

sinister wisdom 52



Allies



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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

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

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 Notes for a Magazine

Correcting the Herstorical Record

Since the beginning of 1991, Caryatis Cardea's work on *Sinister Wisdom* changed from hard-working volunteer to co-editor. From the Retrospective (#42/43) on, she shared all the work with me from writing difficult, detailed editorial letters to picking up and coping with the mail to typing the issues. Many dykes have put their energy into *Sinister Wisdom* and the journal never would have come out without their participation — we've tried to acknowledge their contributions accurately on the inside front covers. But Caryatis has been an equal partner in all decision-making around the magazine in the last three years, every day, and has taken over full responsibility for the magazine on two occasions when I left for two months. That I let her work go unrecognized during this time is a mark of my classism. We were both doing the same work, but I've been getting the credit. In truth, I've been appropriating her labor within a hierarchical structure, for which I cannot apologize deeply enough to her and to you.

With this issue, she is resigning from that co-editorship. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with Caryatis on *Sinister Wisdom* since 1988, among the most productive, engaging work relationships that I've ever had. Work is one of the ways I define my self and self-worth in the world — that I could miss how important that recognition would be to a lesbian close to me has been a tremendous source of grief to me since Caryatis took the risk to let me know what I had done several months ago. Making sure she gets the credit she deserves for her years of work is one way to address the injustice I've done.

It takes time for perceptions to change but they have to start changing here: Caryatis Cardea has been co-editor of *Sinister Wisdom* from 1991 to 1994, and we will list that on the inside cover with the other past editors' credits from now on.



This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* owes most of its substance to the energy, inspiration and tireless effort of Jamie Lee Evans. Her work preparing ten interviews for publication in two months time is nothing less than amazing.

We know many of you are out there struggling with the issues of alliance, which touch us in deep, personal ways. When we examine our understanding of who we're allied with, we're probing our world views, shaping our beliefs about community. Our assumptions about who we are, what we have to give, who our friends are, what we expect from them may all be called into question. Jamie's piece, "Snapshots, an Introduction" offers both a hopeful and critical reflection on the nature of allies — I refer you to it as a frame for this issue of *SW*. Jamie said one of the things she left out of her introduction was that we have to not disappear when we're called on our mistakes — we have to stay: keep working with and caring about each other.



While I intend to spend the rest of my life working with and loving lesbians, I'm getting ready to leave *Sinister Wisdom*. I plan on doing the production work for #53 and editing #54, *Lesbians and Religion*, which will be my last issue as an editor. Getting this issue to press has been more difficult than usual for seven very different reasons — by #54 I hope to have had the time to write about the last seven years with *Sinister Wisdom*.

Caryatis' Notes on the next page give information on our plans for passing *SW* on. We've done a lot of work to keep *Sinister Wisdom* in good material order. The financial support many of you sent in the last three months has helped, but money remains tight, and we are in real need of new equipment. Please keep renewing your subscriptions, talking about *Sinister Wisdom*, getting your friends to subscribe! This is the longest-lived lesbian journal publishing — we want to see it continue with renewed vitality and community participation.

Elana Dykewomon

Notes for a Magazine

At *Sinister Wisdom*, we struggle all the time — with each other, with our contributors, our readers, our politics and the magazine process itself. The short-term purpose is to put out a journal; long-term, to become allies. It seemed natural for us to do an issue on Allies before this editorial group passes *SW* to new editors.

Submissions were, once again, surprisingly low. (I should think you all would send more writing in just to stop me from complaining about it!) When Sauda and I edited the issue on Ethics, we were assured the low number of submissions was due to the difficulty of the theme. Allies, we were equally assured, would bring the ideas rolling in.

Wrong. But thanks to those who wrote about dykes failing to be good allies, we found that very specific questions were needed to learn what lesbians want from our allies. Jamie Lee Evans asked those questions. Her series of interviews forms the core around which this issue is organized.

This is my last issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. My work has increased over the years and, as often happens to lower-class dykes, it has gone without proper credit. Realizing that my efforts would evaporate with my departure, leaving no historical record of my contributions to *SW*, I now receive the title of editor at the moment of my withdrawal from the job. Better late than never, though, because lesbian community is littered with stories like mine. I thank all the dykes with whom I've worked here. It has been a profound learning experience and one which my disability is unlikely to allow me to duplicate.

At the end of 1994, Elana Dykewomon will edit her last issue of *SW*. We will announce themes and guest editors for the issues that will carry us until a new editor (or group of editors) is found. We are committed to passing the journal to lesbians of color and, for that purpose, many of the dykes of color who have worked on *SW* on past issues will make the choice. *Sinister Wisdom* will continue and we hope your support for it will continue as well.

Caryatis Cardea
Oakland, CA

Upcoming Issues

#53 Old Lesbians/Dykes: Guest edited by eight lesbians over sixty, this special issue demystifies the stereotypical images bred by our youth oriented society. We are not only society's mothers and grandmothers. We are questioning, still developing women from 60 upward, creating new images. Old ain't what it used to be! And never was. We want this issue to be a voice for old lesbians in all our variety. Out in August, 1994.

#54 Lesbians and Religion (or: fuck Xmas): to be edited by lesbians raised in other than christian households, all dykes invited to contribute. In the americas, we live in primarily christian countries. But many of us grew up in muslim, buddhist, hindu, jewish, native, atheist or other belief systems. We want to explore what happens when belief systems conflict and what those conflicts mean to our sense(s) of community (that is, analysis of being submerged/oppressed by christian assumptions and how we carry that submersion or rebellion against oppression into daily dyke life). There are questions to ask, and be asked by, lesbians who are reclaiming their cultural roots in santería, yoruban traditions or the goddess/pagan religions of europe. And then there are issues of cultural appropriation: if, for instance, raised-christian dykes do sweat lodge rituals or raised-jewish dykes take up buddhism, do we attribute that to a sense of imperialist entitlement, self-hatred or evolutionary blending of core spiritual expressions? In a world dominated by god-politics, we don't want to pose "goddesses" as an alternative, saving belief — we want to know how dykes deal with religion: in the intimacy of our friendship networks, in the global perspective of rising fundamentalism. This is the place to bring anger, alienation, careful analysis of hierarchical archetypes, righteous indignation, creative re-visioning and dyke takes on the quest for life's meaning. **Deadline: June 1, 1994.**

Rachael Rosen

Words

I walk down the street. My legs turn to jello.
Maybe I should stick them in the fridge.
I scan my brain for more jokes — to keep me going.
Instead, I wonder if I can still walk the talk.
I suppose I can, if I'm not too weak-kneed.
My disabilities are so unstable, unpredictable.
So perhaps one day I will be able
to run away from it all.
But for now, I need to deal.

I think that if I'm too tired
to walk my talk,
I could voice my politics.
I could speak up and show the world.
But sometimes
I run out of breath.
And then I think that it is too dangerous
to use words anyway.

I try to count the words that I have used
against myself,
against others.
Unintentionally.
What was that thing about sticks and stones?
Words have almost killed me.
Apologies and understandings,
mine and others,
have healed me.
Allies.

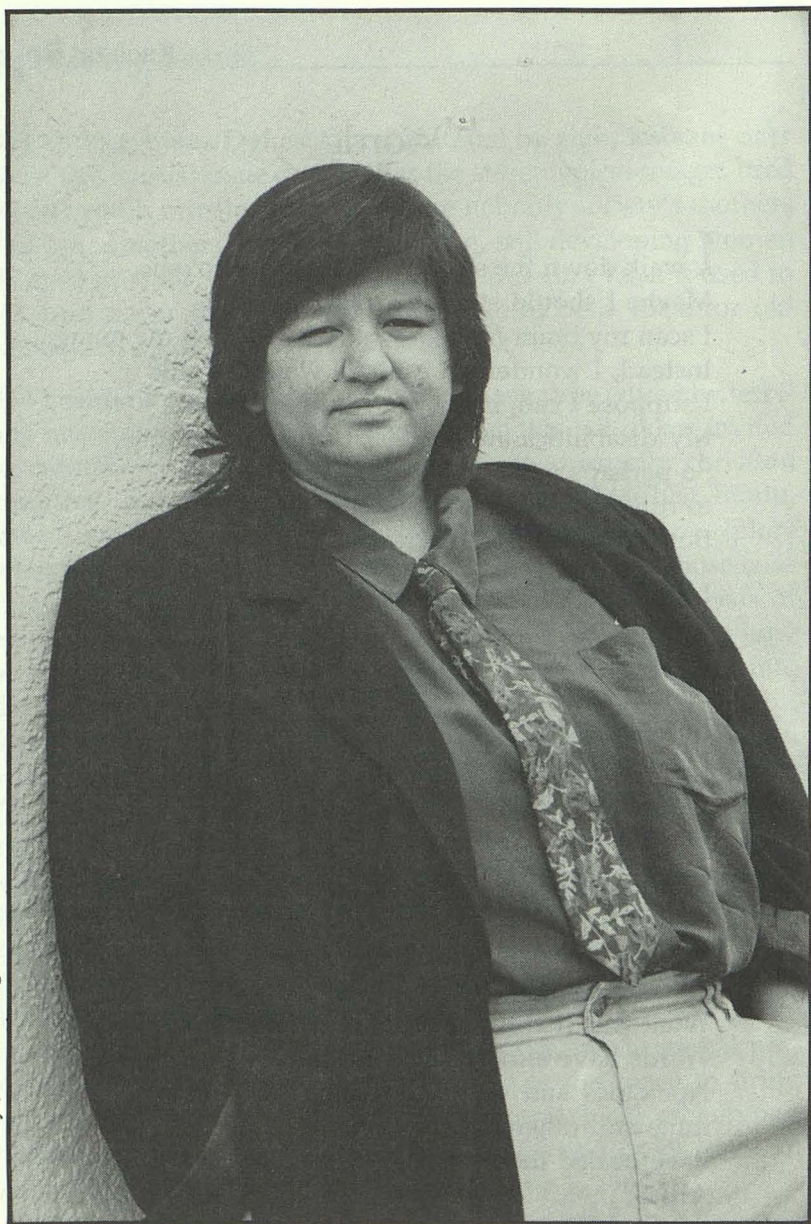


Photo by Jean Weisinger

Jamie Lee Evans

This project is dedicated to my always allies and treasured friends: Kit Yuen Quan, Sauda Burch, Leslie Levy and Caryatis Cardea.

Snapshots

The issue of allies comes up in my life a lot. I am a lower-class, mixed-blood dyke primarily of Asian and European descent. My lover is an Irish, ex-Catholic, middle-class woman. I work part-time in a multi-racial, feminist press, and part-time at a multi-racial, radical rape crisis center. Jewish dykes were my first role models of feminist lesbians. I work in coalition with many white women in the struggle to end violence against women. I am 27 years old, fat, able-bodied and I believe in the liberation of all women. I have allies, I need allies and I strive to be an ally on a daily level, as a worker, an activist, a friend and lover.

Allies or All lies?

Allies are the ones who help to keep me alive. Friends are the women who make me glad to be alive. I may not know each ally on a personal level, but I trust them to fight for me, make space for me (sometimes literally) and have sensibilities and actions that will keep roads open to me. Friends are the allies who go farther and love me, nurture me, invoke my playful side, appreciate my intellectual side and attempt to understand me in all the places that I come from.

Throughout my life I have made many honest and some questionable alliances. Sometimes I have expected and assumed and needed women to be *more than they were*, i.e., be more aware, thoughtful, politically-minded, committed to dismantling oppression, etc. I have needed to believe the best in women. And I'm sure other women have also tried to believe the best in me, sometimes disappointedly. There have been times that even in the most equal of circumstances, we let each other down. Some-

times circumstances were in the way of us being anything to each other at all. If I'm tired, feeling confused and playing out old unhealthy patterns in my life, chances are that I'm not going to be a good ally. When I can't be there for myself, and those times do come, I know I'm unable to be there for anyone else.

I worked on this project because I want and need to know why and how dykes act as allies to each other. I want to hear stories, examples, successes and even failures. I need this issue for myself: to learn how to be an ally to others and as a resource to women who are trying to be good allies to me. I wanted short pieces, a snapshot from each woman, just enough to make us think, stories we'd remember, share, talk about. From interracial relationships to multicultural work environments, to international alliances, to friendship networks to spiritual practices and political organizing: I need to know much more than the current and seemingly endless lesbian obsession on what women do with and to each other in bed!

I also wanted to read what general theories dykes had on alliances. Are there philosophical but accessible thoughts on who makes a good ally and whether or not coalition work should be a priority in our communities? I want something to hand over to the next friend or sister who asks, "What can I do?" or says "But I didn't know what the right thing was to do." Then I will charge her \$5 and give it to *Sinister Wisdom*, the individual sales route!

If I don't care about you, how can I care about your life?

After the conversations began, this project took on new weight, new meaning. I began to feel the honor, respect, the community that I want so much among sisters who dare, resist and love with a fierceness, a passion. I remembered so clearly an African American sister who said to me in a multicultural group of women of color that she wanted to know each and all of our stories and cultures because "If she didn't care about each of us, how could she care about our lives?" How could she do the work? How could she fully motivate herself? I took that thought home with me that night. I thought of some white women friends and comrades in my life with whom I've never discussed my per-

sonal/political struggles over racism. I thought of all the rhetoric I'd written about violence against women and all the times I'd not asked for the stories of the sisters I was working with. Politics without heart. Is this true ally-ship? But I do care about women's lives and I want to know our many stories and cultures so that I can act in an informed and ethical way, so that my politics are not without love.

The following interviews and gathered pieces are from dykes of color, Jewish dykes, cultural activists and political activists. First, I asked for their submissions, and when time constraints kept getting me "no's," I instead asked for taped conversations, a chat, a phone call and, yes, eight women agreed to talk. Barbara Smith and Mattie Richardson faxed me their pieces and ultimately every dyke who was interviewed had a chance to edit, revise and add commentary to their own edited interview*. In the end I have ten lesbian stories: some they wrote, some they spoke and some they did both.

I've taken my voice out of the following seven modified interviews and I offer you snapshots of the thoughts and experiences of ten lesbians in our community. I've removed my voice because I wanted you to know these women without my questions and comments interrupting the flow. Some of the women I know closely and some through my work (of many kinds); all are women who have important experiences and ideas to share. Although my questions and comments to them do not appear in print, I want to acknowledge the power I had in directing and guiding our talks together. I also want to be accountable for my editing and selecting what few ideas to use in each piece, some of our individual conversations amounted to over thirty pages! And it is here that I want to thank Andrea Calderón, Emily LaBarbara Twarog, Hadas Weiss, Lisa Horan and especially Noelle Hanrahan for their incredible ally work in helping me transcribe these monstrous essays. Without these women typing to the eleventh hour, this project would have gone even further past the deadline. I also want to thank my old roommate Lisa Rudman

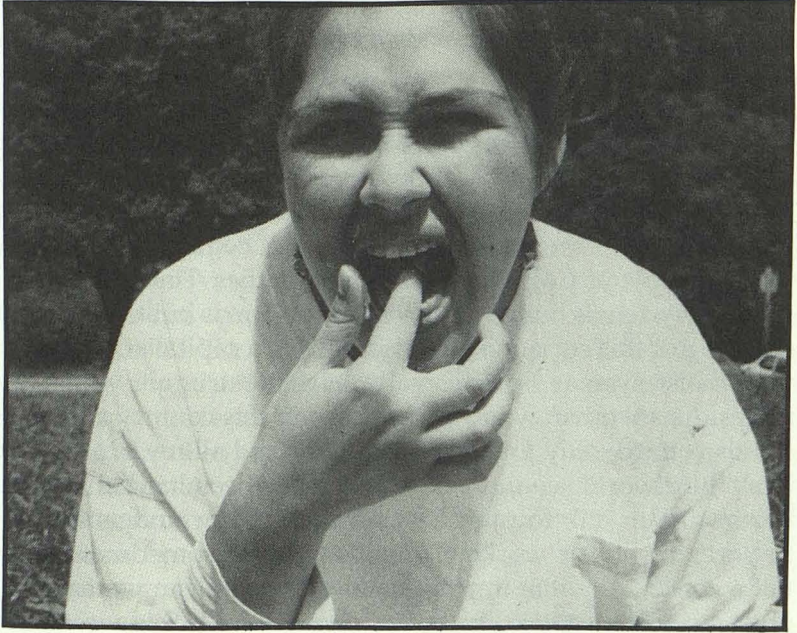
* With the exception of Gloria Anzaldúa

who told me to ask for help and when I didn't do it, she asked for me. When I was shocked that women would donate twenty hours with six hours notice to help my work, Lisa told me that dykes care about me and believe in the work that I do and therefore, would gladly help. Allies remind you of your value in the community when you forget.

