**y presence in the world is my first resistance. It is when I wake up and start each day — no matter what.

Resistance is remembering. Remembering my ancestors, my herstory, all the dreams and nightmares of a lifetime and a thousand lifetimes before me. The way the world picks at this mosaic and dismantles it piece by piece until nothing is left and suddenly I am alone with no background, no context, just an assimilated tasteless broth of sadness and sameness. Resistance is claiming my ethnicity, my Sicilian and Italian/American self. Resistance is putting the mosaic back together again so what was once broken can become whole. Resistance is repair work. It takes glue and guts and an eye for detail.

Resistance is paying attention. When I am tired of it all — I want things to blur. Then I can kaleidoscope each event and if I turn it and twist it and squint enough I can find a place to breathe in between the lines of the terrible design. But it is a lie. The more I squint, the more I need to distort — the less I really know, the less I can name, the less I can resist. Resistance is paying attention to what it is that is actually happening. Right here. Right now. If I know the thing itself that is threatening then I can meet it fully and, from this place of strength, decide what to do next. Resistance is having information and access and when none exists, cut in line and make a lot of noise.

Resistance is action and movement. I have marched, rallied, lobbied, petitioned, fought, argued, organized, defended, studied, researched, defied, taught, witnessed, debated, created, and agonized. I have written, I have spoken, I have performed, I have yelled and I have raged. I have filed suit and defied suit. I have been rejected, fired, spit on, discriminated against, denied, and tried. I have loudly broken bad laws and quietly worked my way around others. I have been called names: whore, scum, unwomanly, man-hater, lefty bitch, liar, ugly, disgraceful lezzie. I have been told I was a shame, a loss, a loser. I have been told that I was abnormal, emotional, victimized, far-out. Each time I have reached down to

a place so deep and beautiful and prior to all this, that I can't stop knowing and therefore I can't stop acting on what I know.

Resistance is also rest and quiet. Resistance is when, in spite of it all, I am able to sleep. It is when I can sit quietly and write or sit quietly and watch the tomatoes in my garden grow. It is when I lie in the hammock and appreciate the way the leaves don't care where they fall. It is when my cat lies on my belly purring. It is when I practice T'ai Chi. It is when I am content for no apparent reason and laugh as if to save my life. It is when I love who I love no matter what.

Resistance is touching my lover. It is holding her hand in public. It is loving her with my eyes and the love rushes out and I can't stop it even though there is danger nearby — someone hateful or someone who can hurt us, throw rocks at us, fire us, turn us in or inside out or somehow try to silence or change us. And the love comes out of my eyes and we walk down the street fierce in our love, knowing what we know. And resistance is when we are home and are still able to love each other in body and soul. That we can peel our clothes off and caress and hold and suck and kiss and make love and come loudly and long and wet in the middle of the afternoon, the night, the war — is a miracle we have worked hard to create. This love of ours is a sublime act of resistance.

Resistance is honoring the lives and work of women. The work of our foremothers, of lesbians, of women of color, of disabled women, ethnic women, Jewish women, working class and poor women, older women — ALL of us. My first allegiance is to these lives and to this work. In the place where these lives and this work flourish, I was born, and it is here I will die.

Resistance is noticing how women are dying. Women murdered, dying of cancer, AIDS and other diseases, committing suicide. It is one thing to die, and yet another to die from having lived in this cycle of enmity, despair and destruction. Resistance is knowing that when disease strikes our bodies or someone shoots or beats us, it is not somehow our own karmic complicity that brought this on. It is the indiscriminate hand of disease and the discriminate hand of male violence that is deadly, not our thoughts or our past mistakes. It is the way we die that is the tragedy. Period.

Once a woman I loved killed herself. Since then, I notice death acutely. How it passes through my heart, how my body rages

against these kinds of deaths, how my mind seeks to somehow embrace the impossible fact that some of us are falling like flies. Since that irrevocable moment of her suicide, I notice the subtle deaths, the silences, the self-censorship, the oblique erasure, the suicide of dreams, of moments, of love. How we take ourselves and strip our spirits and internalize blame and hate and squeeze our bones into dust trying to fit into the role they would have us fit. I notice how we take the worst of these voices inside and compare ourselves to a decadent set of rules: "I am too short, fat, poor, uneducated, old, tall, unusual, ugly." Every time I hear myself doing this it is like a blunt weapon striking the soft flesh of a ripe fruit. And I stop. Resistance is noticing the way women are dying and resistance is noticing the way women are living.

Resistance is when I sit with a group of women and we talk and learn about and practice our strength. Once a friend called me "a pacifist who teaches women how to break faces." Because I believe in nonviolence and because I have taught women self-defense for years some say this is a contradiction. What I know is that my first allegiance is to women — to our lives and to our safety. So I can express my loathing of the colossal, global infrastructure of the condition of violence under which we live (the maldistribution of goods and resources, poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, classism, misogyny, ethnic prejudice, the hatred of lesbians and gays, etc.) and acts of violence (rape, beatings, hate crimes, etc.) and then discuss, in the same breath, the intricacies, mechanisms and efficacy of an eye gouge technique for self-defense. It seems clear to me that violence against women is an institutionalized, endemic, socially, politically, economically, legally condoned force that needs a well-organized, enraged, effective, empowered response.

Resistance is having choices; self-defense is about choosing to fight back in whatever way we can. I loathe guns and do not own one. Some say this is another contradiction. I don't know. Many women do own guns. Know how to use them, is all I say anymore. Being a "pacifist" is not the same as being a victim, and being a gun owner is not the same as being "Rambo." Violence against women calls for a wide range of responses and strategies. Here are some of mine: study and teach self-defense; speak out; expose it; fight it. I am well-trained and will physically, psychologically, and spiritually

defend myself when under attack. I will do anything I can to keep myself and other women safe — and the world would not recognize this “pacifist” who will shatter the hand (and the system behind it) that tries to wound her.

What is resistance? It is everything we’ve done to be here today. It is waking alive into each day, aware of how we’ve gotten this far. Tomorrow I will think of a million more ways to resist. Sometimes it’s overwhelming and I understand nothing, forget everything and have no idea who I am or what to do. The murder of 14 women in Canada, the war in the Middle East, the atrocities Anita Hill was subjected to in the Clarence Thomas hearings, the William Kennedy Smith trial, the beating of Rodney King, the verdict of not-guilty, the hourly, daily, weekly abuses, tragedies, injustices, and assaults on our being. The track record, historical and current, of heinous, genocidal moments in this country and the world seems endless. The list goes on. Resistance is when we know what is on the list. When we are convinced something else is possible.