Because these pieces are mostly taken from speech, I think they will be best when read aloud. So grab a friend, an ally or a lover and read these pieces aloud to each other. Read them at dinner, in bed, while the other takes a bath, over the phone, in the daytime or at night. If your life experience is not here, or even if it is, plan a night to talk to your friends and allies about your relationships and struggles. Write your own snapshot and send it to all your friends. Tell your story and hear someone else's. Care about your own life and your sisters', remember what you're fighting for.

I care about my sisters' lives and I care about lesbian lives. I want to know all lesbian cultures and stories so that my work means more than recyclable propaganda. I thank Akiba, Andrea, Barbara, Gloria, Hadas, Kit, Lisa, Lynn, Mattie and Melanie for telling me some of their lives. With close attention to their words, I'm sure you'll care too.

Photo by Raean Rivra



Andrea Calderón

Interviewed November 27, 1993
Oakland, CA

Andrea Calderón is a 22 year old born and raised Chilena of Mapuche and Aymara and Jewish descent. She's a political, spiritual lesbian organizer and artist. She is also the mother of two black cats.

The work that I have been doing and love to do is coalition work between Women of Color, U.S. and international. The Latina community specifically is where I choose to focus my energy and my spirit. It is extremely important for us as Women of Color to come together to do coalition work; I believe it brings the work we do to another level. I also think it is very important for us as Women of Color to connect internationally. What white institu-

tions and white power have always done in this country is separate People of Color here from where their roots are, separate them from the rest of the world and push the concept of *minority*. When you look at who we are; there is no doubt we are the majority in this world. We have been the majority throughout history and our ancestors were the majority before us. We hold a lot of pain but also a lot of power.

There are a lot of obstacles in coalition-building and it's very hard to get past them because we are in a country and a world where People of Color are against each other. That's the whole way the system is built; that's how capitalism is built. My understanding of this society is that it is built in a capitalist, racist and imperialist system. So, we really have to struggle with these issues. As a woman who was not born in this country and came to this country only four years ago, who did all my growing up in a "third world" country, one issue that's been hard in terms of being able to talk to other sisters, make them understand the importance of our working together, is that sometimes there's not a concept of what imperialism is. As a Chilean woman who grew up in a dictatorship, sponsored by the U.S. government, imperialism is very real. It's an obstacle in doing coalition-building between Women of Color in the U.S. In this country, the people who are born and raised in it don't have much of an understanding of what imperialism is. Of course for everybody there's a process of awareness but there's a significant struggle with putting to rest the concept that, yes, if you are a U.S. citizen and the U.S. is put at the center of the world, then you do have an impact on the "third world." I've even encountered ignorant statements from People of Color in this country around the "third world." For example, "Oh, you all just love dictatorships and you can't manage each other." There's just an ignorance about our countries.

What I'm basically trying to point out is that ignorance is something that is fed to our communities and it takes educating and struggling and doing coalition work to get through it. The hard part of my coalition work is struggling with other sisters to really get that imperialism is important and it affects *all* our lives. Imperialism is very real in the U.S. too. People of Color live under a dictatorship here too. I'm talking about People of Color

being able to practice our spirituality freely. I'm talking about the drugs and arms being brought into our communities. I'm talking about People of Color's struggles censored through history. And how many women and men from our communities are in jail? I'm talking about police brutality, border patrol brutality, and the raids on the "illegal aliens." I'm talking about political prisoners and the many activists that this government has killed too — the "disappeared" of this country! The U.S., called the "melting pot," is really the "frying pan" — especially for Lesbians of Color.

I know some very tough sisters who are organizing in their communities but when it comes to having a sense of international politics, it's like, "Who cares? It's not really relevant to me." And then on the other hand, in my work with international women, growing up outside of this country we have also been fed certain images of U.S. People of Color. I'm talking about images of Latinos, Asians, African Americans and Native Americans. And these images come through the media. And the media is soaked with racism. In our countries, we get images of our own people that are distorted. And when it comes to working with U.S. and International Women of Color, these things are very real, are very there. Being there in the middle of it where sisters of the "third world" are making assumptions of the sisters in the U.S., and the sisters of the U.S. are patronizing "third world" sisters, is very hard. This is a really big issue in terms of coalition-building with sisters.

I've seen such beauty and such power when U.S. and International Sisters of Color come together. It is so powerful. That connection is so important. For Sisters of Color in this country to connect to women that live where their roots are is so powerful. And for sisters outside of this country to connect with their sisters who have left and go through so much shit in this country, understanding that pain — this is also really powerful.

Really important ingredients in coalition-building are listening, speaking, taking risks and respecting each other — one of the most important things, and one of the hardest things, too. Because when a sister is saying something extremely offensive to your community or when a sister is telling you something that is totally making your community invisible, it's very painful. A good ally is someone who is committed to struggling. If I'm

struggling, if I'm putting all that energy into building a coalition, I want to know that the person I'm building it with is committed and that we're building it on a solid relationship. Although we may be doing our separate work within our communities, I know that when I need your support, it'll be there. And then we're ready to challenge others together *and* challenge each other.

I need allies that are going to be there with me when I need to challenge issues and people. Lesbians of Color are always being put in hard positions and being scapegoated. We are constantly scapegoated by white people — even by white “anti-racist” radical lesbians when the shit hits the fan or when we start making them feel uncomfortable. We're also scapegoated sometimes by our own brothers and sisters. We're constantly in the forefront of all struggles. It's so easy to feel alone and overwhelmed. As a Woman of Color, challenging white institutions, challenging the system period — you're doing something radical. You are radical. When you bring issues of homophobia, class, imperialism in the forefront, you are being radical. That can be both powerful and alienating. I need an ally who will be with me and will struggle with me, will make sure that we're OK. In a human, spiritual and a political way.

If we don't take the risk to make alliances, we're really hurting each other. Alliances are extremely important between People of Color. There is danger in not making alliances. We become more and more isolated from each other and then it's easier for them to pit us against each other. It's a fact of everyday life how we're pitted against each other.

The rewards of coalition-building are when I see a sister from another community taking up for her community *and* mine. Or when she's challenging people from her own community on their ignorance towards my community. Or when I see U.S. Sisters of Color taking responsibility and really pushing on issues of imperialism. That's when I feel that my work is good. In this way, we honor ourselves and each other, and continue the struggle of our ancestors.

Photo by Akiba Onada-Sikwoia



Lynn Scott

Interviewed December 2, 1993
San Francisco, CA

Lynn Scott is 49 years old, of African, Indigenous and European descent (in this lifetime). She has lived in the Bay Area all of her life and grew up in a family who struggled economically. She is a mother of two adult children and a grandmother to one jewel. She has a strong spiritual identity deriving support from the teachings of Ifá (from the Yoruba of Nigeria), some Lakota traditions, and also from ways that "sit right" with her.

An ally is beside you or behind you and has your back; together you share certain principles. An ally will speak up for you and not allow others to speak against you, even when you are not present. An ally is willing to be a "frontliner." Wimmin have shown up being my ally when I didn't expect it and they have also not shown up when I expected that they would. At times, an ally has "pulled my coat," offering constructive insight and guidance when my

own perspective was cloudy.

Alliances seem to reveal themselves most often during times of stress. In my experience, allies have at various times given me an extra boost of energy, or kept me from feeling crazy or alone. Allies have also taught and modeled courage and conviction in the face of fear. I have found support and alliance from human beings with many different labels — wimmin, men, children, lesbian, heterosexual, disabled, African American, Chinese American, Indigenous American, Mexicana, Puerto Rican, Chilean, European American, mixed heritage, friend, neighbor, co-worker, and others I have not identified by labels. Of course, how one is “labeled” by society influences one’s experience and where one may be on an issue. However, we are multidimensional beings who cannot be pigeon-holed as to who we are and how we will respond.

A story from my personal herstory might illustrate some of these points. At a preliminary divorce hearing in 1977, it was ruled that because I was a lesbian, I was an unfit mother. Temporary custody of my two children was granted to their father with no visitation rights for me. The courtroom experience was horrible—my shifty ex-husband, his slimy attorney, a uniformed bailiff, the soul-less conservative judge, a detached court reporter, and me. No allies!

Prior to the hearing, I’d contacted a white, lesbian lawyer who’d been recommended to me. I was nervous about the “routine” hearing because my “ex” had not returned the children from a weekend but I asked her as many questions as I could. She assured me it would be a simple matter for me to represent myself at the hearing and request a postponement. She suggested that we could meet again and talk about her representing me. (I had very little money for legal fees and had planned a “Nolo Press Do-It-Yourself Divorce”). She was a lesbian, but not my ally.

As the issue of my fitness for custody of the children unfolded in my family, my mother, father, brother (who testified for me in court), and my mother-in-law (who wrote me a letter I will forever cherish) showed their alliance by directly addressing me

and giving their support. I honor them for their clarity and forthrightness. The silence of my other in-laws who knew about the case left me not knowing where they were. I felt hurt and cast aside.

As the issue unfolded in the straight community I had been a part of with my "ex," two wimmin came forth to let me know they were with me against the injustice and vindictiveness. They did not understand a lot about me being a lesbian, but they were with me as a friend and mother. Their embrace softened the harsh silences of many others who had been "my friends." One of the wimmin supported me every inch of the way to get the best representation and to keep my hopes high. The other woman testified in my behalf. Both were true allies.

I also went to a support group of African American lesbians that I'd been a part of and told them what I'd been going through. There were promises to do fundraising for my case, but it didn't go far. I was told that about \$40 was raised, but the individual in charge of the account never followed through with giving me the money. However, one woman in the group took a risk and got a personal loan for me that was of tremendous help. Although we had only established a casual relationship, she showed up as an ally for me. I respect her so highly for really putting sisterhood into practice. A few other wimmin from the group gave me courtroom support.

My attorney (another white lesbian) was excellent. She was an ally for sure, in the way that she showed compassion and respect to me and my family, and in the way she "fought" for me in court. We won the case (although lesbian mothers are still having their children taken away) and my children came back to live with me. It was a time of excitement. I gave myself a victory party. Many of the people who were vocal about support and fundraising were right there ... there for the victory, but where were they for the work?

Why are there so many disappointments in alliances? For me, when I have had superficial relationships, it has undermined my understanding of who my real allies are. I need to challenge myself to get more information from people who I associate

with, and to get clarity about the cues that I perceive. Perhaps I need to pose situations for us to explore together like, “What if such and such happened, where would you be? And this is where I’d be if...” My personal responsibility in alliances is to be clear within, to assume nothing, to ask, and to speak my truth so as to reveal where I’m coming from. Of course, it is all easier said than done! I/we have all been so damaged — being children, being girl-children, being colored girl-children — and carry wounds (sometimes still festering) of self-hatred and internalized-ISMs! Nevertheless, I/we must forge past the fear or be ruled by it.

I know that I have been an ally in a small circle of wimmin-friends. I’ve been an ally by letting them have their process, by being “there” over the long haul, by showing up with material support and emotional support (which I consider material support), by praying for and with them, by not asking tit for tat, and by opening myself up, too. I haven’t always understood the dynamic of receiving as the balance of giving. My Homegirls are very happy when I call upon them to be my allies; just as I feel a sense of respect when they call upon me. It is an honor to be someone’s ally. This is an important concept.



Photo by Claire Nelson

Lisa Rudman

Interviewed December 2, 1993

Oakland, CA

Lisa Rudman is a 33 year old lesbian feminist, anti-imperialist activist, fat Jewish commie dyke. She's a member of Women Against Imperialism and the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. She is a political video maker and a leaflet queen.

In my mind, by definition, alliances are multi-issue because as allies you're dealing with each other as whole people(s), not just around a particular issue that we might be in a short-term coalition around. What that means for lesbians is embracing an agenda that seeks the liberation of all people. I can't see how we can eradicate homophobia if white supremacy, anti-semitism,

classism, ableism, and all the other dominations are still there.

“Solidarity” is a term that was introduced to me around international political work, and I think it can include some real exchange, mutual learning and connecting. When I think of the word “alliance” though, it seems to add a dimension of personal commitment and connection that comes from your life depending on it. I don’t mean material survival necessarily. While “solidarity” can come from a desire to “do the right thing,” “alliance” is when I *refuse* to live with things the way they are, and I have to struggle more intensely with my own relationship/participation in systems of domination while being an ally or having allies. Allies are about recognizing power differences and paternalism. With allies, you’re gonna take some criticism, give some criticism and hash it out. I don’t even know if these distinctions are related to “official” definitions, and really what matters more is our actions, not word definitions.

I think allies recognize differences and connections between us and ask, how are we going to function with each other? How are we going to move together or move separately and then come together to actually build something (a relationship, an organization, a movement) effective and sustaining and not simply short term.

If I’m your ally, I’m going to take some of the heat that heads your way. There’s risk involved. It’s not just sort of some nice, feel-good kind of thing. When you’re from groups that have more power, it’s “acceptable” to sort of feel bad or guilty, but nothing more. We white middle-class people get this training that subverts our rage, like we’re traitors to our race and class if we’re resisters. The point I’m trying to get around to is that allies are side by side, shoulder to shoulder. I’m not just mushing everybody together as if we’re all the same, but when the shit comes down, you’re still there. Allies are about accountability and recognizing differences in power and privilege, and taking on different roles in struggle; sitting down and figuring out, what’s gonna be mutually respectful and productive. It’s an ongoing challenge for us as white people to check our tendency to put ourselves at the center, to be the “definers.” I think bell

hooks talks about that aspect ...

To be more concrete, at this year's National Lesbian and Gay Task Force conference, lesbians and gay men of color had a lot of political leadership and the empowerment to set priorities, and quite a number of white participants were overtly whining and complaining about that. It seemed like struggles over race and class had been really brewing over time, and this year the discussions around the North American Free Trade Agreement were an example of people of color leading a struggle, and challenging the rest of us to, also. It included us struggling intensely with other white lesbians and gay men to see the connection between NAFTA, race, class, gender oppression and the fight against lesbophobia and homophobia.

More concretes? O.K. We approach reproductive rights as broader than just abortion rights, and we're working as allies with women of color who are leading the campaign against the birth control drug "Depo-Prevera." Also, in the 500 Years of Resistance/Anti-Columbus Quincentennial coalition, it seemed to come back to self-determination, and ways of working that recognize differences in style, experiences, and perspective — not to mention differences in power and privilege! What levels of struggle are available to what people? As allies, what are our roles? In the midst of working together against colonialism and racism, how do we interrupt sexism and homophobia, in ways that aren't simultaneously racist?

It feels sort of shorthand to name other instances for you, but certainly issues of access/power and allies are in my political video work and with the heterosexual feminists I work with. I have to admit I think I work with some of the most pro-lesbian-liberation allies around, who work for lesbian issues in a principled way. I try to be an ally to my friend Pam who's a great political activist dyke. She has a degenerative illness/disability and really (patiently? frustratingly?) struggles with me and our friends about our ableism. Also, I've been looking at my internalized anti-semitism and I'm beginning to see when women are being my ally around anti-semitism or not.

When you ask me about building alliances with lesbians of

color, and lesbian of color organizations, I think of the importance of coming into an alliance from a "homebase." In my political herstory, I come from a tradition of relating to people as part of their nation, or people, or community. If alliance is about a redistribution of power and privilege, then when people come to the table as members of groups that empower them, it invigorates the whole process. Because you and I are trying to be allies already knowing who we are, and have our own collectives or circles for back-up and insight. I think we white lesbians have to prioritize work that respects and supports lesbian of color organizations.

Among alliances of lesbians of color and white lesbians, friendships and social connections play an important role in building these ally relationships. Respect, trust, love and friendship totally makes the harder parts of us working together possible! For white lesbians, I think the history of our institutional and personal racism along with our *simultaneous* oppression as lesbians complicates the ways we "own" our situations and deal with all of the barriers created by that. Allies are about mutual respect and support, and that comes in the form of direct material support or taking a position to fight oppression as a white dyke and taking risks. I think the struggle made about the oppressiveness of the *Lesbian Culture* book was critically important, scary, and not resolved unfortunately, but crucial to be engaged in amongst white lesbians.

We have so much work to do on this and I feel like we're still trying to figure it out. And as we figure it out, how to put it into practice. More questions: as allies, how do we support the separate work we do and work together too? When is it appropriate and/or effective? I think sometimes there's this desire to "patch it up and make it better" or work together in ways that are only superficially dealing with the vast differences in power and privilege among us. Issues of "parity" and *real power* in coalitions are crucial; simultaneously, there are ways of working in separate ally groups, so that there's coordination plus autonomy.

To answer your question of whether or not we're doing our work: we could *absolutely* do better. If we were doing everything that we need to be doing, we'd see women of color institutions having absolute viability and organizational health. If we were

doing everything we could, Kitchen Table Press would be gigantic, flourishing — not having to be distracted by survival. Places like the Asian Women's Shelter would have enough volunteers, etc. One way to answer the question is to just look at the results. I'm not exempt from the criticisms around this work, and I certainly don't have all the answers. I *can* say that many feminists, particularly lesbians and especially lesbians of color and other women of color, have had a large impact on my thinking and activism; that's something I'd like to acknowledge and build on.



Self-protection
Havana, Cuba, 1992
Jean Weisinger

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz
Phone interview from New York City
November 27, 1993

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz is a 48 year old Jewish lesbian. She is a former editor of Sinister Wisdom, the director of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and lives in New York City. She has two books out from Aunt Lute Books, My Jewish Face & Other Stories and The Issue Is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance.

I am concerned with taking the issue of allies beyond sticking up for your friends and interrupting personal racism; I want us also to address the political arena. You ask about political work in the lesbian community. I am sure that there are people who disagree with this — but aside from the issue of lesbian visibility, I don't think that there is a lesbian political agenda separate from the feminist agenda or the gay/queer agenda. How do you separate out feminist issues, the issues that affect women? The economic issues, the issues of homophobia, the particular ways that they impact lesbians? Economic issues are lesbian issues. Hate crimes are a lesbian issue. Misogyny is a lesbian issue. I see a need for lesbians to act visibly as lesbians in many of these struggles, in the same way that, as a Jew, I see the need to act visibly as Jews in these struggles. We need to participate forcefully in the struggles of the nation.

I think that there is a lot more line-crossing in the lesbian community than in other communities. A lot of us have relationships, intimate relationships and friendships, and form families across lines of color and class. Close relationships and really having a stake in the lives of people who are not your community of origin — these make you a better ally because their struggle becomes your own. The more distance that you have from another community's experience and struggle, the harder it is for you to be a really good ally. If you don't really understand it [the struggle], you don't bring the same kind of passion to it.

[The organization that I direct] Jews for Racial and Economic

Justice (JFREJ) was founded in 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and there was a threat from some Jews of protesting his visit to New York because he had embraced Yassar Arafat. So, among progressive Jews, some who were working in the Jewish community and some who were working in various progressive movements, people really felt the need to speak up and say that that is not the only view in the Jewish Community. Some progressive Jews organized a Jewish welcome for Nelson Mandela, and they had a Shabat service (a Friday night service), and they raised money for the ANC (African National Congress). So that was our opening activity, and since then we have pretty much focused on local/domestic issues and particularly on issues in New York City. We basically work on two fronts: one, in the Jewish community, doing education to connect up Jewish values and concerns with anti-racist and economic justice efforts; and two, in coalitions. We try to strengthen the base of what we bring to coalitions, by doing the education work in the Jewish community. We've gone from an organization that was founded by forty-three people to a membership organization of 350, with a large mailing list that is growing rapidly. A lot of the activists in JFREJ are lesbians.

Recently I got a call from a Jewish union official from local 1199, which is a hospital and health care employees' union. The workers of a nursing home were organizing against the home's owner. They wanted union representation, and the owner was just stalling them, which is very common. And the workers were mostly immigrants — Caribbean and Latino, mostly women. What the owner was doing was deflecting them and trying to undermine their organizing by claiming that anti-Semitism was involved. And we checked it out. We wouldn't ignore that possibility, but that is not what was going on. So it was very important to the union to have Jewish support to counter the owner's attempt to deflect the workers' attempt to organize. We were called to help mobilize some Jewish support, which we were really happy to do. We contacted some rabbis, I went and spoke at the rally and got members of JFREJ to write letters and make phone calls and so on.

What happened is that at least the progressive Jewish community knew about this struggle and was not misled by what the owner was trying to do. I know that he got a lot of calls and that we were at least able to disrupt business as usual at the nursing home. I think the main impact it created was an opportunity for a working relationship between us and 1199. It was a time when we were asked for support and we were able to give it. A bit later, we were organizing an event where we needed space. 1199 has an auditorium and they were willing to let us use it. I guess that I see alliance as where you recognize that you have a common purpose, some over-arching purpose, which is about seeking justice, and you support each other's work and do what you can for each other when you can. I see my work now as being in a kind of primitive stage of creating opportunities for building trust so that more alliance is possible, building towards a time when there is more working together.



You ask about Christmas — how that is for me, as a Jew. Really varied. I grew up in New York and now that I am back in New York, Christmas is not the same source of pain to me as it has been in other places I have lived. Because in New York there is not an assumption that you are Christian. Christmas is very commercial and annoying but it is not as though everybody assumes without question that you are celebrating Christmas. Where Christmas has been most painful for me is in communities where I have felt totally invisible. Like "Merry Christmas, have a Happy ..., What are you doing for Christmas?" You know just that sort of incessant situation where you are constantly having to explain yourself. What non Jews can do for Jews around this time is *remember*.

There is a very interesting, not yet fully developed, possibility for alliance between Jews and Muslims around this time. Also with other non-Christians in this country: many Asian peoples, Buddhists, Hindu, and all the other religions. We can all recognize that Christianity is the dominant religion of this country, and that all other religions/cultures need to be made visible.

I think there is a lot of opportunity, particularly around kids

in school. Lesbians who either have children in the schools or who are teachers can do really important work around holidays. Making non-Christian holidays and traditions visible offers a natural opportunity for multi-cultural work.

One more thing: it is a real drag to be a Jew (and I assume this is true for other non-Christians) and have to always be the one pointing out that Christmas is not everybody's holiday. You get treated like the grinch who stole Christmas. I always appreciate it immensely when other women take that on, so that it doesn't always have to be me.

Basically, being a good ally means using your common sense, your heart, energy, resources. What you have. What you can contribute.

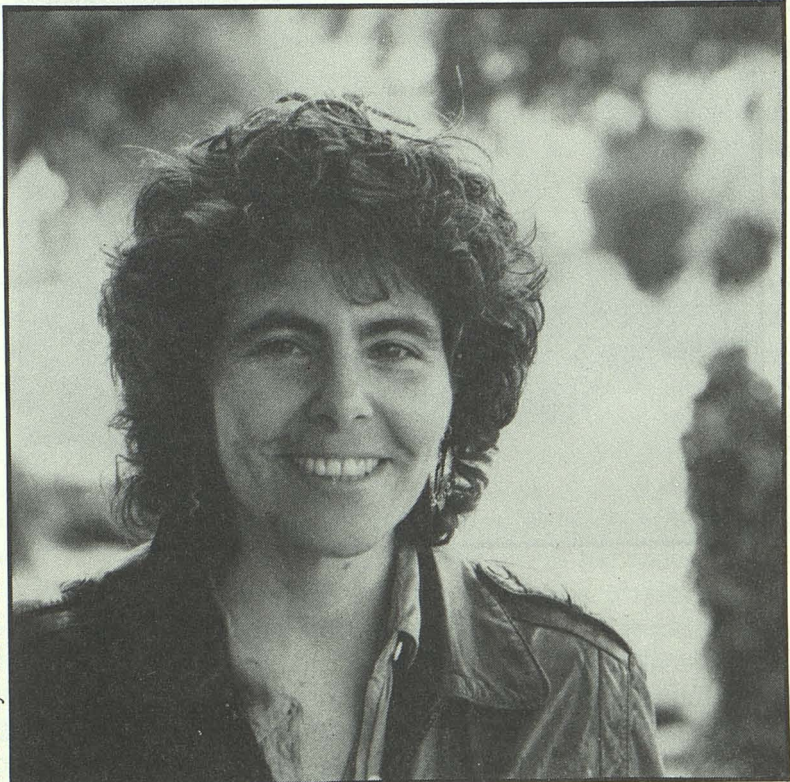


Photo by Sarah Bolden

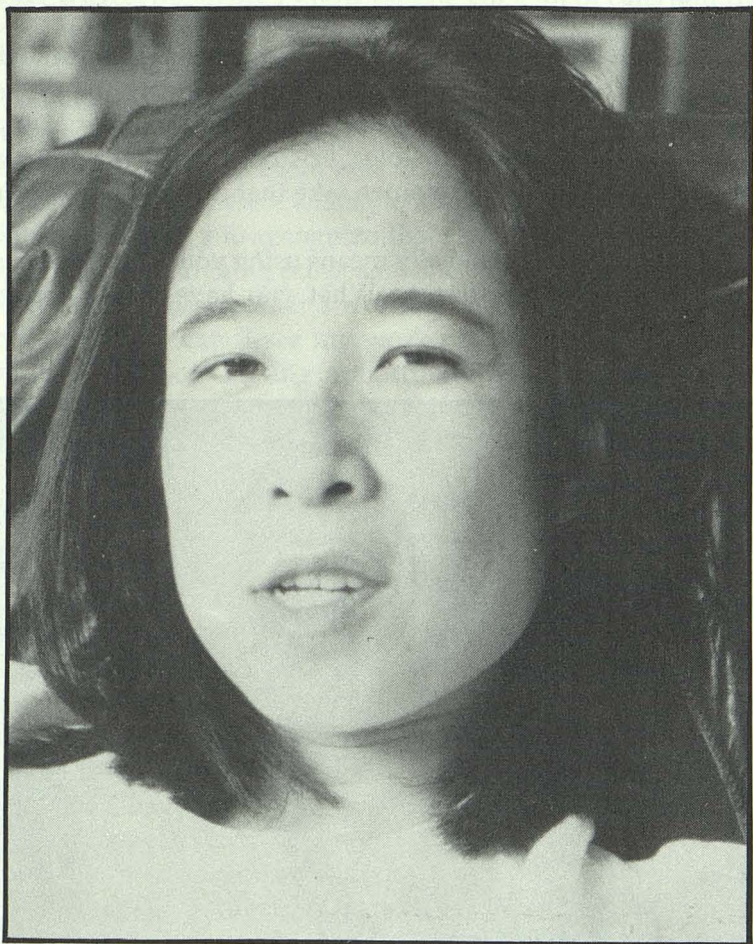


Photo by Meg Khoo

Kit Yuen Quan

Telephone interview from San Francisco

November 30, 1993

Kit Yuen Quan is a 32 year old Chinese American immigrant from Hong Kong. This article is a work in progress.

Alliances in Question

Physically I've removed myself from the lesbian feminist movement but all I have to do is open a book written from a lesbian feminist perspective and it all comes back to me like a math problem I never solved. Perhaps it's because of my obsession with trying to figure out how not to get hurt the next time. After working for a living within the movement for over fourteen years, mostly behind the scenes, I have chosen to withdraw from it, maybe temporarily, to re-examine my beliefs and past actions. Once I had thought that fighting bare-fisted for what I believe in was the most honest way. I did this by revealing all of my weaknesses, expressing my doubts, and trying to name the problems to get at what it was that felt disempowering. For years I worked with people who differed with me and didn't care to understand the power dynamics between us. Even when alliances were attempted through painstaking discussions of these issues, our talking was more a catharsis than about actual strategies for making substantial changes. Trying to form alliances in the midst of those struggles brought me face to face with issues of trust too familiar and deep to be able to separate the personal from the political. In the end, I drew so many lines of separation from these people that I backed myself out of the room.

What became clear was that the role I was playing within white, middle-class, feminist structures was not working. The things that I was saying, the things that I was doing, the sacrifices that I was making for the political vision were not empowering me. I was perpetuating patterns that were too scary to change. I knew how to give my power over to white, middle-class women

too well; to their education, to their language, to their structures, to their logic, to their visions, but I was not deriving power back from my work towards this political vision that we shared. I felt isolated as a woman of color among white women, and I lacked solid alliances with other women of color. At every critical juncture where I finally gave up on struggling with particular individuals or organizations, these circumstances played a devastating part in my eventual breakdowns.

I think my point of entry into the feminist movement set the stage for the hard lessons that I had to learn. I first entered into the movement as a young person, fifteen years old, and as a lesbian runaway from a working class, traditional Chinese American immigrant family. Working in a feminist bookstore collective enabled me to leave home, support myself, and identify as a lesbian feminist long before I could go to a lesbian bar without a fake ID. I left my family and my culture to live by my political beliefs, but except for the driving forces of anger and hunger, I did not have much backup for my new life. However destructive they may have been, anger and hunger were my first allies. I was angry because I felt powerless and alone. I had little practical and emotional support and few options economic-ally. I was hungry for understanding, warmth, and caring from people who I believed were working toward the same changes in the world that I was. I was young and vulnerable, struggling with language issues, trying to bridge the gap between my life experience and that of the people around me who were older, far more educated academically and politically, and well-versed in feminist rhetoric. Within the collective, my age and lack of political experience in other feminist or political organizations were used as bases for invalidating my issues and concerns. Except for my hard work and efforts to express my reality and feelings of being oppressed to my co-workers, I was not equipped to fight the hand that fed me.

Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, I worked at the bookstore during three separate periods with two different collectives. During that time, I sought allies who would support me and my political vision of a feminist bookstore and literary

movement which would be accessible to someone like myself: a working class lesbian of color who was not college educated and who had a hard time with language. I left the collective feeling angry and disillusioned when these efforts were met with antagonism and humiliation. I saw a struggle for power and control within a white, middle-class structure run by both white women and women of color who were using their various privileges to invalidate those of us who challenged that power structure whether we were white, African American, Chicana, Asian, or middle-class, working-class or poverty-class. I learned that feminist identified women were capable of vying for power and control within so-called feminist structures using psychological warfare and feminist rhetoric. People were isolated, invalidated, politically attacked, and then driven out. One by one, dissenters left and formed alliances as ex-collective members, but no action was taken to confront the organization because the existing system did not have any true accountability to its stated political objectives.