Resistance is passion. Passion about and for ourselves, each other, this beleaguered planet. Passion that creates — resources, mailing lists, dinner, art, love, support, children, community, jobs, beauty, options. Passion that is in constant motion so that even when standing still someone somewhere is rocking the boat.

Resistance is making sure, on a daily basis, that I am patriarchy’s worst nightmare. A needle in its haystack, a burr in its sock, a storm in the middle of its eye, a raucous, seditious, billowing uprising against its malevolence. It is to make sure that I confound and challenge the ideas and laws and structures that exist to constrict life, to narrow women’s voices, to bleach and destroy women of color, to lay waste to nature.

Resistance is when we bond with, create, and recreate one another and the world. Resistance is joy. It is when I feel the sun on my face, it is when I dance just because it feels good. Resistance is when we listen to each other. When we tell stories, light candles, dream, experiment, protest, wonder, work, charge forward. It is when we rise and point and crack open. It is when we tell the truth at the moment it matters the most and at the moment it matters the least. Like a bell marking time, we strike whether or not anyone notices and hope to another woman somewhere, it rings true.



Tracy Becker

## Speak

I gladly will feed you.  
I'll offer you the roof over my head.  
But I will not remain silent for you.

I don't expect you to risk losing your job.  
I do not insist you do community work,  
volunteer at the help-line  
or put a pink triangle on your car.  
I do not ask for your political endorsement  
or require you move onto our land.

It's simple:  
All I want is for you to speak.

I don't want to hear "live and let live,"  
because what you mean is "leave me out of it."  
I invite you to acknowledge the traitor within,  
yet do everything to win her trust.  
I do not demand you publicly undress her.

I simply ask that you stand and say,  
"Yes, I am a Lesbian,  
and I am glad."

Monifa Ajanaku

## Lesbians Who Have Never Voluntarily Had Sex With Men

Since coming out fourteen years ago, I have often been perplexed as to why some Dykes successfully resisted heterosexual programming and conditioning and others didn't. I created a questionnaire to try to ascertain what some of those distinguishers may be. The respondents to this questionnaire are much more than virgin Dykes: they are resisters of one of the most entrenched, oppressive, misogynistic, power-over dynamics and schemes known to womankind in the last 5,000 years — patriarchal heterosexuality! For as long as I can remember, my basic orientation has been toward females and, for the last two decades, zealously pro-feminist. I always preferred being around females, therefore I have wondered why I didn't resist hetero-patriarchal indoctrination. I was never that male-identified, though I complied with the societal mandate of mating. Every boyfriend I had accused me of being a Lesbian before I was one, usually because I always prioritized my wimin friends over them. So, why didn't I escape this conditioning? Although I engaged in numerous sexual explorations before and during my pre-adolescent development, my overall attitudes towards sexuality remained traditional.

I also had a few same-gender flings with my girlfriends before coming out as a Lesbian. My behavior was too complex for me to understand why I never fully resisted. Is the Western American heterosexual paradigm impossible for some of us to resist? I don't know why I didn't, given my strong identification, ties and loyalty to wimin.

As a political activist for well over twenty years, I have struggled with and fought many things that were subtly and blatantly oppressive, but I didn't successfully resist heteropatriarchal conformity. I maintain that heterosexuality is not compulsory — at least for some Dykes it wasn't, but what factors made and make it compulsory for some others? How did this sexual subversiveness toward men occur? Did these wimin have a unique, intrinsic knowledge and/or ability?

All of the Lesbians that participated in this study are resisters to compulsory heterosexuality. Some of the Dykes responded that even before they knew they were Lesbians, they had no sexual interest in males and consequently resisted having sex with them. This, to them as well as myself, is the fundamental premise of being a Lesbian. Lesbians don't have sex with men!

The American society has conflicting standards and ideas about sexuality. It is puritanical in many respects and yet it utilizes sex to promote and sell almost anything and everything. American culture's patriarchal sexual programming is also paradoxical and harmful. Growing up, young girls receive many mixed and contradictory messages about sex. Some of us internalize these harmful messages, and repress our authentic sexual feelings and embrace pseudo-sexual relations with men. Others didn't affirm this model. Some view this form of resistance, defying heteropatriarchal sexual conditioning, as akin to being self-actualized warriors.

I am not implying that they, as opposed to Dykes that didn't resist, are utopian in any way, but this is an internal and powerful form of resistance. Sex role stereotyping is one of patriarchy's major tools for causing wimin to fail to be true to our deepest and most spiritual, loving, sexual feelings towards ourselves and other wimin.

I feel the environment which I grew up in reinforced the message that men are wimin's saviours and if you encounter any mistreatment from men, it is an isolated case, and the woman is viewed as the instigator. I endured much mistreatment which made the personal, social and sexual transition to becoming fully woman-identified, and discovering my Lesbianism, less difficult.

I am not suggesting that there are significant numbers of Lesbians who became Lesbians because of abuse from men (though I know there are some for whom this maltreatment, endured directly or witnessed, was a catalyst towards the discovery of Lesbianism). Lesbophobia, another powerful tool in patriarchy's arsenal, causes some of us to never become Lesbians and some of us to prolong this discovery and transition.

Often class assumptions and stereotypes are believed, such as you will never be able to make a place for yourself in the world without the financial and social protection of a man. I am sure as long as post matriarchy has existed, wimin have found the courage

to not align themselves sexually with men, and have named themselves many things to connote this.

Herstory has documented many strikes of wimin globally withholding sex from men in order to have their demands recognized and adhered to. Some names used were "strike of the womb," "sex strike," "strike of the uterus," "strike of the bedroom," "no natal for no nukes," etc.

Thinking of these wimin makes me wonder what would happen if a significant number, a critical mass of wimin, were politicized around this issue of not ever having sex with men? The entire economic, political and social structure would be altered; change would be inevitable. Wimin's oppression would cease. A united force of this magnitude would encourage men, particularly European American males, to give up their dehumanizing domination. Sex is an almighty motivator. Not having sex with men is very political, while the practice of abstaining from sex with men can have positive consequences for wimin whether they come out as Lesbians or not.

I have long advocated, both privately and publicly, united global pussy strikes as a great weapon to combat patriarchy. I proclaim this is still a viable strategy for ameliorating wimin's oppressive life condition.

The Lesbians in this study have resisted having sex with men and are trailblazers for all wimin to utilize everything in our power to effect change.

So why have some Lesbians always resisted hetero-patriarchal conditioning and some of us did not? Most of us didn't successfully resist. Those of you who have are invited to answer the questionnaire at the end of this article. A manuscript or book will be forthcoming. I greatly appreciate your time and cooperation.

The following are results of four questions taken from a preliminary sample of 40 responses.

#### Age — 39 responses

Percent			4/39	36-40	10.2%
4/39	under 25	10.2%	1/39	41-45	2.5%
19/39	25-30	48.7%	1/39	46-50	<u>2.5%</u>
10/39	31-35	25.6%	Total		99.7%

Average age is 30.12 years old. Within the 25-30 group, 8 respondents (8/39 or 20.5% of the total) were 28 years old at the time they answered.

**Ethnicity — 42 answers**

0/42 Asian	0%	2/42 Native	4.7%
0/42 African American	0%	3/42 Hispanic	7.1%
1/42 French Canadian	2.3%	5/42 Jewish	11.9%
1/42 Roumanian	2.3%	30/42 Caucasian	<u>71.4%</u>
2/42 Irish	4.7%	Total	104.4%

Some wimmin were in 2 groups, and are counted in each group, namely Irish/Native and Hispanic/white.

**Influences of Gay Men or Lesbians During Youth — 42 answers**

22/42 Yes	52%	5/42 Maybe	<u>13%</u>
15/42 No	35%	Total	100%

**Class Background — 42 answers (calculated by respondent's answer)**

0/42 Very poor	0%
0/42 Poor	0%
1/42 Working poor	2.3%
4/42 Working class	9.5%
7/42 Lower middle class	16.6%
10/42 Middle/professional (teacher, nurse, etc.; small management)	23.8%
11/42 Upper middle class (lawyers, architects, upper management)	26.1%
3/42 Upper, wealthy, heirs	<u>7.1%</u>
Total	85.4%

**Roles — 42 Questions answered**

26/42 Neither; or don't know; or both; or called one but feel other	61.9%
7/42 Femme; or femme but really neutral; or dress butch but really feel femme	16.6%
20/42 Butch; or seen as butch; or others called her butch but she feels neutral	<u>47.6%</u>
Total	126.1%

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON  
LESBIANS WHO HAVE NEVER VOLUNTARILY HAD SEX WITH MEN

PLEASE RETURN (Researcher is lesbian - Lesbians only may copy this questionnaire and give to eligible friends)

DIRECTIONS: Answer questions requiring brief responses on this page and use reverse side for more extensive responses. Additional sheets ok if necessary. (Confidentiality protected)

- 1. Name/pseudonym; AND ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Birthdate - city/state/country where raised \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Are you an only child? \_\_\_\_\_ What number are you in the sibling order? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. What was/is your family's religion? If atheist or agnostic, please indicate. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Were you raised by both parents and did your mother work outside the home? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Describe your class background in at least one or more paragraphs (on back please)

7. How long have you been a practicing lesbian? \_\_\_\_\_ What age were you when you emotionally or psychologically became conscious of being a lesbian, whether you were a practicing lesbian or not?

8. Total length of time you have identified as a lesbian and/or named and referred to yourself as a lesbian? \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What are some of the major reasons why you feel you have never engaged in sex with men?

10. How have you explored your sexuality? (Use back please)

11. What were your thoughts and experiences regarding sex before adolescence? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What were your sexual fantasies prior to identification as a lesbian and after? Were men predominant sometimes, or women predominant sometimes, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Have you ever identified as femme or butch? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, which and why? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Please indicate any other information regarding your sexuality that you feel is relevant pertaining to your abstinence of sex with men. (Use back please.)

15. What assumptions did you make that caused you NOT to respond to heterosexuality, as opposed to your siblings, cousins, peers, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Were there visible lesbians or gay men you were exposed to during your early to late maturation periods? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, did you have personal contact with them? \_\_\_\_\_ How did they, or did they not, influence you?

PLEASE RETURN TO: RESEARCH/ P.O. BOX 424796/ SAN FRAN, CA. 94102-9991

Janet/Giovanna Capone

## Rape and Empowerment: Three Pictures

1. **I** have a dream  
in which men  
roam the streets  
Their souls are gone.  
They are programmed cyborgs  
relentless and homicidal  
they grab at every woman in sight.  
In my sleep  
the statistics swim in my head:  
one in three women  
will be raped.  
That's one of us  
every sixty seconds.  
In my dream we are cogs  
in a pinball game  
waiting, hoping we won't get hit  
while the points keep ringing up  
in their favor.
2. I have a dream  
in which I'm asking  
pleading with a woman I love  
to stay with me through the night  
just this one night.  
I'm so scared.  
Tonight is the night  
a man I don't know well  
said he would come to my house  
and kill me.  
He's omniscient  
and knows  
where I live.

3. I have a dream  
in which I'm dressed  
from head to toe  
in black leather.  
I have numerous hatchets  
hanging in sheaths  
from my black vest.  
They are silvery sharp axes  
polished and gleaming.  
The moment I see them  
I remember  
I'm an expert  
with blades.  
I take them out  
in twos and fours,  
swing them in graceful, rapid arcs.  
I step forward, a woman gyro.  
I make the wind around me  
whistle.



*Billie Miracle*

*untitled*

Billie Miracle



Kelly Jean Cogswell

## Sonnets for God

I.

God never did a goddamn thing for me  
 in all those years of mute sacrifice,  
 and dimes to Lottie Moon\*. I turned my cheek  
 for Him, to every eager knife.  
 I prayed for boys who yelled, "Fat Ass,"  
 "Bitch," and pinched my butt at school.  
 It was a cross to bear, not harass-  
 ment, but a trial to learn control  
 of anger, fear, and that man in Catholic  
 Spain — molester, rapist. I prayed for him,  
 then prayed to forget the feel of his prick  
 forced into my hand. I didn't. God never did  
 a goddamn thing for me. He died?! Tough shit.  
 I've taken nails through my hand — and lived.

II.

I've taken nails through the hand and lived  
 despite the stigma at parties, blood  
 in the potato chips, on the right hands of Christians  
 who hate my scars, and hold out latex gloves  
 like fellowship. There are niceties to suffering.  
 I want gore, a hatchet. I want to be free  
 to chop off limbs, old lumber eased  
 from rotting trees. I'm gonna build me  
 a house of bloody hands, praying, groping,  
 bloody hands. No gloves. I will shut  
 saints up in it. This ark will seem like home,  
 or church. We could applaud martyrs cut  
 in silent shreds. Screaming, I refuse to die,  
 I wave to passing cars. I stay alive.

III.