After this experience, I believed that hierarchies were more honest structures to work within, given the inevitable power imbalances within feminist structures. There existed a rank of bosses and workers no matter how democratic an organization tried to be. This concept was obvious to the workers but hard to accept by the bosses. With this in mind, I decided to accept an office manager position with a small feminist publishing company. Surprisingly, within this acknowledged hierarchical, white, middle-class feminist company, I felt for the first time, alliances with white women, in terms of some version of a political vision which reflected me: a feminist press publishing multi-cultural literature by women. Despite my resistance to making myself vulnerable in an all-white environment where I still felt disadvantaged by my issues with language, I was once again reinfected with a desire to work towards a political vision that I believed in.

This process of trying to work towards a political vision with women who were different in age, race, class, and lifestyle within a white, middle-class structure that did not yet embody its political vision of multi-culturalism, meant that I had to cope with the discrepancies between the theory and the practice of that theory,

and the limits of that practice. The efforts that were made to equalize power as much as possible were ultimately limited by the structure and by my own inability to take power. In the latter respect, I've taken full responsibility for my own limits and count the experience as yet another stage of my development.

Although I have not fully resolved that entire experience, I was left with some disturbing questions. First, as much as we talk about the need for alliances between white women and women of color within the feminist movement, there is little said of how that process actually happens. How do we engage with each other on a daily basis when we have our own vested interests, and are hindered by all of our insecurities and limits as individuals? Except for within organizations owned and run by women of color, of which there are very few, there exist dynamics of a power imbalance between white women and women of color. The struggle to equalize power is a painful one. Honest relationships that incorporate elements of love, friendship and trust are not easy to develop or maintain. What happens when these alliances break down and the people who've worked hard together towards a political vision feel that they have failed themselves and each other? These are hardly the accounts that one would hear at a conference, and yet it is often the outcome of the process of attempting to build alliances where there are power imbalances.

My second question relates to a separate set of dynamics between women of color and white women within white, middle-class, feminist structures. I am assuming here that most feminist structures built by both working-class and middle-class women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds will ultimately privilege white, middle-class women. Although women of color have always worked within the feminist movement, we do not hold the power in most feminist structures. We are recruited to work within these structures, but through our isolation, we are systematically set up to feel disempowered rather than empowered. Where there are more than one of us within an organization, white women feel threatened when we take our power seriously and actively seek alliances with each other. Even when white

women want to share their power and resources and believe that to be a part of their role as allies, the reality of giving up their control is problematic. They are too entrenched in political and cultural systems that give them unquestioned authority. Given this context, what choices and chances do women of color really have to empower ourselves within white feminist structures?

My last question has to do with the next level of engagement between women of color and white women in their efforts to share power within white feminist structures. In order to share in the power and resources which white women hold, women of color sometimes consciously make concessions that are not always spoken or acknowledged by either party. For example, we may choose not to challenge white women's authority when it may jeopardize our own position or set of privileges within the hierarchy. We may not say how we really feel even when we realize that we are not being treated as equals. In my discussions with other women of color, it is often understood that they do not really hold as much power as their titles may suggest. Although this may be a tolerable or workable situation, the lack of honesty allows for an illusion of the equal distribution of power. Where there is more than one woman of color, the much-needed alliances between us can be undermined by this lack of honesty as to who actually holds the power within an organization. Given this context, how far can alliances between women of color go before we are forced to protect our own interests within a white feminist structure?

In the final analysis, the bottom line of how I evaluate any potential ally is by her politics and how she tries to live out those politics. Alliances are necessary relationships within any social change movement. No one can survive very long isolated and alienated from other people, whether it is within a movement, a job, or even a room. My experiences thus far have taught me that attempting any alliance is a risk that cannot be calculated. I take these risks where acting out of my beliefs is the only way that I can be true to my principles. For example, at my last job in a non-profit women's agency headed by a woman of color and which employed a majority of women of color workers, I was in a

position where I was willing to quit my job, if necessary, in support of a white, lesbian co-worker. Despite the risk of hardship from such a decision, I felt morally compelled in that particular situation to take such an action as her ally.

As one might expect from my brief account, very few alliances came out of those fourteen years of working in the feminist movement, but the ones that have survived are very strong. These are the people who really listened to me, who tried to understand, who told me how they really felt, and who believed that I was capable of learning from my mistakes. Some of them are friends; many of them are not, but we continue to have a mutual respect for one another. While I have made some lasting political alliances with white, working-class women, my closer alliances are with working-class women of color who work in social change organizations. With them, I share an overall political vision for social change more complete and with fewer and different contradictions than I share with white women. The issues they are working on, such as immigrant and refugee rights, domestic violence and literacy, reflect more closely my own immediate concerns. Until I can find a way to re-enter the feminist movement in a more empowering way than before, I will continue to feel some discomfort around the issue of alliances with other lesbian feminists. I will continue to grapple with difficult questions, but the hard lessons learned have allowed me to cope more constructively with the contradictions and limitations of any political movement. And this, I think, takes me off of the critically injured list.

Mattie Richardson

Mattie Richardson is a Black, Latina, lesbian, feminist writer and activist. She currently lives in Albany, New York.

Spice

By the time I figured out what was really going on, I had already given myself over to her. I handed myself over to a white girl who had never seen me at all. I mean, she didn't have any trouble visually seeing me, she just couldn't bring herself to visualize my existence.

"What does it feel like being like you are?" I asked Jen Cutter, who at the time was the big dyke on campus. She could tell I didn't know any better than to say something like that. Jen just laughed, leaned over to me and whispered, "I could always show you."

I was simultaneously scared out of my mind and desperately in love. Sporting her newly shorn dykely haircut and newly acquired black leather motorcycle jacket, she was the essence of lesbian for me; in fact, Jen was the first out lesbian I ever met. This was my first year in college and I had discovered, to my surprise, that I was attracted to women. I decided not to tell anyone until I could find one to ask what it is lesbians do, anyway.

Jen taught me about everything that lesbians did. From her I was introduced to the world of dyke culture and history. She gave me a stack of the required reading to become a full-fledged lesbian. Fortunately, this reading included a few Black lesbians like myself. The college I went to was virtually all-white in a predominantly white New England town. If there were other Black people who were queer, I didn't know about them growing up and they were not visible on campus.

Jen introduced me to other out white lesbians on campus, all six of them. Along with Jen, they formed a small cadre of radical activist lesbians. Their goal was to push the few existing progressive campus organizations further left. I joined their ranks with Jen. I borrowed a friend's leather jacket, smoked Camels, and learned how to discuss Foucault and Fanon in diners for hours.

I felt like I was with people who had a better grip on political realities. I felt that not only was I among friends, but real allies.

I thought Jen knew almost everything. She had traveled extensively and her parents worked for a moderate-to-liberal major magazine. Their assignments took them all over the world and sometimes Jen would get to go with them. As a result, she had an impressive collection of craftwork from India, Brazil, Senegal..., anywhere her parents went without her they brought back a present. We spent the weekends in her room making love and talking. I told her everything about my life. I trusted her completely.

We broke up one wintery Sunday afternoon after we had spent the weekend hanging out in her room. It was bitterly cold outside but sunny so that the room was filled with a pale, blanching light. It made all of her souvenirs look odd and dull. She picked up her camera and started snapping pictures of me in my pajamas in various silly poses. We were both laughing and having fun. After taking the pictures for a while, she laughed out loud to herself. It wasn't until I pressed her for the joke that she told me. It had suddenly occurred to her that I matched the room. I gave it extra flavor. I was the spice.

Photo by Donna Grande

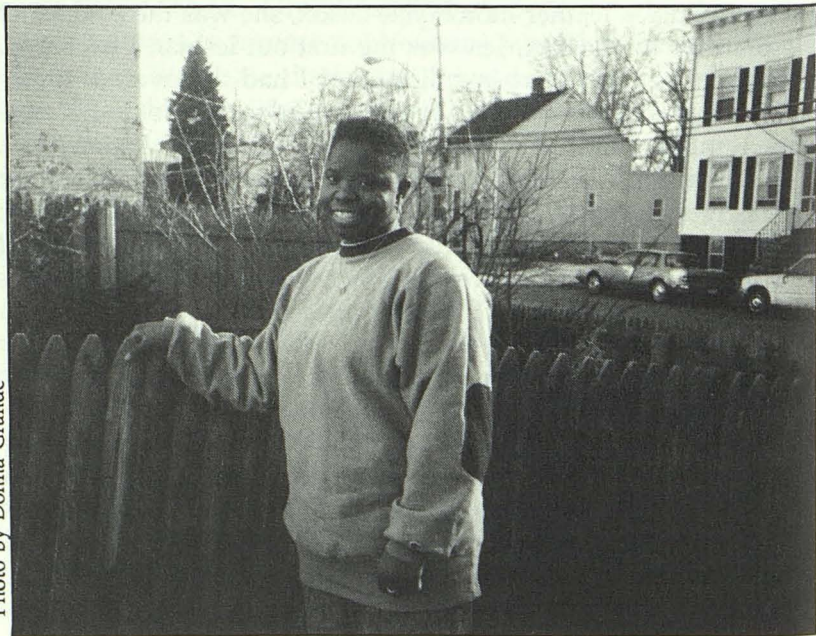


Photo by Loren Chasin



Hadas Weiss

Interviewed in Oakland, CA

December 1, 1993

Hadas Weiss is a Jewish woman of Ashkenazi descent. She's a fat, lesbian separatist with a poverty-class background. She's also an attorney and is hoping to open a private practice in San Francisco in the near future.

There are two categories of allies: there's the situation where my people have been and continue to be abusers and I need to be an ally to the Lesbians who have been the target of the cruelty; and there are places where my people and I have been the target of the cruelty. Of course, any given Lesbian usually embodies many identities. A middle-class Lesbian of Color may be an ally to me in terms of classism and I may be an ally to her in terms of racism.

An ally is someone who does the work. Allies are not the same as friends. If a woman of Color reaches out to me, she might want me to be her ally and I don't have the permission to assume the familiarity of a friendship unless I'm told otherwise. Ally work minimally entails a conscious examination of one's behavior and words. If I'm going to claim to be an ally to Lesbians of Color, I must listen and read. If a Lesbian of Color goes out of her way to educate me, I take that opportunity very seriously. If there is some work that needs to be done, work that I can do, I do it.

When SW put out a call for submissions on this issue, a German lesbian (who I will call Katerina) approached me and asked if I was willing to do an article with her on the issue of German-Jewish alliances. I was uncomfortable doing the article because I was not clear about the issue in general, and because I thought the two of us needed to do a lot more work before we considered ourselves allies. At that point we had known each other for a few months.

My parents are Holocaust survivors. They never talked about it, partly as a way of protecting us from it. So I've had to find out about what happened myself. My aunt and uncle are planning to take their family and me to the camps and to the places they lived before the war. So I feel this extra pressure to educate myself in order to make the trip more meaningful. I wanted to talk with German Lesbians, to find out what they learned at home and at school about the Holocaust. Also, the magnitude of the cruelty is so incomprehensible and I thought that talking about it would help me make sense of it.

I wanted to establish an allyship with a German lesbian on a very individual basis. I wanted to ask her, "Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you know about this?" I consciously chose Katerina because, like me, she is a separatist and from a poverty class background. The first time we met socially, she flat out asked me how I felt about spending time with a German lesbian. I was so relieved to hear her acknowledge our difference.

One of the other reasons that I so wanted to forge an alliance with a German lesbian is because I assumed she would have an

awareness of anti-Semitism. In this country most Jews are white, and therefore automatically privileged. Also, anti-semitism is at an historical low. This is a relatively good time for Jews, and a relatively good place for Jews to be. So it is hard for people in this country to understand and appreciate the pain. Perhaps I was mistaken assuming that a German lesbian who is semi-conscious would have to know about just how vicious anti-semitism is. So in a bizarre way, I thought I was one step ahead with a German woman. At least she would know it as an issue.

After we spent substantial social time together and talked for many hours about many difficult issues (not on the same day), I asked Katerina to go see a Holocaust film with me (and 300 other Jews). I needed her to get a sense of the collective grief. This was her responsibility. This was her ally work.

Katerina came to the film and it was an absolutely hellish experience. All kinds of emotions raged through me. I was embarrassed to introduce her to my Jewish Lesbian friends; I thought they would hate me for bringing "the enemy" into our midst. After all, we were there to mourn the atrocities committed against us by her people. I was afraid for her physical safety, afraid someone would hear her German accent and attack her, unlikely as that would be. Then I felt ridiculous for wanting to protect her. I tried to focus on the film and become fully immersed in it with my people. But there she was, a constant and symbolic reminder that I was not safe.

But I wanted her to be there. And in some ways I wanted her to be there because I wanted to shove it in her face, even knowing she had no control over the legacy she inherited, knowing I could only hold her accountable for the way she dealt with this legacy. I can't even remember what film we saw. Afterwards, we went to a café, held hands and sobbed. There was nothing to say, really. Here we were, the two of us from opposite sides of the fence, meeting 50 years later because we were Lesbians. Just trying to do something with the history we both inherited. Just looking at each other and crying.

I've talked with my Jewish friends about this and to this day I don't fully understand what motivated me to seek an allyship

with a German Lesbian. At some level, I was hoping that it would get me beyond the personal pain of knowing how 6,000,000 of my people — including my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins — were killed.

The forged alliance didn't really last. I'm not sure if the reason it didn't work in the long term has much to do with alliance building or the strength of certain alliances. It didn't last mostly because of our personality differences and because we were too easily wounded by every mistake we made in the process.

I have an example of a Lesbian who has been my ally. Karin is a white German lesbian. She is my next-door neighbor and I consider her an ally and a friend. She asks me questions which show she has done her homework. Very soon after I moved in, we passed each other in the hall. After making casual conversation Karin told me she was expecting two German visitors for a few days and asked me if I would be OK with it. She understood that three Germans passing by my door several times a day or three Germans talking and laughing in German five feet from my home space could be an issue. This made my day. I mean she hardly knew me and had no way of knowing how I would respond. It made a big difference to me. It warmed me to her. Me and another Jewish woman were going to have a ceremony to honor and name Karin as an official Jewish ally and Karin's refusal to do it made me more aware that she deserved that title.

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia
Interviewed in Oakland, CA
December 2, 1993

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia is a 51 year old black woman of African, Native American and Irish ancestry. She is an artist and a poet, a warrior and a healer, amazed, honored and grateful to have lived to be 51.

I learned at a very young age that, emotionally, I was on my own — something that I've spent most of my life trying to come to terms with. As a child I felt isolated in my family because of my difference and my abuse. As a matter of fact, I felt that way around most people, so having allies and friends became very important to me. I even used to steal money from my stepfather to buy candy for other kids at school because I thought it might bring me friends.

By the time I was fifteen I was in my rebel warrior stance. I had friends but very few allies. Mostly because I couldn't really tell people who I was — I was being battered, something I was very ashamed of, consequently I got very little support because I did not talk about my real self to most people.

I came out as a dyke when I was fifteen, that was thirty-six years ago. My first lover was my "best" friend and a real ally. We had the same fierceness. She actually confronted my mother — who was my batterer — for calling me a whore and a slut. It was that same year that I found the strength to hit my mother back.

An ally is someone who has my back. Who will not leave me out there alone because they get scared. Certainly, I've had numerous allies, many have supported me in my life or else I would probably not be here today. Some of these people I don't even know, but their deeds have created paths for me to travel on. They have been all colors and sexes — heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. An ally may not always be my friend, but those whom I call friends, I need to be my allies. One of my biggest errors has been to try to make my allies my friends and to expect that my friends will always be my ally.

A person is my ally when we both share the same perspective of a particular reality, and can make a commitment to take a stance for that reality. I need to know that I can count on the people that I spend my energy with. Relationships are very big commitments for me. There are people I love but I know that they don't know how to be allies for me, therefore our friendship is limited.

I've also learned I need people that I align myself with to recognize their personal power, have integrity, take responsibility for their power and the ways they choose to use it. After years of struggle, I now understand that I have personal power and if people in my life have not come to acknowledge their own power there's a strong chance I'll be treated as *the* powerful one (or the strong one, etc.) in the relationship and thus bear too much responsibility. Many times I've been with people who were in denial of their power and therefore made me *the* powerful one. I've been on both ends of this dynamic and it doesn't work. I need balance, I also need people to be conscious of the way they use their power. And equally important I need the people whom I align myself with to have a strong sense of spirit in their lives.

I am an Oya child, a catalyst, like the center of the tornado there is always a lot going on around me. Truth is very important to me and if I'm not around people who recognize their worth, people who are willing to live their truth then I can end up being the problem — the cause.

I haven't always felt this way. It's been a process. Most of my life I felt like the only victim in town because I, like many of us (especially as a Black two-spirited woman), have been a constant target for violence, hatred and oppression.

I learned from my childhood that in order to control the pain I was experiencing, I needed to be a "good girl." Of course, I was never a "good girl" (otherwise there would have been no *excuse* to beat me) but I tried. I was always striving and in a relationship with anger and pain at home, busy trying to prove my love and reading from my environment that I wasn't worthy — that no one would love me just as I was. I've brought all of these dynamics to my relationships. Truly in the past I've compromised myself many times for what I thought was acceptance. Yet I've also been

an ally and friend to many people because of my commitment to my truth. Now I am in a more healthy place emotionally. I'm not as needy but I am so much more selective.

There is also the issue of trust. I trust people to be who they say they are until I learn how they act, allies are those who live their truth. But the person that I really have to trust is myself — can I take care of myself in relationship with this person? Sometimes I choose to be in denial about what I discover in other people (that's when I'm in my "they'll like me so much that they'll change" — you know, the "I can fix it syndrome"). This choice not to acknowledge what I feel has indeed been emotionally costly because my expectations of what another person could give have been based on my fantasy. Often I've thought I had to take what I could get — it's been hard learning how to take care of myself in a healthy way in such an unhealthy world, community, family.

The lesbian community has been no different than any other community in terms of betrayal, most of my experiences of personal betrayal have been with wimmin. Amongst my black sisters and other sisters of color, class and difference has always been an issue, but we don't really talk about that. And I've certainly entertained the fantasy that just because we are people of color and especially my black sisters — due to our common oppression — we should be allies, but oppression is no place to form one's expectation of camaraderie. It is something, but it alone has never held me up. We are from so many different cultures and have used our power many times in not such positive ways in order to survive. And amongst white wimmin, racism is usually always an issue and one that I must say I am sick and tired of having to confront.

Ultimately, I've learned that spirit and myself are my greatest allies. Spirit has carried me through my loneliest hours and as I grow I realize that my commitment to myself and my truth is the most important commitment I can make. I find that when I start depending on another human too much I get disappointed. So far no one person has ever been able to fulfill all my needs — although some wimmin have certainly tried. My needs and my

responses in situations are relative to who I am and where I come from. Therefore, my needs in any given moment are constantly changing. Today, I recognize how fortunate I am to be loved and cherished by the incredible and powerful wimmin in my life today. I am very grateful. So in the final analysis all I can ask for is that people show up in the best way that they can and that I do the same.

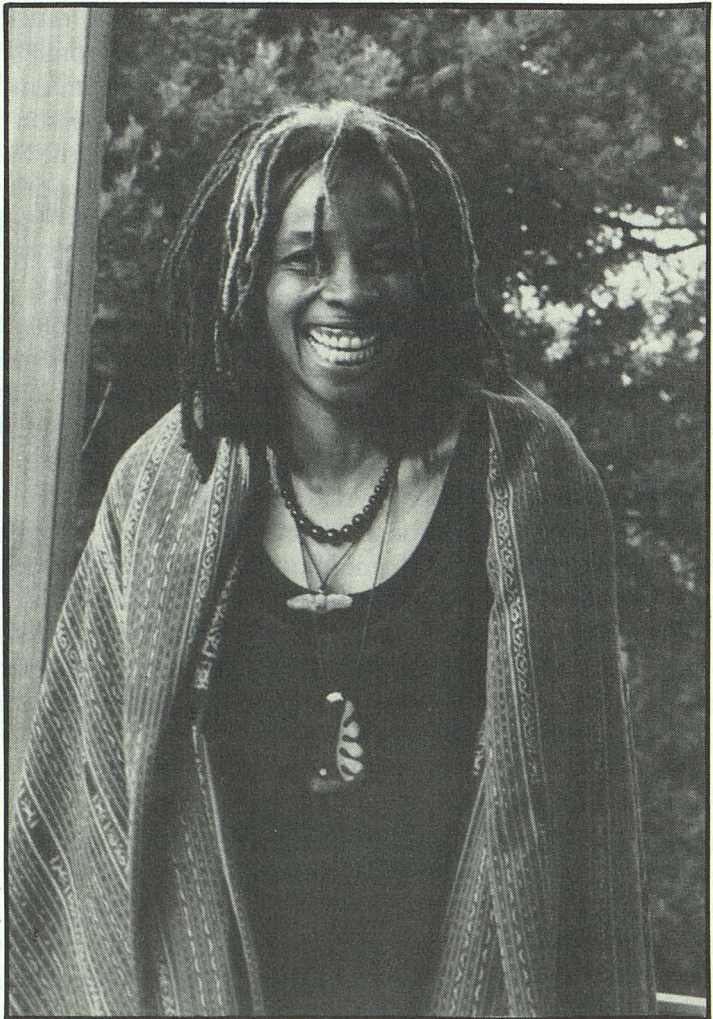


Photo by Lynn Scott

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Interviewed in Santa Cruz, CA

November 26, 1993

Gloria E. Anzaldúa is a Chicana, was born and raised in Texas but considers herself a Californian as well. She just had her 51st birthday and is the author/editor of two Aunt Lute Books: Borderlands/La Frontera and Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras. She is also the co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back from Kitchen Table Women of Color Press.

Becoming allies means helping each other heal. It can be hard to expose yourself and your wounds to a stranger who could be an ally or an enemy. But if you and I were to do good alliance work together, be good allies to each other, I would have to expose my wounds to you and you would have to expose your wounds to me and then we could start from a place of openness. During our alliance work, doors will close and we'll have to open them up again. People who engage in alliances and are working toward certain goals want to keep their personal feelings out of it, but you can't. You have to work out your personal problems while you are working out the problems of this particular community or this particular culture.

When you are doing alliance work it is very important to say who you are. For example, I am a Chicana, Mexicana, dyke, whatever. I come from a *campesina* background but I have now put one foot into middle-classness. I belong to the *inteligencia*, the intelligence class, the artistic class as an artist, and I am speaking today to you as all these people, but primarily as a Chicana or as a dyke, etc. You must situate yourself and tell what your stance is on particular things, so other allies know exactly where you are coming from. And they can later say, "Oh you say that you are talking from a working-class perspective but you have a house, you have a car, you have these privileges, you are a professor, or a salaried publisher, a privileged writer, etc." Allies might challenge some of your positions as a first step in finding out whether

you are a real potential ally. Then you can get a sense of whether you can trust this person or not. And you go with your gut feeling. You go with how you feel, because sometimes they will say all the politically correct rhetoric, but you just know that they are trying to put one over on you.



Photo by Margaret Randall

I have edited three books, *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Haciendo Caras*, and *Signs: Theorizing Lesbian Experience*. In the first two books I consider anthologizing as my way of making alliances with women of color. In *Signs* it was more (or less) white women wanting to make alliances with lesbians of color. Many lesbians of color I asked to submit work didn't, because they didn't trust *Signs* because they know it to be elitist, esoteric and racist.

In the books that other people anthologize me in, some editors are very genuine and want to diversify their community. Then there are the anthologizers that call on me so that dykes of color will not call them and say, "You have one contributor of color and ninety white contributors, this is racist!" So they attempt to tokenize me, or they try to pull a fast one on their readers, by tokenizing in general. Some of my work is hard to assimilate and I consider assimilation in white culture like an amoeba trying to swallow me. But it is hard for them to assimilate me in that manner because of language and because of the way that I write. They can ignore some issues that I bring out, but because of my writing style, there are things they must confront. I don't write like a white person. I don't write like an academic or follow those rules. I break them.

If they can't assimilate my writing what they try and do is assimilate me, by tokenizing me. They bring me into their book, or into their conference, or into their alliance in a way that will acknowledge the easy stuff I raise, but ignore the more dangerous stuff. They try to do this to me all the time, so then I have to respond back, either on the phone or in a letter, and say, why? One anthology that asked for my work was called *Growing Up Latino*. Before I agreed to publish in it, I had this whole dialogue with one of the editors, and talked about naming the book Latino and not Chicano. I asked "How many Chicanos/Chicanas are in your book? How many are Latina and how do they identify themselves?" Once the magazine *New Chicano Writing* asked me to sit on their board. I called and voiced my objections to the editor before I agreed to join: I objected having Chicano writers but not Chicana in the title, and furthermore told them that the groundbreaking writing being done in the Chicano/Chicana

community was by women. I also objected to their project only accepting work written in English. So the editor went home and thought about the issues and later called me and said, "I've changed the title of the magazine to New Chicana/Chicano writing, and people can write in Spanish, they can do bilingual, and they can do *Tex Mex*." Then I felt like the editor was open to me, and I agreed to be on their editorial board.



The biggest risk in forming alliances is betrayal. When you are betrayed you feel shitty. When I have been betrayed I have felt stupid, like why did I trust this person and allow this person to stab me in the back, it's all my fault, you know the victim syndrome. Betrayal, especially with Chicanas, betrayal is a big thing, because we were betrayed as women, as Indians, as a *minority* in this country, everything. We have been stabbed in the back by all of these various people. And betrayal makes you feel like less of a person, you feel shame, it reduces your self-esteem. It is politically deadening and dangerous, it's disempowering. When you lose your self-esteem you no longer trust yourself to make value judgments about other people, you lose confidence in yourself and your values. When a whole person is slowly destroyed, and this is what women of color are suffering from, their personhood is destroyed.



At first I felt really good belonging to the lesbian community, even though it was mostly white. It made me feel like where I had no home, I now had a new one. But after two or three or four years, I started looking at power, and who had power and who was trying to define for me what I was as a Chicana lesbian. I realized how my voice was silent and how my history was ignored and that drove me into looking at my roots, my queer roots in my own culture. I had to get a positive sense of being queer from my culture, not just from the white culture. Now I am in a place where I can look at both the white lesbian community and my own culture that is only beginning to have groups of lesbians organizing. *Ellas San Antonio* is a group of Chicana dykes, *Amigas*

y *Que*, in Houston and Austin. But they were not in place when I was coming out. Chicana dyke organizations are just now coming into their power.

Now I look at my culture and white culture and the whole planet. I look at other nationalities and how they deal with their queer people, I'm getting a global perspective on being a queer person. And sometimes I feel very comfortable with a bunch of white dykes and other times I feel totally invisible, ignored. I feel that they only see the queer part of me. They don't see the Chicana part of me or the working class part of me. As long as I leave my class and culture outside the door when I enter a room full of white dykes I am okay, but if I bring in my race or class, then my role as educator starts.



I think that most white dykes really want a community that is diversified. And sometimes they want it so badly that they want to put everybody under this queer umbrella and say we are all in this together and we are all equal. But we are not equal. In their thirst and hunger for this diversity the issues of class and race are issues that they don't even want to examine, because they feel like they're divisive. So they are hungry for being politically correct and having women of color in their organizations, in their syllabi, and as performers, singers, writers and lovers. But a lot of times in order to bring us under the queer umbrella they will ignore or collapse the differences, not really deal with the issues. When it comes down to the numbers of who has power or *how many* dykes of color are getting in this anthology and how many don't — in terms of the real work, they fail. I mean the ideas are good, like the greater numbers/the greater strength kind of thing but they want us to leave our race and our class in the check room when we enter their space.



As a group, I think dykes are more progressively political than any other group because of feminism, and because of being (at least) doubly oppressed. Because they have been oppressed as dykes, I believe white lesbians are more apt to recognize the

oppression of women of color. So they have a true wanting of multi-cultural groups. And there are always the false ones of course, there are always the ones that do want it to be white. But there is some honest motivation about wanting to be allies and in this they still have a lot of work to do. For example, one of the things they often don't contend with is the unconscious motivation of doing it out of guilt. But I am very hopeful and I think that I am one of the very few people. I think that most people of my age or younger have been burned out and disillusioned and feel like it's the pits right now. Much younger people than me have no hope, do not see alliances working, do not see white people reaching out or doing their work, and do not see the possibility of white people changing perspectives. Or allowing change to come into their lives, but I do.



Voices Calling Across the Borderlines

acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"

Tarascon



Photo by Tee Corinne

Barbara Smith

Barbara Smith is a Black, lesbian, feminist activist and writer. She was a co-founder of the Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist group in Boston which did organizing from 1974-1980. She is co-founder and current publisher of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the only U.S. publisher for women of color. She lives in Albany, New York and is a member of the Feminist Action Network, a multi-racial group of lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women who have been organizing against racism and homophobia since 1989.

The Tip Of The Iceberg

Before discussing how white lesbians can be allies to me as a Black lesbian, I first need to talk about what racism is and how it works. From the moment this continent was colonized, racism has been fundamental to this country's functioning on every level. To this day, racism is systematically institutionalized in every aspect of the United States' political, economic and social life. Racism negatively affects the day to day lives of people of color in both devastating and "petty" ways, ranging from whether we grow up in poverty and die years earlier than whites to whether we will be waited on promptly and courteously whenever we enter a restaurant or a store.

There were two crucial events, directly tied to racism, that insured this country's successful European settlement. The first was the wholesale theft of the land itself from the original inhabitants, the Native peoples, a process accomplished through war and other acts of genocide. The second was the importation of millions of Africans to work as slaves. The United States is built upon stolen land and stolen labor.

For racism to serve its essential purpose, which was and is the exploitation of people of color in order to maintain white economic and political power, i.e. white supremacy, a racist ideology also had to be put in place. Vicious stereotypes based upon the supposed inferiority of sub-human Indian and African "savages" were created in order to justify policies and acts that would otherwise be viewed as criminally inhumane. Racist ideology, attitudes and beliefs, reinforced by segregation and discrimination, enable institutionalized racism to perpetuate itself.

Racism is not primarily a set of negative attitudes or behaviors on the part of individual whites. These negative attitudes and behaviors are grievous and sometimes fatal, but they are in fact symptoms of a system whose purpose is not merely to make people of color feel badly, but to maintain white power and control.

Of course there have always been people of color who have resisted white rule in every way we could. The abolition of

slavery, the destruction of legal segregation, our ongoing movements that fight against racism, our very physical survival are all testaments to the resistance of people of color.