I wave to passing cars. I stay alive.  
I wait for Sunday when they'll let me out  
this walled up bone-yard. I've survived.  
Beyond the edge of dream, I moan; I howl.  
The stone door vibrates with my pain. Look!  
It rolls away. I won't hang out — a side  
show, soap opera, damaged goods,  
a woman — and let those bastards bind  
me here again, empty handed, thighs  
chained open for ghosts to walk between.  
No cars stop. I won't submit to lies  
or hunger. I'll change stone to bread, eat  
my fill. I'm sick of gnawing bones and pain.  
I'm gonna take off. Fly away.

IV.

I'm gonna take off. Fly away  
to somewhere, California, the sea  
with sun a golden egg ablaze  
and tides like Bach repeated endlessly,  
but infinitely new against the grave  
faces of fishermen. I want to rest  
in peace, no swords or crosses, just waves.  
I want to die like everybody else.  
But years of visions in the desert where  
sand shimmers and twists like rivers in the wind  
and bones preach and miracles haunt the unwary  
like suicides, changed me. I can't fish  
and sleep forever in the sun. I fly  
beyond obedience. I blast through sky.

## V.

Beyond obedience, I blast through sky  
 like an A-bomb, lear jet, chariot, angel, God.  
 On a good day, I mimic God; I dive  
 between promises, winged heiress of *ought*,  
 and *should*, and *get your feet off my chair*,  
*don't shit in my yard. Cover your head,*  
*boobs, feet, cunt. How dare*  
*you not wear panties, stockings, bra. You better*  
*watch yourself.* Death is dead. Words  
 trail from my mouth like globs of spit  
 and malediction. I'm not scared of worms  
 or rods that float slo-mo in rain-bowed mist,  
 hell, or condemnation. I've died and lived  
 to tell the truth. I've repented sin.

## VI.

To tell the truth — I've repented sin  
 like silence. Give me cymbals, sirens, horns  
 erasing death, proclaiming glory. Then  
 in triumph, *thou shalt not's* shall be reborn  
 as *yes! yes!* I will learn to forget  
 God. God is like my father, slow  
 to help, and full of stupid jokes, gin.  
 Or like my mom. The woman won't  
 be pleased. Her ideals change with the tide,  
 or washing machine cycle. I wanted to scream,  
 explode, celebrate my imperfections, die.  
 Too bad I never did. I got redeemed.  
 I learned to love my cross, smile, nod.  
 I married Silence like nuns marry God.

VII.

I married Silence like nuns marry God.  
I reclaim my voice. Word by word,  
I reclaim my cunt, my hands, my body—  
stubborn thighs. I divorce the bastard  
that condemned me to repeat His will,  
not mine, that subtle violence, passion played  
out. I'll skip the supper, recant the real  
live thorns and blood. Pricks are every place.  
I carry a blade. I begin with No.  
I refuse to nod my head and smile.  
When someone yokes his weight around my throat —  
I scream; I strike out with my knife.  
I declare myself — Alive! I rage to see  
all the goddamn things god did for me.

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The form of the poem itself — my “crown” of sonnets— is partially a dialogue with John Donne and others who used this particular form of seven interlocking sonnets to express religious devotion. I intended my use of the form to be a challenge, a subversion.

\*Note to Sonnet I.: Lottie Moon refers to the Southern Baptist Foreign Missionary fund named after a woman missionary to China

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 Review

*The Montreal Massacre*, edited by Louise Malette and Marie Chalouh, translated by Marlene Wildeiman. gynergy books, 1991 (P.O. Box 2023, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, C1A 7N7, \$12.95)

### A Moment of No Silence

When I read mainstream newspapers, I usually read the stories about women being raped or murdered. I feel like I need to know. At the same time, it feels wrong to read them, like I'm participating in the absurd voyeurism of this culture that gives rise to shows like America's Most Wanted. I know that reading reports of violence makes me feel more afraid and more powerless. Yet skipping them doesn't feel right either: wouldn't that be saying it doesn't matter, or refusing to recognize the violence of American culture?

I've wondered if there was a way that specific acts of violence against women could be talked about that would be more helpful, that would be informative and would empower people to take action to end violence and support its victims. But the topic has been so hard for me to think about that I've never really tried very hard.

So I was intrigued to hear of the collection of writings about the December 6, 1989 massacre of women at the University of Montreal's school of engineering, hoping the women who put the book together had figured out helpful ways to talk about this specific and horrifying episode of violence against women.

Actually, this massacre was the only time I can recall having initiated a political action as a result of reading media reports of violence. With two other women, I organized a vigil protesting the deaths and all violence against women. We stood at a busy intersection in commute traffic with signs reading "Feminism cannot be killed," "Feminism is alive in Montreal," "Mourn and organize." But that vigil had felt like a fairly empty attempt to "do something," and had left me knowing it was nowhere near enough. I hoped that *The Montreal Massacre* would tell me about other acts of protest women had organized, and would give me ideas for responses to future violence or—better yet—ideas for preventing future violence.

I had a hard time getting around to reading the book. At the same time I wanted help figuring out how to think about the day when a man literally tried to murder feminism, I didn't want to

replay the scene in my head. That familiar wanting-to-know/not-wanting-to-know tug-of-war raged inside me. But I finally did read the book, thanks to my commitment to review it here. I was surprised to find that there were only a few brief moments when the writers carried the reader back into the Polytechnique, where the massacre occurred. There seemed to be a consensus that flashing back to those scenes doesn't help us understand them or prevent them from happening again. (Perhaps, though, this wasn't so much consensus of the contributors as an editing decision.)

The collection is quite different from typical feminist anthologies in several ways. First, the subject is more narrowly defined. Though nearly all the writings touched on broader issues including violence against women, oppression, and worldwide injustice, each had the Montreal massacre at its base. Second, the book was compiled in large part from existing writings about the massacre. Many were reprinted letters to the editor. As a result, ideas were repeated frequently and I found glaring omissions. These may be a result of the editors' commitment to timely publication of the book following the massacre. (The book was originally published in French a year earlier.) Third, though the book jacket promises a book filled with "feminist voices," a few of the entries were written by men and men were widely quoted.

Ordinarily, reading a collection, I am most interested in the ways the voices differ. But here, as I searched for a satisfactory response to the massacre, it was the consensus of analysis that most interested me: We must not accept acts of violence as a part of everyday life. Yet, at the same time, we must recognize that this act was not an isolated incident, but that "...there's a connection to be made between this extreme manifestation and the aura of animosity which tar-nishes the everyday confrontations of men and women."<sup>1</sup> Or, more bluntly, "[This] act was a condensed version of the same old shit."<sup>2</sup>

The massacre of women at the Polytechnique was unique only in that the murderer specifically stated (in his suicide note<sup>3</sup>) that his violence was political by specifying that feminists were his target. While this should have helped the public at large to understand the nature of violence against women, the mainstream media, particularly the French language media, made sure such analysis was omitted from coverage of the massacre. In fact, women—their words, their analysis, their grief and horror and fury, their ideas about how to make this massacre the last—were once again silenced by the media and the Church in the aftermath of the killings.