The concept of resistance brings me to how white lesbians (or anyone who is white) can be an ally to me as a Black person, a woman, and a lesbian. And that is to do political organizing with the ultimate goal of destroying the institutionalized, structural racism that oppresses all people of color, including Black lesbians. As a socialist I believe that racism will only be destroyed when capitalism is also destroyed, which means it will be a long struggle. However, there are various kinds of grassroots organizing that challenge the state which we can participate in, right now.

I consider white lesbians to be allies who do actual organizing to dismantle institutionalized racism in the society as a whole. Having a "safe space" within the lesbian community where concerned white lesbians might treat me as if I were human is all well and good, but it won't help at all when I am in my car and get pulled over by a cop who decides to crack my head open because I am black. What would help would be for white lesbians to organize against police brutality, which is occurring in epidemic proportions against different groups of people of color all over the country. There are countless other issues to which anti-racist white lesbians can bring their intelligence, activism and support.

Doing anti-racist organizing does not mean that one has to stop organizing against homophobia and sexism, as demonstrated by the multi-issued political practice of lesbian feminists of color. Indeed, given how linked all the systems of oppression are, organizing around what may seem to be one issue should quickly lead to work around related ones. For example, lesbians and gays have a history of being mistreated by the police, so working against police brutality has direct positive consequences for our lives. Opposing the Christian right wing's homophobic campaigns logically necessitates opposing their assaults on women's reproductive freedom, their racist efforts to institute school vouchers, and their anti-immigration initiatives.

Of course I want white lesbians to treat me like a human being and there have been too many instances in the last twenty

years when they have not. I also would like white lesbians to know about and respect my culture and history. But most of all I need for white lesbians to do work toward eradicating the oppression that undermines the lives of all people of color including mine. The white lesbians who have been friends, allies, and in some cases family to me for many years all do practical political work to end racism in this country. One aspect of that work is challenging racism in lesbian contexts, but limiting one's activities to lesbian settings is to confront just the tip of the iceberg. As I wrote several years ago, I don't live in the women's movement, I live on the streets of North America.

The only way oppressed groups' situations ever change in real life as opposed to in theory is through activism. Talk doesn't do it, trainings don't do it, books don't do it, pleasant attitudes don't do it. Organizing does. The white lesbian allies I can depend upon are those who are allies in struggle.



Brooms and well-worn shoes
Uganda, Africa, 1993
Jean Weisinger

Judith K. Witherow

Are You A Gypsy

It's that time
of year again
when sun filled days
color me and flowers

With high cheek bones
and all the rest,
folks can't quite
pigeonhole me.

Being a mixed blood
Native American
doesn't help those who want
to discriminate knowingly.

But sure as bucks
lose their velvet, I'm often asked
"Are you a Gypsy?"

If I were I would be
proud to say so,
but thank you just
the brazen bigot same.

Lisa Huebner

Traitor

You
with your white lily smile
mist of intolerance
barely
just barely
sweeping over your
clear
blue eyes.

You
with your
calm
level
tone
in your voice
hiding contempt
mockery
masked as patience.

You
with your never torn
never crumpled
crisp clean
dollar bills
buying owning
the luxury of expectation
never questioning
because You don't have to.

Why do You have to
disgust me so?
Like the immediacy
and the normalcy

of sharp piercing pain
lessening
resigning to a
slow
dull
thud, yet
never quite ceasing to exist.

Go ahead
Stay safe
in your sweet ivory tower
high above
those of us
who must
rise above
circumstances
most likely
caused by
You.

Caryatis Cardea

A Different Set of Values

On November 28th, 1993, at Mama Bears Bookstore in Oakland, California, I participated in a reading by contributors to the newly-released anthology, *Lesbian Culture*, edited by Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe. I wrote a piece specifically for the reading, which we are publishing here. I have written a preface to give the readers a context and an epilogue explaining what happened afterward at the bookstore, and outlining the reaction since then. We are also including, with her permission, one of the letters I have received from Julia Penelope since that date, and as her comments refer more to my unofficial or private remarks that day than to the substance of my speech, I have tried to give the context for them also.

Preface

Two years ago, I gave permission to Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe to reprint some work of mine in their upcoming anthology, *Lesbian Culture*. As the book neared completion, a friend of mine happened to mention that a piece of hers was coming out in another anthology. She had granted permission, she told me, only if the editors assured her the book would be culturally diverse.

I was exasperated that I had not felt similarly compelled to be certain that I was not participating in a white-dominated publication, to recognize how my white privilege had kept me, once again, from asking the questions which were a matter of survival for my friend, who is a lesbian of color.

A few weeks later, my copy of the *Lesbian Culture* anthology came in the mail. From the cover to the artwork to the level of representation, the book is overwhelmingly white. My lover, Leslie, and I decided to do an actual count. Through self-descriptions in the contributors' notes, things mentioned in the written work, pictures and double-checking the places where the pieces had originally appeared, we were able to ascertain only 14 dykes

of color in the volume, leaving the possibility that it was as much as 75% white.

I was trying to figure out what I could do that would sufficiently counter the racism of my appearance here when I got another letter from Julia, inviting me to participate in local readings of the anthology. I decided to attend, but to make a public statement owning the privilege from which I had assumed that someone else would be responsible for assuring thorough representation of lesbians of color and lack of oppressive content.

I was the fifth of the contributing authors to read. I would rather have gone first, before the celebratory aspect built up. When I got to the stage, I made some off-the-cuff remarks, as I always do while I adjust the microphone and settle my nerves. In this vein, I responded to a comment from Julia's introduction that every self-respecting woman hates her doctor. I said, "Although I am a self-respecting woman, I don't hate my doctor. She's a lesbian who's here in the audience, and I feel lucky to have had the care she's been giving me for over ten years." (I mention this only to make sense of the P.S. to Julia's letter.)

Since the event, one factual error and one instance of my privilege at work even in the remarks I read at the bookstore have been pointed out to me. The factual error is corrected in a footnote within the text.

The exercise of privilege was in my description of the lesbian on the cover. It is a very famous picture with which I was familiar, though I didn't know who took the picture or who was in it. I now know that it is a self-portrait by JEB, a Jewish lesbian photographer (and photographer of lesbians) of some renown.

My comments regarding the cover have to do with the concept of marginalization. If I had it to do again — and I guess this is the point when I sort of do — I would, among my other remarks, take notice of what it means to Jewish lesbians, who cannot take their inclusion in lesbian culture for granted, to have found one of themselves on the cover. It was a moment of some considerable gladness and recognition for many of my friends, and I plowed past that on my way to another point. Not knowing JEB's identity, I indicated that the dyke in the picture was some-

one absolutely *not* marginalized, thereby leaving the many dykes who recognized JEB (or recognized that she was Jewish, even if they didn't know her) even further marginalized. The points about the cover are that no one person can represent the concept of "lesbian," and that only white-skinned dykes have even been considered for the role.

I have added to the text of the speech the page numbers of the items I referred to that day, and footnoted certain comments that would make no sense out of the context of the bookstore reading. None of the footnotes were read that day. I have titled this version after a quote from an essay by Lee Evans, originally published in *Sinister Wisdom*, and reprinted in *Lesbian Culture*.

The point of Lesbian community is to separate from the status quo and base our connections on a different set of values.

These explanations and qualifications being made, what follows is what I read at Mama Bears.

**Response to *Lesbian Culture*
read at Mama Bears Bookstore, Oakland, CA
November 28, 1993**

I've been thinking a great deal lately about the ways that white Lesbians protect each other against the consequences of our racism. We say that we know we are all racist, but, when challenged, we focus on how offended we are by the accusation, or how it was made. By such means, racism continues and thrives in our communities. When I am racist in the presence of another white Dyke, I implicitly trust her lack of real outrage, I rely on her racism to allow mine to continue.

When Julia and Susan asked for permission to include my work in this volume, I admit to having felt flattered. The notion that all my trouble-making had actually earned me a place in the history of Lesbian culture was seductive. Mostly, I perceive myself as a thorn in the side of my community: a role with which, as a Scorpio, I am quite comfortable. Now, the book is out, and I am not flattered, because it is not OK with me to be in a book of 92 Lesbian contributors, with only 14 Lesbians of color that I can

identify; a book in which Lesbians of Asian, Native American and Latina descent altogether total six, but I can find 39 Lesbians whom I know to be white Gentile.

How could the editors have come to believe that I would approve of the makeup of this book? That's easy. When I was asked for material for this book, I didn't ask if it would be representative of old Dykes, fat Dykes, young Dykes, disabled Dykes, Dykes of color, Jewish Dykes: I didn't ask anything. I assumed that my invitation to participate was a move toward class diversity. But I didn't ask. Well, that's privilege at work. I gave them every right to believe that this book would be acceptable to me. This book is not acceptable to me.

So, I've decided that my objection to this book, and to my participation must be made public. Private consultations between white Lesbians — and they do take place — just aren't accomplishing enough. Not if a book which may be as much as 75% white can be released in 1993, twenty years into this movement, and be titled *Lesbian Culture*. It doesn't matter that this is an anthology. Lesbians have very limited access to publishing. This is not one of dozens which will appear. And if it were, what are we suggesting, separate but equal? The whole wide world, the whole wild world of Dykedom goes steadily about its business of changing the world while too many of us who are white Lesbians rest complacently within our skin privilege, believing that we are all there is to being Lesbian. Two decades of being so easy on one another has led us, collectively, to this book.

Well, what is wrong with this book?

92 contributors

1 of Asian descent

3 Latina

2 Native American

8 African American, including Audre Lorde & Pat Parker

10 Jewish

39 white gentile¹

¹ The SW editorial group has pointed out to me that I added up who is in the book and never even mentioned that some folks go by with no representation whatsoever. Dykes of Arab descent, they note, are entirely absent.

What else is wrong?

The cover has a white woman on it. That should be enough right there. She stands under a roadside sign reading, "Dyke." She seems confident that this describes her and that everyone seeing the photograph will get it. This picture, of a young Lesbian, thin, white, apparently able-bodied and possibly class-privileged (I'm taking a shot in the dark here, because very few of us get even teeth otherwise) delivers one message: This is Dyke. We use the term "marginalize" in our politics, but this is what it really means. You define Dyke as thin, young and white and that image is placed at the center of Lesbian consciousness, at the center of our consciousness of what is Lesbian, with everyone possessing other characteristics pushed toward the margins. They aren't Dykes, they're Black Dykes, or fat Dykes, or old Dykes. This cover alone marginalizes Lesbians of color (as well as disabled or fat or old Lesbians).

What else is wrong? A Lesbian fantasy about constructing a nipple atop a mesa in Australia called Ayer's Rock (p. 218), which just happens to be a site sacred to the indigenous people of color. After years of struggle, the Aborigines just won back the right to keep white people from climbing all over it, and here, a white Dyke from the U.S. is having imperialist daydreams in print about scaling it and altering it in the name of "the leaping Lesbians."²

More? A character in a play protests being married off by her author. Well, certainly, our Lesbian sensibilities revolt at such a thought, but she objects mostly because he is (and I quote) "fat, and old, and poor ... and he can't even speak good English." (p. 169)

You see, this is not a mere difference of opinion about who should and should not have been included. But I do question the priorities honored here. If there was only room to discuss some authors, while excerpting others, couldn't we have included Paula Gunn Allen and Gloria Anzaldúa, and just mentioned Isabel Miller and Radclyffe Hall. Personally, I do not find myself

2 A woman who spoke to me after the reading said she had just come from Australia, where the land struggle continues and tourists still climb the Rock, though some limited areas are now restricted.

or my history in the lives of ultra-rich white womyn from the U.S. and Britain, nor in stories like *The Well of Loneliness*, wherein the main character's greatest tragedy is that the world won't let her have her very own cute little straight blonde girl, like the men get to do. I disavow Radclyffe Hall as a foremother, and frankly, I don't think she'd be too eager to claim me as her descendant, either.

And there's still more. A rap lyric by two white womyn (p. 331), despite the poem by an African American Lesbian (p. 461) protesting the plagiarism that occurs when white womyn use Black modes of expression. At least two sexualized references to children (pp. 277, 334), a relentless ridicule of the Asian foods commonly eaten by Lesbian vegetarians (pp. 342, 347, 349, 352), with no notice taken of the implicit racism. It just isn't appropriate for a white U.S. Dyke to refer to tofu as "icky, weirdo food." (p. 347) It is Asian food. And what is the word "weirdo" even doing here? Slavery (p. 171) and genocide (p. 190) used as metaphors, classism (p. 344, all of *The Well of Loneliness* and all of *Patience and Sarah*), womyn disliked by certain authors referred to as "babe" and even "bitch." (p. 302) This book is wrong.

Mama Bears' review recommends that we keep this book handy in our homes and "wander through its atmosphere."³ I love Lesbians, and I love history, and I love Lesbian history and literature and culture. But I tried wandering here, and I just couldn't breathe. I'm sure there are arguments that can and will be presented to justify the choices made in this book. I'm equally sure that I will be reprimanded for making this critique public. But the Introduction to this book recommends being self-critical, and acknowledges that without our controversies "our communities could not change." (p. 19) Even so, the Michigan festival is covered extensively in this section, although the struggles of disabled Lesbians for accommodation, the overt discrimination against fat Lesbians, the outright exclusion of Lesbians of color from the stage and, consequently, from the audience, for years and years is never mentioned.

But the worst single indictment of racism against this book

³ *Mama Bears News 'N' Notes*

is on page 397. A photograph of Sue Fink accompanying an interview with her. A half-page photo of Sue wearing a T-shirt which reads "Come to Camp Nowanaweenee, with Sue Fink," the words inscribed around a circle, within which is a drawing of a young woman wearing braids and a headband with a feather. I'm afraid if I begin to talk about this, I will start screaming. For one thing, this community does not need me, personally, to tell them what's wrong with this. Even the editors of this book didn't need me to tell them. They only needed to turn to page 465 of their own book, where Chrystos, a Native American Lesbian poet, states, "I Am Not Your Princess." Bypassing the classism of assuming that everyone can relate to a camp experience, let's go directly to the racism of those camps for affluent white children which make a mockery of everything Native, from names to clothing to crafts and music. This pretend Camp name — Nowanaweenee — employs the ridicule of Native languages to make a joke which only makes sense if you are English-speaking. And I sincerely hope I don't have to say anything about the picture on the shirt.⁴

Unfortunately, the outrage of this picture doesn't stop here. The photograph is captioned "Sue Fink & Friends." I was so focused on the T-shirt, so incensed that it should appear here when I know Sue has been challenged on this, including by me, that it took another friend, a Lesbian of color, to notice that the unnamed friends flanking Sue in the picture are Jean and June Millington, Lesbian of color musicians every bit as well known as Sue Fink. The photo, and the accompanying interview, were produced by an African-American Dyke for *Hot Wire* magazine. But in the context of this predominantly white book, it takes on new meaning that the only Dykes of Asian/Pacific Island descent whom I could identify are not even credited in the photo acknowledgements in the front of the book. The picture is referred to as "Sue Fink in Camp Nowanaweenee T-shirt." This

4 I was holding up the picture at the time. The T-shirt has a cartoon-like drawing of a young-looking female whose long dark hair is in pigtails, and who is wearing a headband with a feather.

may mean that it was actually chosen for that reason and that the Millingtons were incidental and, therefore, could remain nameless.

It's considered better, I know, to take someone aside and discuss these things privately. Of course, it's also way more middle-class and I guess a lot of you know how I feel about that sort of suggestion.⁵ I'm not even sure what I want to come from this. At least, I don't want the book to be bought. I don't want it used in Lesbian Studies courses. I don't want it to go into reprint. I want my community, my Lesbian community, here in Oakland, to say no to this book and any and all others like it. I want to acknowledge, myself, that some of the issues I've brought out here today were discovered or analyzed by Lesbian friends of mine: Jewish Dykes, Dykes of Color, white Dykes. I want a public acknowledgement from all of us, and from the editors, that if you take 92 Lesbians, and only 14 are of color, the result is not *Lesbian Culture*. It is white Lesbians, plus tokens of color. That is not the community I have worked twenty years to build. That is not even the community I live in now.

I've given you the figures I've been able to ascertain from information in the Contributor's Notes, or because I know or know of the Lesbians published here. I'd like each of you to recognize that I can count, for certain, 39 white Gentile Lesbians in this book. If any of you are tempted to ask me what the "right" figures would be, I will say only this. If it had 39 Latina Lesbians out of 92, or 39 African American Lesbians, or 39 Jewish Lesbians, many Lesbians in this community would protest the overrepresentation. Even more would simply refuse to consider that kind of book a generic Lesbian Culture book.

The Introduction states that due to the "long history of racism in the U.S., Black Lesbians don't trust white Lesbians." (p. 5) Well, I don't say no to that, though I'd like to pause long enough to point out that those are not the only two races in this country.

⁵ This remark was directed to my hometown audience. For those unfamiliar with my work, I spend a very large portion of my time ranting about classism and resisting the class assimilation our lesbian communities continually demand.

More to my point is that it is time, and past time, for white Lesbians to admit that though there is, indeed, no reason for any Lesbian of Color to trust us, that is not what keeps our communities segregated. We are the ones with the power to exclude, and we use it. We don't trust *them*. And that distrust is racism.

Epilogue

I returned to my table and Julia returned to the stage, where she made a few comments on efforts that had been made to expand the diversity of the book. There were three more readers scheduled, but many in the audience were unwilling to continue the reading, as though, one dyke said, oppression was something we could afford to shelve until a more convenient time. An impromptu discussion developed, initiated by dykes at my table, who knew what I had come there to do, supported it, and already knew some of the things they wanted to say. Some folks left in anger, others for reasons unstated. It was finally suggested that we decide one way or the other, to continue the reading or have a discussion. Enough voted for the discussion that it happened, although even more lesbians left at that point.

And it was a discussion, not a trashing, as some have reported experiencing in the past. That was the most cheering thing for many of us. It was understood that this was not an opportunity to point at Julia as though we had just found the source of all racism, leaving ourselves innocent. (This is important, since most, but not all, of the lesbians present were white.⁶) The discussion did not devolve to a recipe of numbers, as in just-add-more-pieces-by-dykes-of-color-and-mix. Some in the room were supportive of the book and of Julia, others supported my posi-

⁶ Julia's reference, in her letter to me, to a Native American lesbian who had been unable to participate left me baffled. I found someone who had been sitting closer to Julia and she does recall a woman saying she'd grown up on a reservation as the opening to her remarks. From my corner, I didn't hear that. I remember a lesbian who was interrupted, but she challenged the interruption and finished what she had to say. My question is, if Julia thought a lesbian was being silenced, why didn't she do something then?

tion. Julia's responses, though disappointing to me personally,⁷ were calm and reasoned. There was also participation, in written form, by a homebound lesbian friend who had asked me, in the event of an open discussion, to distribute her statement as a disability accommodation.

Julia and I spoke privately for a moment after the reading. She said she had known what I was going to do as soon as I entered and told her I would be reading a piece on racism which I had written for that day. I asked her if she understood the points that had been made. In other words, I said, do you get it? Do we part allies on this issue? She said, sure, although she didn't think I'd really accomplished anything. I added that I had chosen the public mode because our private challenges to each other, as white womyn, have been getting the community exactly nowhere.

A number of white lesbians commented to me afterward that their thinking about how to confront oppressive behavior had been altered by the reading and discussion that day. Some of us, hoping for radical change, not just an absence of verbal assault, could only say, "It could have been worse." Some felt that Julia had handled it well and that we had all learned some things. Some thought it was all just talk.

Since then, I have received the letter to which I alluded at the top of this piece, in which Julia retracts any suggestion that she understood. My only hesitation in presenting my speech and Julia's letter together is that confronting oppression is a necessity, not something on which we can take sides and must present equal time, as it were. It would be heartbreaking to me if white lesbians, instead of dealing with the oppressions involved, turned the whole matter into a question of whom to believe.

White lesbians need to deal with the quality of community

⁷ My disappointment lay in my belief that if a person acts out of ignorance, education can remedy the situation. Julia indicated that she had known the exact numbers of lesbians of color and white lesbians and had gone ahead with publication, even stating that this adequately represented actual participation in lesbian culture. She hadn't known what June and Jean Millington looked like, she said, failing to recognize that it was her duty to identify them and give them credit before profiting from the use of their images.

we have constructed, in which our outrage at racism never equals our outrage at having it pointed out. The qualities we most love in ourselves as political activists against men in the patriarchy — being upfront, confrontive, outrageous, refusing smokescreens, holding oppressors accountable — are the very qualities we most hate when we are active against the privileges and oppressions we bring into our dyke communities.

Elana wrote to Julia for permission to include the letter I received from her. Julia replied by phone message that our January 24th deadline was too soon for her to respond, and that she wanted a copy of what I had said that day. On the 24th, before I made the copy, I received from Julia a 16-page, single-spaced diatribe, with four attachments, three of which had been circulated without permission from their authors. Certain comments in the statement indicate that the packet may have been sent to 100 or more dykes. The general tone of the statement is that persecution, evidenced by actions such as mine, has driven Julia to leave lesbian community and activism. There is also an insinuation that what *SW* publishes herein may not be what I really said that day.

My motive in all of this is just what I said at the reading, and if Julia or anyone else wishes to try and convert it into a dispute among white womyn, they will have to do so without my participation. I have said what I need to about the book. Any responses should be about that, not about my attitude, tone of voice, lack of etiquette or credentials, or off-hand jokes or remarks made then or since. Do we or do we not wish to combat the racism, classism, anti-Semitism and other oppressions which have left us with only the shell of lesbian community?⁸

8 I engaged in long conversations with many friends before and since the reading, and my love and appreciation go to them for their support, ideas and patience. I thank Leslie Levy, Jamie Lee Evans, Suz Fields, Monifa Ajanaku, Naja Sorella, Michele Nichols and Laura Stern for being allies when I needed them.

Julia Penelope

December 29, 1993

Dear Caryatis:

When you came to speak to me after the "event" you and your friends staged at Mama Bear's on November 28th, you asked me if we could "still be allies." At that time, I replied "Yes," a response I must now apologize for and withdraw. You also told me you "couldn't think of another way of doing it" (which I interpreted in that context as referring to your allegations of racism). I now realize that I cannot trust you, nor, on the basis of your treatment of me at Mama Bear's, do you trust me. Without trust and respect, we have no basis being allies.

If it was your intention to humiliate me, hurt me, or discredit me, or some combination of similar aims, then you selected the method appropriate to your aim(s), whether or not it was successful. If, as you claimed, you wanted to address what seem to you the manifestations of racism in the *Lesbian Culture* anthology, there were a number of alternative methods available to you. If you had trusted me and my politics, I believe you'd have approached me in a different manner. You might, for example, have

(1) written to me and/or Susan Wolfe at any time during the two years prior to the publication of the book, because you knew we were working on it;

(2) written to one or both of us after the anthology had been published expressing your dissatisfaction and urging us to "make right" what you perceive to be errors of consciousness;

(3) written to me before I left for the west coast, because you had all the information concerning my trip ahead of time, telling me what you planned to do;

(4) called me (if you could afford it) to tell me what you planned to do.

Whatever alternative method you might have chosen, you would have made sure that I had a copy of your allegations before you read them. Your chosen method of confrontation,

however, reveals your intent to “surprise” me and your assumptions that made you think that surprise was an appropriate way to make public your concerns. The way you chose to voice your objections to *Lesbian Culture* reveals your very cynical assumptions about who I am: (1) that I am indifferent to or ignorant of the facts of our different oppressions and the ways they are intertwined in our lives, (2) that I am somehow otherwise inaccessible to you and other Lesbians regarding discussions about how we can address and challenge each other about these oppressions and their manifestations in our communities. Neither of these assumptions is true about me. (I won’t, in this letter, attempt to demonstrate the inaccuracy of your assumptions because any presentation of facts seems to be interpreted as “defensive,” in which case facts are irrelevant.)

Had you chosen to treat me, as a Lesbian, differently, I might now believe that “racism” in the anthology was your point. But I don’t believe that. I believe that you had some other motive for treating me as you did. Other Lesbians who were present have told me they believe that you were trying to “score points” off of me, and that your self-righteousness suggested a “holier-than-thou” attitude. It didn’t help, for example, when individuals at your table talked over the Winnebago Lesbian when she tried to enter the discussion, although she began by identifying herself as a reservation-born Native American.

You should also know that your actions and your statement that Lesbians should refuse to buy the book did not have the effect you said you intended. Lesbians who hadn’t planned to buy the book did, those who were going to buy one copy bought two or three instead. And they did it, not because they’re also racists, but because they were angry and very tired of watching one group of Lesbians attack and abuse another Lesbian for what they claim is some lack of political consciousness. Yes, I felt you were verbally abusive toward me. I believe I deserve better treatment from you and your friends.

You should know that, because of your accusations, I informed Dykes of Color who had planned to read with me at other bookstores about what you had alleged, including some of your

examples (Sue Fink's Camp Nowannaweenie T-shirt, Elliott's description of tofu; JEB's picture on the cover), and told them that they could decide whether or not they still wanted to appear with me. I told them that I did not want to tokenize them or appear to tokenize them, and that I would understand if they felt they couldn't appear with me.

I think that assumptions are an important part of your chosen actions. I am now in possession of a copy of [the]* letter that you passed out at Mama Bear's, something I wasn't given until a contributor put it in my hands the evening of the reading at Old Wives Tales. I assume that, because you distributed it, you share Sorella's assumptions that *Lesbian Culture* is "a book on a small number of Lesbians, those with the bucks to get books like this printed." You should know enough about publishing in general and Lesbian publishing in particular to know that neither Susan and I nor the contributors to the anthology have "the bucks" to pay for producing such a book. To make such an allegation and to distribute it as though you want it to have wider circulation is both irresponsible and malicious on your part. Furthermore, to hold up the anthology and ridicule the photo of JEB as a picture of "a young, thin, white, privileged lesbian," because her teeth are straight, as you did, was unconscionable. JEB is white, but she is a Jew, the photo is about 20 years old — JEB when she was a younger Dyke. That photo, and the postcard she made with it, are considered by many Lesbians to be Lesbian "classics." Whether or not you agree with that evaluation, having straight teeth, while it may indicate class privilege, is not the best criterion for such an allegation. First, JEB is working class.** Second, as a Dyke of Color said: "I have straight teeth because it was get them fixed or lose all of them." (She chose the first option.)

You should know, by the way, that Susan and I did not

*Editors' note: The letter referred to here was a disability accommodation by which a homebound dyke participated in the bookstore discussion. SW considers it inappropriate for that individual to be singled out by name simply because her remarks were made in writing.

** JEB and Julia would like to change this to say that JEB identifies as middle-class.

request your permission to reprint "tremors" in the anthology because of "class." We like the poem; we thought it was powerful. We accepted "My Old Dykes' Home Scream" because we thought you said many important things. If your "class" identity had motivated our selection, why then we couldn't have been "good" Lesbians anyway because we'd tokenized you! From your position, either we "tokenize" too little, or we weren't "aggressive enough" (from one of your friends during the discussion), or we "tokenize," period.

Finally, I've talked to Susan about the fact that you are "ashamed" to be included in *Lesbian Culture*, and we will delete both of your contributions to the anthology as soon as we can. I can't say exactly when, because the deletion will require making many new plates throughout the book (Table of Contents, the text itself, Contributors' Notes), and I cannot commit Crossing Press to such an expensive undertaking. That decision is theirs to make, not mine. But we can request it, and we will.

Sincerely,

Julia Penelope

P.S. One other thing, your snide comment about my assumption that women mistrust the medical establishment: You should know that your situation, having "a sweet, Lesbian doctor" who's taken such good care of you, is a privilege of the area in which you live. You don't have the right to assume, as you do, that your special case is any reason why women should trust the AMA and the doctors it produces. Both my mother and I have been the victims of AMA doctors in times when there were very few doctors, much less lesbian doctors. Your arrogance and self-righteousness is appalling, and for you to presume to "correct" my statement ignores the long, long history of medical misogyny (which continues) and iatrogenic practices, both of which have been more than adequately documented by feminists.

Jamie Lee Evans

Lesbians and the Even Steven Syndrome
or For white class privileged dykes who
should know better
(a sarcastic pissed off poem)

Even Steven
is what you say
we are.
You know,
because we are at the same place
at the same time
because we have the same job
the same car
the same salary
the same amount of vacation
because we've both gone to the same festivals
some of the same concerts
seen the same videos.

Because we like the same shoes
each have 10 pairs of jockey underwear
own a computer
work in publishing
have b.a.'s, m.a.'s, phd's, mfcc's, lcsw's
and a sufficient dosage of bs.

It seems to be a syndrome among
privileged sighted women —
if you see me, than I must no longer be oppressed
or I must have never been oppressed or maybe I was oppressed,
but the oppression didn't really hurt me
not really, right?

I'll call it the *even steven syndrome*,
something for you professionally minded girls to sink your teeth into
a real title, a diagnosis.

I'll submit it to the dsm IIIr,*
it'll be categorized and covered in your insurance plans:
"The ancient U.S. privileged lesbian belief that we were
all created equal under god."

Ohhh gawd,
Yes, it only popped up once we found each other,
or more accurately,
once you found me
[in your world]
Funny thing that I can be here,
occasionally,
yet, never quite the same
never knowing when I'll be made to feel uncomfortable,
be stared at, be the subject
of bad jokes or thoughtless remarks.
I'll have to say women of color, woman of color,
dyke of color, Asian dyke, Chinese dyke, mixed-blood dyke,
at least twenty times just to make sure that I be acknowledged...

Like the time when I was at Rhythmfest, in one of
the coveted cabins no less, and a group of white dykes came in,
took one look at the way we had arranged the bunk beds,
and said aloud and laughing, "my gawd, it looks like
an internment camp in here ..." ha. ha.
Then women wonder why
there were less than 10 Asian women at the festival.

Even steven,
"I mean, you got here, it couldn't have been that bad?"
And I wonder for all the dykes who didn't say it,
did you think it?
And, for gawds sake, don't say ignoring my life is about
treating me with *equality*,
about treating us all the same
that "can't we all just get along," kinda crap
because that's not it, not at all.

* *Diagnostic Statistical Manual, 3rd edition, revised* — a tool therapists use to
diagnose patients.

When you treat someone like "we're all the same,"
even steven
a peaceful loving people,
we are even less your equal than before,
as you've just erased all our struggle
all our pain, the time we spend and waste on some of the women
who we align ourselves with, and sometimes end up shamefully
begging for equality!

When you erase my struggles, you erase me.
You erase the life force and fight that got me into your classroom,
dining room or writer's cottage in the first place.

So please,
just stop acting pretending and wishing that it was all equal.
One scenario I can guarantee,
if we all did have the same level of power
I would be light years ahead of you right now.