One male political leader "spoke of 'silence' as the only way to commemorate this tragedy."<sup>4</sup> Attempts made by feminists to put the massacre into broader perspective were repeatedly shunned as attempts to take advantage of the tragedy to advance political goals.

Meanwhile, the media claimed not to understand how it could be that only women were killed. But that lack of understanding was no accident. "We [as a culture] don't understand, because if we were to understand, we would know that the man who pulled that trigger was not alone."<sup>5</sup> "We were above all not to say that in every male a Marc Lépine<sup>6</sup> could be found lying dormant..."<sup>7</sup>

In order to define the murderer as "other," the media immediately labeled him "a raving madman" despite the premeditation of his rampage and his acquaintances' descriptions of him as "average." (Though many writers touched on the issue of the "sanity" of the murderer, radical analysis of this question was missing.)

While the killing of the women at the Polytechnique was tragic, these women were no more nor less important than others who have been victimized. "Seen against the backdrop of other horrors in the world and against the incalculable number of victims of all sorts of violence, [these 14 women are] a mere drop of water in the ocean—but a drop that happened to splash us in the eye."<sup>8</sup> "I do not wish to understate the tragedy of the deaths of those fourteen women. But I mourn their deaths as I do the deaths of relatively anonymous women who are raped and murdered, or as I would if Lépine had gunned down fourteen strippers, bag ladies, or secretaries instead of fourteen aspiring engineers."<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

Though parts of this consensus were discussed by most of the writers, a few differing analyses were included. Marie Lavigne, President of the Council on the Status of Women, wrote what must be recognized as anti-feminist, "[Making] this tragedy symbolic of the relationship between men and women in our society... would be to suggest that the progress made by Quebec women during this past century... was all done in an atmosphere of violence."<sup>10</sup>

The strengths of the book are in the righteous anger of many of the writers, the acknowledgment by the editors that women, "ordinary" women, are the experts on misogyny and violence against women, and the parallel claim of the contributors to women's right to interpret events such as the massacre.

It was the emotion in the book that affected me most, and the connecting of this event to other events in the lives of women. I

wished for more of both. (I wondered if the editors made a decision to play down emotion because men so often belittle women for having it, expressing it, taking it seriously.) While contributors drew repeated parallels to other forms of sexism/misogyny/patriarchal violence, there were very few stories about women's own experiences and how their lives were affected by the massacre. If this book was intended for a feminist readership, that's probably fine: we've heard stories like that before. But if the book was written for pre-feminists or non-feminists or even anti-feminists, then more personal experiences might help readers' understanding of the ideas and analysis the book offers.

I was especially moved by the piece called "A Little Story of Censorship,"<sup>11</sup> in which letters between two women following the massacre tell the story of one of the women's being threatened with violence when she speaks about what has happened.

Contempt for feminists, familiar to the contributors when it was violently expressed at the Polytechnique, grew more familiar in the period following the massacre. "The public debate which followed the tragedy demonstrated beyond a doubt that a great many men hate feminists. I'm not talking only about those men who wrote articles, gave interviews, or swamped the open line shows, but also about those who, in ordinary conversations, expressed their contempt for feminists and feminism. The gunman killed fourteen women, but in his wake thousands of men symbolically killed all feminists."<sup>12</sup>

I appreciated tidbits of analysis offered by contributors, particularly the following one about the question of whether all men can be blamed for the acts of individual men: "...[M]isogyny, phallogocentrism, and ordinary sexism form such a cohesive politico-cultural whole that it is difficult to identify each man's actual participation in the oppression of women. The reasonable doubt each man benefits from has, as a consequence, the invalidation of every generalization that can be made about men's behaviour toward women, and thus it reinforces the presumed innocence of them all."<sup>13</sup>

Contributors generally took care not to blame men in general in the wake of the Polytechnique violence. No one even asked about the men who followed the killer's orders to leave the room during the massacre.

Several writers, however, discussed reports that women victims were heard to plead that they were not feminists. Some seemed angry at the victims for their words, though none directly blamed



them. "What, in fact, did they actually mean to say? Did they want to dissociate themselves from women who fight against unjust laws, against violence against women, against the degradation of women's image? Did they want to make it clear they were not lesbians, that they were not against men? Did they think, as the media would have us believe, that feminists are a category of undesirable women whose perspective is narrow and partisan, whose words are bitter and excessive...?"<sup>14</sup>

No one suggested that those words may have been fabricated by the media. More importantly, no one suggested that women's choice to say them to an armed man may have been a self-defense strategy. I wish that *Montreal Massacre* had included stories of what the women did to try to survive. Maybe that information was unavailable. I wished for the voices of some of the women who did survive in the room that day (13 were injured in addition to the 14 killed). The book was dedicated to "the memory of the victims," but they were barely spoken about. I suppose this is appropriate to the theme of this massacre being seen in context of the continuum of violence against women. Still, I wished for a sense of the individual women whose lives were shattered that day. Who were they besides women who wanted to become engineers?<sup>15</sup> Were any of them women of color? Lesbians?

Similarly, the book identified contributors of previously unpublished writings only by their occupations (writer, engineer, architect, psychoanalyst, acupuncturist, activist), making it impossible for me as a reader to discern whether the commentary offered represented the breadth of the women's community.

I was jarred by a couple of ideas repeated in the book. One was that those murdered were killed "because they were women." This is a construction that has bothered me in other contexts, too. It was not their gender that got them killed; it was misogyny. Micheline Dumont stated it well when she wrote that we are "despised collectively as women."<sup>16</sup>

Several contributors, in writing of their outrage that the sexist/misogynist nature of the crime was ignored by the media, offered comparisons such as, "[I]f the killer had picked out a visible minority, everyone would have cried racism..."<sup>17</sup> While it is true that it's sometimes helpful to learn about one form of oppression from what we know about another, I am tired of white people using this comparison as if racism were always sufficiently understood and responded to by whites.

I wanted *The Montreal Massacre* to give me an understanding of what happened after the massacre in Quebec. I learned that men tried to prevent women from speaking at a demonstration sponsored by two women's groups. I learned that, despite the media's attempt to cloud the message, some Canadian women discovered it and began to understand violence against women in new ways. I learned that, while feminists tried to issue a call to action to end violence, no major changes have occurred following the massacre.

I was disappointed by the book's failure to spur readers to action. When individual contributors suggested actions that women or men take as a response to the massacre, the ideas were not particularly creative, inspiring, or new.

I wanted *The Montreal Massacre* to pioneer a new way of speaking about violence against women that shared information, offered feminist analysis and the impetus to spur women to action to stop all violence. At the same time, I feel concerned about our tendency to be moved to action most effectively in response to horror and injustice. In order to have a pro-active movement that goes beyond the politics of response, the politics of saying "no," we must find other ways to inspire/incite ourselves and each other.

— Emily Levy

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Bérard, p.77.

<sup>2</sup> Paula Sypnowich, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in the English edition of the book, after much debate.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed by Francine Pelletier, p.36.

<sup>5</sup> Mireille Brais, p.66.

<sup>6</sup> The murderer.

<sup>7</sup> Armande Saint-Jean, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Gloria Escomel, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Sypnowich, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Ginette Bastien and René Ouimet, pp. 82-86.

<sup>12</sup> Escomel, pp. 132-133.

<sup>13</sup> Nicole Brossard, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Brossard, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Nearly all of the victims were engineering students.

<sup>16</sup> p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Élane Audet, p. 44.

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Letters

Dear Editors,

Thank you for your retrospective issue. I know there are women who thought the retrospective was redundant, because they had read all the back issues, but I think it was very important at this time. You see, I am 22 years old. I was six when the first issue of SW came out. The retrospective gave me a chance to catch up on 15 years of lesbian-feminist thought. I find that many groups, queer or feminist, forget to include young people. Often, we join groups and find ourselves excluded by the groups' assumptions of a common pool of knowledge about which we've never been taught. I'm sure 43/44 was invaluable to many young lesbians.

I just got your issue about class. It couldn't have come at a better time, as I am in the midst of trying to educate myself about how class has affected my life, an education the world around me seems to be doing everything in its power to thwart. I am trying to find a name for myself as I stand in the structure of class. But as I heard the voices of the women in the articles, I was confused. I understand the importance of retaining the power of a true name by refusing to allow it to be misapplied, but I came away feeling that I knew plenty about what lower-class did not mean, but very little about what it was. In the area where my parents live, there is a lower-class subdivision, a middle-class and a wealthy-class, butting up against each other. The boundaries between them are very clear. But the boundaries I carry inside are not. From birth to 10, it was welfare and food stamps. From 10 to 12 it was free lunch. Then my mother got married and it was off to the middle-class suburbs, where, due to the luck of school zoning, I received an upper-class education and some upper-class prejudices. So what name do I give myself? Am I mixed-class? What a strange term. The divisions in my life are confused and jumbled, difficult to separate, but they do not *mix*. How much right do I have to claim solidarity with the women whose anger so thrilled and frightened me? I have no answer. I only hope that these questions will continue to be explored, as issues of mixed-race heritage and passing have. Please, let's not make this discussion of class the last.

— Roxann McGlumphy

Dear Editors,

We are receiving, much to our delight, some issues of Sinister Wisdom here at our state prison facility in central Pa.

Please accept our heartfelt gratitude for this kind — *understanding* — gesture. Our prison library closely follows those Smithsonian exhibits on the accouterments of ancient civilizations and god knows we never get real feminist and lesbian prose! Our treasured friend Robin Morgan always sends us magazines and books, but other than her, you are the only ones to remember us. Being loved and remembered in this desolate place means everything!

Allow me to relate an interesting and pathetic true story about how your "Lesbians and Class" issue "got around" one night.

Our prison facility is an old structure and even though the rooms were designed to hold one, every room houses two women. As you could well imagine, this process of living with a roommate requires the most delicate of balances. When roommates do not mesh with one another, then one creates a list of faults about the defective person and seeks relief from the prison administration.

While I was at work one day in January, my roommate decided that she wanted to live alone and proceeded to prove my obvious *undesirability* as an inmate. She took the copy of "Lesbians and Class" and gave it to the correctional officer claiming that I had left it under her pillow in an effort to recruit her as a lesbian. She figured the obvious wording on the cover — *lesbian* — would be a quick expedient, eliminating the reams of paperwork usually involved in room changes. When every level of staff person was present at my arrival home from my office, I knew something sensational was up in my housing unit. People were looking at me with dismay, others with a mixture of respect and avant garde permissiveness, and a band of others was sorely disappointed.

It took me hours to deduce — from a battery of questions — what went on in my housing unit and where on earth was my book? It seems that the unknowing officer called every authority she could to advise her on how to handle this. *Every type of prison authority came over to examine the evidence. All were denied the much expected catharsis.* The issue was not at all about sexuality but rather about people and the defective socialization process we all grow

up with. To me, the "Lesbians and Class" issue was more about equity within a closed and privately held community — or perhaps it was an urgent request for an unclosed community and an open affirmation of all of us that claim to be female. At no point in the prose was the issue about lesbian fucking.

I did get my book back at about 9:30 that night — I also was told to pack my room because I was moving. I smiled sweetly at the corrections officer and slowly lifted my shirt to reveal my belly and chest. I said, "So sorry, ma'am, but I'm not moving anywhere — I have the chicken pox!" My room — my roommate and myself — were in quarantine.

It is fascinating to note that in my room at the time were copies of *Curious Wine*, *The Price of Salt*, and an anthology, *Lesbians at Midlife* which is as sacred to me as is the New Testament to Christians. My roommate had plenty to go on to fabricate a decent lie, but not enough sense to do a moment's investigative research before entering the old battlefield.

I still have the same *homophobic* roommate and very fortunately for me I have the joy and delight of a *special friend* who lives in another housing unit at the prison. One of the many rules here is the *no physical contact clause*, so it is very rare that there is anything that even purports to be love-making in Muncy.

And, my guess would be, that if I were to find private time alone with my *cherished partner and friend* we would most probably just hold one another and cry. There is no assuaging the abject horror of prison, least of all by an act of sex.

Being lesbian at Muncy means awareness of all women and their suffering, even my homophobic roommate. It means a knowing look exchanged between survivors. More than anything it means *self affirmation* in a world that is still horribly patriarchal — still 100% male abusive.

Since you were kind enough to share Sinister Wisdom with me here at prison, I thought it only proper to share this true cross-section of institutional life with you.

In Sisterhood,  
Judith Wagner

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 Contributors' Notes

**Amber Katherine:** I'm a white middle-class dyke. I'm occasionally easy-going, and I enjoy hanging out with my friends and being philosophical.

**barbara findlay** is a 43-year-old white lesbian lawyer who works on issues of racism, sexism and homophobia. She says her greatest strength is also her greatest weakness.

**BillieMiracle** is a 48-year-old Euro-American who has lived on women's land in southern Oregon for the past 18 years. She is a visual artist working in pastels, acrylics, woodblock printmaking, and nature installation. Her current project is the development of a women's studio for arts and expression. Please write her for more information.

**Dawn A. Rudd:** I am a 29 year old artist, activist, poet and healing warrior woman, committed to truth and integrity. I believe women are the healers and saviors of this planet, with the power to transform our lives and the lives of others through vision, love and determination. I am proud to be a woman, proud to be of African and Native American descent and determined to share all that I am with my communities. My creativity is a celebration of my love, my spirit and my diversity.

**Denise Nico Leto** is a lesbian activist, poet, writer, teacher, t'ai chi practitioner and a working class Sicilian-Italian/American rebel and more.

**Diane F. Germain:** I am a French-American Feminist-Lesbian psychiatric social worker who recently concluded a strength group for *Women Survivors of Incest and/or Childhood Molest* which was five years running. I was arrested and jailed for protesting the objectification of women in the "Myth CaliPORNia Kontest" in 1989. I create cartoons, written humor and computer clipart as a hedge against the misogyny of heterosexist phallogocentric patriarchy and to tickle the Lesbians.

**Emily Levy:** I am a feminist. I have had dreams of being forced by Nazis or the KKK to state whether I am a Jew, a lesbian, one who has survived incest. Dreams in which I've known that my answer will determine whether I live or die. In my dreams, my choice is clear, and I proudly state my identities. But if I were awake, I'm not always sure what I would do.

**Irena Klepfisz** is the author of *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue — Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)* and *Dreams of an Insomniac — Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes* (8th Mountain Press).

**Janet/Giovanna Capone:** I identify as Olive, neither white nor of color. I'm a working class poet and fiction writer of Neapolitan descent. I was raised in New York, and now live in Oakland. I co-edited (with Denise Leto) *Sinister Wisdom* #41 on Italian American Women: *Il Viaggio Delle Donne*, have been published in various dyke journals, and am completing my first novel, *Olive and Lavender*. For me, writing is a constant act of resistance, one which I undertake while working a 40 hour a week job. In everything I write, I grab back chunks of who I am.

**Janice Gutman** — I live in Seattle and drive a school bus. Giving this speech made me realize I have something to say and I'm glad someone wants to hear it.

**Janice Hansen** is currently represented by galleries in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in *Connecting Link*, and been reviewed in *The Trenton Times* (NJ), *Washington Heights Citizen* (NYC) and *The Star Ledger* (NJ). She works in watercolor and pen & ink.

**Jasmine Marah:** (working poor) enigmatic, eclectic, elastic, eccentric, enthusiastic, fat, forty-five, furious fotomaker, gardener.

**Joanna Kadi** is a working-class, Arab-Canadian, able-bodied lesbian feminist. She lives with her lover Jan, a dog named Grace, and Fury and Orlando, two cats who bear no resemblance to those portrayed in the story.

**Jo Ann Starr** is fifty-two and has been in prison ten years. When she gets out (anytime between next August and May 1997), she hopes to work with abused women in the Los Angeles area — if you know of such groups, write her c/o *Sinister Wisdom*.

**Kadeth Pozzesi:** I'm 33 years old, my name means solar eclipse, and I'm just trying to get along in the world as best I can.

**Kären E. Johansson** is a mid-forties lesbian, a mother of two children, a companion to her lover and partner, hard at work blending her art, her politics, and her poetry. She has been living, thinking and breathing in the Santa Cruz area for 17 years.

**Kathleen DeBold** is a dyke cartoonist and puzzle-maker. Her "Word-gaymes" are regularly featured in Lesbian and Gay publications. Her cartoons have been published in *The Lambda Book Report*, *Women's Review of Books* and *Lesbian Contradiction*, and will be included in the upcoming *The Book of Love* and *Women's Glibber*. She lives in a generic suburb with her lover of 18 years, author Barbara Johnson.

**Kathleen O'Donnell:** I'm a 38 year old european american dyke who has worked as an electronics assembler, an organizer, a cook, an editor, and a data miner. My lover z, friends, cats, activism, science

fiction, chocolate, nature and poetry keep me going. I keep telling myself that the backlash against women, queers, poor people and people of color happened because we really gained some ground — it hasn't helped much in facing the daily losses.

**Kelly J. Cogswell:** I am a queer, disabled native of Louisville, Kentucky, and a current, if somewhat reluctant, resident of New York City. My hobbies are sorting through disability and social services paper work and cross-country skiing (not). I've been published in *The Cincinnati Poetry Review*, *Wayne State Poetry Review*, *The Khumba Times* and *Now and Then*. My fondest desires are to publish a collection of "sick" poetry and art, and to meet Dorothy Allison.

**LA Dyer** — a 37 yr. old Appalachian truth seeker, living briefly in San Francisco — a spiritual separatist — the woods and mountains my heart. Parents were/are mill-workers who identify as white, yet their dark blood inspires me: Creek/Cherokee/Black Irish/Latin lineage — raised in hillbilly culture. I have long questioned Spirit, and sunk deep in existential angst, wounded and confused from early childhood exorcisms by Christian fundamentalists — silenced for many years. But no more. Now I drum, and chant, and howl my songs under the moon — and dream of days where many wimmin remember their wholeness. Through writing I am freed. I am grateful.

**Laura Whitehorn** is a revolutionary anti-imperialist lesbian political prisoner, an anti-zionist Jew, and a lesbian. Born in NY in 1945, she is in the 8th year of a 23-year sentence for fighting white supremacy, resisting the government's colonialist practices, and for bombing the u.s. capitol after the invasion of Grenada and shelling of Beirut in 1983 (the "Resistance Conspiracy Case"). She remains politically active, working to fight AIDS in prison (and was recently transferred after participating in a demonstration against police violence at the federal women's prison in Lexington, KY).

**Lenore Baeli Wang's** work can be found in *The Kelsey Review*, *Venture*, *la bella figura*, *VIA*, *Calyx*, and *Footwork: The Paterson Literary Review*. She has written a play, "Phebe and Rosalind," a love story based on characters from "As You Like It," which she is trying to get produced. She is completing books of essays and poems begun during a residency at the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming.

**Lisa Kenney:** I am, among other things, a graduate student living in San Francisco, doing my best to "walk the talk." This is my first published work.

**Monifa Ajanaku:** a believer in the potential revolutionary spirit of virtuous women to seek the essence of all truth that exists and therefore effect an invincible sisterhood which manifests justice and peace on the planet.



**Naomi Guilbert:** I am Sansei (third generation Japanese Canadian) of mixed parentage — my father is French Canadian, my mother is Japanese Canadian. I live and write in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Sauda (Lillian) Burch:** I am a Black, nappyheaded dyke transport from Chicago making my way in Oakland, CA. I am a writer and activist on my return trip to the Mother. I edit regularly for *Sinister Wisdom* as well as *Aché: A Black Lesbian Journal*. I am currently working on a novel, most of which is being written as I sleep.

**Sheila Gilhooly** is a 41-year-old white lesbian printer who co-produced *Still Sane* with Persimmon Blackbridge. She says living well is the best revenge.

**Susan Rosenberg** is an anti-imperialist political prisoner and lesbian who spent two years at the Lexington High Security Unit and is currently in the Maximum Security Unit at Marianna with other women political prisoners.

**Susan Stinson** is a writer and fat liberation activist who frequently performs her work. Her fiction and poetry is forthcoming in an anthology on *Lesbian Culture* from the Crossing Press, *Sister/Stranger* from Sidewalk Revolution Press, and *Tuesday Night* from the Valley Lesbian Writers Group. She lives in Easthampton, MA, where she is at work on a novel, *Martha Moody*.

**Terri Fredlund** is a 35-year-old Euro-American, working class lesbian with strong nomadic tendencies. She has been active in wimmin's resistance camps and in the wimmin's self defense movements in Germany and the U.S. since 1981. She is involved in the politics of various wimmin's projects wherever she goes. She has lived legally and illegally in various places, both indoors and in a vehicle. She is now in the Bay Area for a longer stay.

**Terry McClain** is a mixed media artist with a background in fiber. She is currently relocating to Oregon to pursue an MFA.

**Toni L. Cassista:** I'm an activist for the lesbian/gay community, for the women's community, for the senior community and for the fat dyke community. If I could have anything I wanted it would be a job of my own design where I am paid what I am worth and a home.

**Tracy Becker:** I'm a 23-year-old Ohio native who grew up in North Carolina. I now live in Durham/Chapel Hill where I work as a copy editor for a newspaper and spend my free time biking and writing, not necessarily in that order. My work has appeared in *Bay Windows* and *The Church-Wellesley Review*.

**Xenia** is a Russian photographer who has worked for the Kremlin and now devotes her creative spirit to capitalistic portraiture work at K-Mart.

## Announcements and Classified Ads \_\_\_\_\_

### PUBLICATIONS

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

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

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

*FRONTIERS: A JOURNAL OF WOMEN'S STUDIES* has changed its address to: Room 2142, Mesa Vista Hall, Univ. of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131

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

*GIRLJOCK'* zine can be got through POB 2533, Berkeley, CA 94702.

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

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

### CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

**BLACK LESBIAN CULTURE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE** — Putting all “correctness” aside, let’s be honest and claim ALL we are, have been and will be for centuries! All and every form (inc.: bios, herstory, songs, jokes, rumors, anecdotes, fashion, art, organizations, bars, radical & separatist mat., etc.) welcome. Guidelines, info: SASE to Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, running deadline.

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

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

**EATING OUT** — fiction, erotic fantasy, true-to-life experiences, poetry, essays, recipes — the fun stuff — for lesbian anthology on "eating out" while dining in. Women of color, big, physically challenged and fun women encouraged to apply. Send SASE to: N. Landers, 3717 W. Cermak Rd., Chicago, IL 60623 for guidelines, info.

**BY AND ABOUT WOMEN WITH FACIAL HAIR** — all forms sought by bearded lesbian: presenting ourselves, pride/shame, self acceptance, interactions, how class, family, age, race, sexual identity affect our decisions, writing by women of all choices (bleach, shave, trim, grow, remove, etc.). Send w/ SASE to: Lyn Staack, POB 239, Hartford, VT 05047.

**BROTHER-SISTER INCEST** — any form of work on paper on our brothers' inability to keep their hands and organs away from us. Pseudonyms can be used. Send with SASE to: Risa Shaw, POB 5723, Takoma Park, MD 20913-0723.

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

**LIKE WRITING ABOUT WOMEN? WE NEED YOUR STORIES!** LAVENDER LIFE, 215 Cleveland Ave., Endicott, NY 13760.

**WOMAN OF POWER** — all forms except poetry for #26 on "Language" (deadline March 1, 1992). Query: POB 2785, Orleans, MA 02653.

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

## EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/FESTIVALS

**AUSTRALIAN LESBIAN FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE**, Oct. 1993. Write POB 985, Fremantle, Western Australia 6160 for info.

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

LAVENDER L.E.A.F. is the Lesbian Emergency Action Fund of money anonymously available to any S.F. or Alameda County (CA) lesbian of poverty or working class background who needs it. Send checks, queries to: L. Leaf, POB 20921, Oakland, CA 94620. INTERNATIONAL MARCH on the UN to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People, June 26, 1994, called by the International Lesbian and Gay Assoc. (ILGA) & U.S. organizers Stonewall 25. US org. meeting Jan. 15-17 in Dallas. Much more info: Stonewall 25, 208 W. 13th St., NYC, NY 10011-7799.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON, April 25, 1993 for Lesbian, Gay & Bi Equal Rights & Liberation. To register, get info, volunteer, donate: 1012 14th St. NW #705, Washington, DC 20005, 1-800-832-2889.

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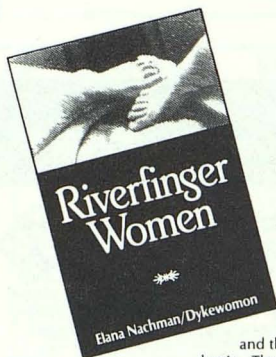
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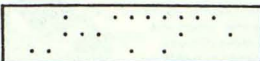
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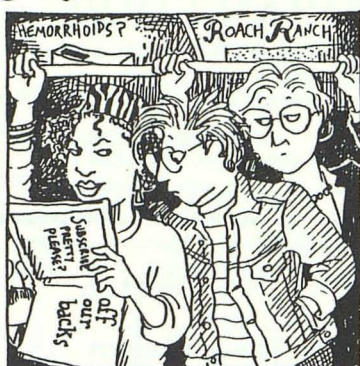
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