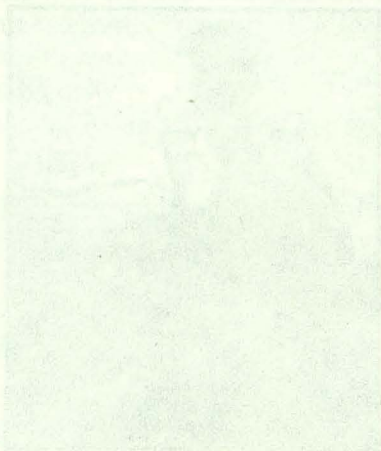


Young officer
Uganda, Africa, 1993
Jean Weisinger

Neta C. Crawford

Diva Girl

I am afraid of you diva girls
so into your selves
conferences, book parties, board meetings
your famous self
you will forget that
I exist
apart
from
you
your mirror of how good you are
to other black women



Myke Johnson

Wanting to be Indian: Cultural Appropriation in White Feminist Spirituality

*You can't hear the grass breathe
because you're too busy talking
about being an Indian holy woman two hundred years ago
You sure must stink if you didn't let go¹*

— *Chrystos*

How has racism affected white women's search for spiritual empowerment? How has white women's spiritual search adversely affected people of color? How can we work toward a woman-valuing spirituality which is deeply anti-racist?

When white women began to be hungry for a woman-valuing spirituality, it was easy to look to other cultures and be excited about rituals and stories we saw there. Encouraged by the new age movement, many white feminists began exploring Native American and African spiritualities. We gravitated to their greater emphasis on female deities and positive roles for women. We found a resonance with their greater focus on the earth, their grounding in the interconnectedness of all beings. Because of our misunderstanding of feminism as uniting women across race and culture, it was easy to jump in and claim these treasures as our own lost histories.

Many Native and African American women have since informed us that this is not how they see it.² They have introduced us to the concept of "cultural appropriation," naming as theft the misuse of Native and African cultural symbols and practices by white people. These women of color have asked white women

1 From a poem by Chrystos, "Shame On!" in *Dream On*, (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991), pp. 100-01.

2 See references in footnotes throughout article, plus Amoja Three Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette: A Guide for the Well-Intentioned*, 1990 (distributed by Market Wimmin, Box 28, Indian Valley, VA 24105).

who truly want to be sisters, to be allies, to join them in condemning the new age appropriation of the cultural heritage of people of color. This has been a difficult challenge for white women to understand and take to heart.

This challenge has been a source of deep transformation for me. I stand in a peculiar relation to the question of cultural appropriation because I am a woman with mixed racial ancestry, with both European and Native heritage. I grew up in white patriarchal christian culture, with fair skin and red hair, and only a reminder that we were "part-Indian" to link me to any other culture. It was when I began to reclaim the power of the mothers, that I found my matrilineal descent was from the Innu, who were called Montagnais by the French. My mother line led me to these women who were not white, who were made white by the racist and sexist practice of the assimilation of Native women into white culture through marriage.

Part of my attempt to reconnect with my female Innu roots drew me into exploring "Native spirituality." Luckily, it also drew me into political activity with Native people, for sovereignty, land rights, and religious freedom. It has been my engagement with these real issues and realities of Indian life that has brought me into connection with a me who is Indian. It also brings into sharper relief the me who is white, gives me a deeper insight into what whiteness is in this society. It undercuts that feature of whiteness which is about not having to look at itself, because it is the dominant norm, the "way things are."

This dual identity creates a grammatical problem when I write about cultural appropriation. How do I use "we" and "they" when I am included in both categories? In this article, I want to speak as a white woman especially to other white women. I have heard many Indian people speak out about these issues. It seems to me that it is white women in the women's spirituality movement who especially need to wrestle with these issues, if we are to be true to our commitment to the survival and liberation of all people.

White racism works in many ways. For example, many cultures have maintained a more spirit-including world view than Euro-American cultures. White racism has called these views "primitive," while considering white perspectives as "advanced." To study the cultures of people of color with new awareness and

appreciation can be a positive way to undermine that form of cultural imperialism. To glorify or romanticize the stereotypes of these cultures is just another form of racism: for example, to consider all Indians as mystical and close to nature, all Africans as rhythmic and possessing powerful magic. This form of racism is currently rampant in the new age movement, as well as other contexts of mainstream life.

So-called "Native American spirituality" has been a particular commodity on the new age market.³ A look at any new age magazine, center for workshops, or even the bulletin board of your favorite women's bookstore, will reveal some white person claiming to have studied "Native American beliefs, traditions, and rituals for many years." They will then offer a course or workshop, for a price, which will use Native spiritual practices to help us to "experience our wholeness" and "our primal female energies."⁴

Andrea Smith, Cherokee activist and member of Women of All Red Nations, points out that actual Native religions are diverse community based religions, and reflect the particular needs of each community. "The 'Indian' ways that these white, New Age 'feminists' are practicing have little grounding in reality....they do not understand Indian people, or our struggles for survival, and thus they can have no genuine understanding of Indian spiritual practices."⁵

Janet McCloud, Tulalip elder and fishing rights activist, reflects

First they came to take our land and water, then our fish and game. ... Now they want our religions as well. All of a sudden, we have a lot of unscrupulous idiots running around saying they're medicine people. And they'll sell you a sweat lodge ceremony for fifty bucks. It's not only wrong, it's obscene. Indians don't sell

3 I am focusing on the appropriation of Native American cultures because I am most familiar with and engaged in this particular battleground, and because this is perhaps the most popular culture for such an assault. However, the principles of which I am speaking apply also to the appropriation of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern spiritual and cultural heritage.

4 Quotes from a random flyer found on a women's bookstore bulletin board.

5 Andy Smith, "For All those Who Were Indian in a Former Life," *Sojourner*, Vol 15 #3, Nov., 1990, p. 8. Now in the anthology, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, edited by Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), pp.168-71.

their spirituality to anybody, for any price. This is just another in a very long series of thefts from Indian people and, in some ways, this is the worst one yet.⁶

Paula Gunn Allen, Laguna Pueblo author and teacher, sums it up by saying, "You cannot do Indian spirituality without an Indian community. ...it's physical and social and spiritual and they're fused together."⁷

There are also Indian individuals who are marketing these practices. Some Indian people who become "teachers" of white people defend the practice by saying it is time to share these wisdoms. They put forth the idea of a "rainbow tribe," composed of people of all races and nations living together in harmony. I have noticed, however, that the context of this sharing is in white dominated new age circles, not in Indian communities. McCloud comments, "They're thieves and sell-outs, and they know that too. That's why you never see them around Indian people anymore."⁸ In 1980, a resolution was passed by the Circle of Elders of the Indigenous Nations of North America against Indians "who use spiritual ceremonies with non-Indian people for profit." In 1984, the American Indian Movement passed a resolution supporting the Elders.⁹

When I am in Native political and community contexts, among those who are struggling against oppression, I hear these sentiments echoed over and over again. Yet when I am in white and multicultural feminist contexts, women seem to have a really hard time understanding cultural appropriation. "I cannot see the harm in worshipping the Goddess in whatever cultural form you can relate to,"¹⁰ writes one woman in a letter in a woman's spirituality magazine. Another echoes in a more disgusted tone,

6 From "Spiritual Hucksterism: The Rise of the Plastic Medicine Men," in Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1992) p. 217. (Originally published in *Z Magazine*, Dec., 90.)

7 Jane Caputi, "Interview with Paula Gunn Allen," *Trivia* 16/17, Fall 1990, p. 50

8 Ibid.

9 AIM Resolution, May 11, 1984, at Sovereign Dine Nation, Window Rock, AZ. Full text is in Churchill, op.cit., pp. 226-28.

10 *Sage Woman* #17, Oct., 1991, p.45

speaking against

"politically correct" wiccans/pagans saying I can't worship the Goddess(es) that I want to (that speak to me) because I'm of "European descent" and am therefore committing "Cultural Genocide" no matter *what* I do.¹¹

By denying the spiritual and political autonomy of Indian people, the new age "rainbow" people subvert whatever good intentions they may have about multi-cultural community. What gets created is multi-cultural white middle class dominance in yet another form.

An even more ominous excuse I have heard, also from both new age white people and Indian "teachers," is that Native peoples are dying out, and therefore these treasures must be passed on to whites so they are not lost. White Americans, at least in the United States, like to believe that Indians are a phenomenon of the past. This creates a climate in which denial can be maintained about current day assaults on Indian land and livelihood. Indians are not "dying out" but they are being killed even today, by radioactive mining, environmental waste, and FBI bullets, among other things. They are also fighting back and surviving.

I don't mean to discount the fact that there are Indian people on all sides of this issue. Like all groups of people, Native people have many different opinions and political leanings. But if we are concerned about fighting oppression, I believe it makes sense to pay attention to those Native people who are fighting against the oppression of their people. At some point, we have to choose those with whom we are going to make alliance.

To better understand cultural appropriation/theft and its deadliness, and to distinguish it from appropriate cultural sharing, I think an example from European history might be helpful. Cultural appropriation is one of the ancient tools of domination and colonization. It has been going on throughout history, whenever one culture has attempted to conquer another. Battles are not fought only by the force of arms, but also by images and ideas. Any context of domination will include such cultural imperialism. This isn't unique to U.S./Native relations.

11 *Sage Woman*, p. 46.

Many feminist scholars have pointed to evidence suggesting that there were early female images of divinity throughout "pre-historic Europe." The Catholic Church took the image of the great mother goddess, and incorporated it as the virgin Mary, Mother of God. It used her early pagan sacred sites for building shrines to Mary. The church absorbed many such pagan symbols, yet distorted and transformed their meaning and their impact on the lives of the people.

The shift of context, control and usage created important shifts of meaning and power. The conqueror took what had been an image of empowerment and valuing of women and turned it into an image promoting female acquiescence to male pre-eminence. They were able to then redefine female goodness as obedience, humility, and rejection of sexual energy. To capture and transform the image of the goddess in this way served to further solidify the subjugation of women, and undermine the ideas fostering resistance.

How is this similar to the cultural appropriation of Native images and practices by the new age movement? I will use the example of one practice, the "vision quest," a ritual found in Lakota culture (as well as in several other Native nations), which is now offered for a price in many new age contexts. In traditional Lakota culture, the vision quest was a time of fasting and prayer in the mountains, and fit into the unfolding of a person's role within their community. The elders of the community sent the individual forth with prayers, and received them back offering interpretation of their visions and guidance for living out their implications. The context was a belief that the person's individual life and calling was a gift for the whole group, and their connection to the spirit world would bring them into deeper connection with the community. Each existed in balance with the other.¹²

When this ritual is brought into a new age context, its meaning and power are altered. First of all, the focus shifts to white people's needs and visions. There is no accountability to a community, particularly any Native community. Secondly, the form and structure of the ritual itself has been changed. The focus of spirituality in the new age is much more on individual growth and pros-

12 One account of the vision quest is given in Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971) pp. 44-66.

perity. The giving and receiving of the Native way is transformed into buying and selling, a sacrilege in Native contexts. What is called "Indian spirituality" has actually become a distortion. It cannot be relied on, it has been warped to fit another agenda.

What are some of the effects of this warped agenda on Native people? The actual realities of Native communities are erased. Native communities have been under assault for 500 years, and are facing issues of dislocation, poverty, suicide, unemployment, addiction. In Native communities, the recovery of traditional practices such as the vision quest helps build identity and community pride, helps empower Native communities for life struggles against a racist mainstream.

This process is ultimately intended to supplant Indians, even in areas of their own customs and spirituality. In the end, non-Indians will have complete power to define what is and is not Indian, even for Indians. We are talking here about an absolute ideological/conceptual subordination of Indian people in addition to the total physical subordination [we] already experience. When this happens, the last vestiges of real Indian society and Indian rights will disappear. Non-Indians will then "own" our heritage and ideas as thoroughly as they now claim to own our land and resources.¹³

Pam Colorado

It is important to notice that Indian people are not saying, "Don't learn about Indian culture." Rather they are asking that white people learn more deeply and accurately about Indian cultures and in a context which does not foster their destruction.

... for those of you who want to know what Aboriginal people are like, let us tell you. Participate in our writings, feel our visual art, move with our music, hear in

13 Pam Colorado, Oneida activist, quoted in Wendy Rose, "The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on Whitemaniamism," in M. Annette Jaimes, *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) p. 405. (Original quote in Ward Churchill, "A Little Matter of Genocide: Native American Spirituality and New Age Hucksterism," *Bloomsbury Review*, Vol. 8 #5, Sept./Oct., 1988, pp. 23-4.

your heart our stories.

Joy Asham Fedorick¹⁴

There are many community rooted Indian writers, artists, scholars, and cultural workers we can support, for example by buying their books instead of the new age impostor books, and helping to "break down the barriers which stand in [their] way to full creative and cultural expression."¹⁵

Cultural sharing involves interaction with the whole of a person and community, reciprocal giving and receiving, sharing of struggle as well as joy, receiving what the community wants to give, not what you want to take. Cultural sharing begins in respect, with patience not to make assumptions but to risk stepping outside of our own frame of reference.¹⁶

We need to birth in our hearts a commitment to the cultural (and literal) survival of Native people, just as a commitment to the empowerment of women is held there. Once we have decided to let our politics guide our spirits, we will find there are many things to do, both in the area of our connection to Indian people, and in our search for women-valuing spirituality. For the rest of this article, I want to focus on ways in which this commitment to solidarity against racism and cultural genocide informs our creation of women's spirituality.

What are some of the ways we can work toward a woman-valuing spirituality which is culturally located and deeply anti-racist? Part of what feeds cultural appropriation is a deep spiritual hunger in white people. This sense of starvation is very real, but we must realize: *Native people are not keeping us from spirit.* White culture has broken and disrupted its own spiritual heritage. If there is such a thing as spirit, we can recreate a path to it, we can hope that it will help us in that process.

14 Joy Asham Fedorick, "Fencepost Sitting and How I Fell Off to One Side," in *Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, (North Vancouver, BC, Canada), *Gallerie: Women Artists' Monographs*, Issue 11, 1992, p. 42.

15 *Ibid.*, p.38

16 For those who would like to learn more about the experience of Indian people and support Native women writers, I would recommend the books of the following Native writers, as a start: Paula Gunn Allen, Beth Brant, Maria Campbell, Chrystos, Louise Erdrich, Janice Gould, Janet Campbell Hale, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, M. Annette Jaimes, Lee Maracle, Leslie Marmon Silko, Anna Lee Walters.

We need to explore the links of spirit to community. Ask ourselves, Who is my community? how do we negotiate the world together? Where do we find our power? What gives us meaning? What is our relationship to the world around us?

The concept "Indian" is stereotypically linked to a connection to the earth and other species. In reality, we all live here on this earth, our lives equally enmeshed with the fate of countless other beings. These beings can teach us if we are quiet with them. We need to trust that we can begin where we are, who we are, in our own lives. What are the animals and plants we rely on? What feeds us? How can we honor that gift? How can we give back?

We can also look more closely at the deep desires underlying the phenomenon of white people "wanting to be Indian." White culture has attached those desires to a fantasy creation it called "Indian," which is not accurate to the real realities of Indians. But the fantasy can teach us about our own realities. We may find that we recover some lost shadow of ourselves which was projected onto the "other."

Many Native people have encouraged us to explore the traditions of our own ancestors. Whiteness in the U.S. has served to homogenize distinct European (and some part-European) peoples into one entity, generally from the very racist intention of solidifying the Anglo-Saxon base of power against people of color. We can counter that manifestation of racism by reconstructing ethnic cultural identity. People in the mainstream U.S. have been pressured to dishonor our ancestors, to honor individuality and rebellion against our cultural traditions, as well as conformity to dominant patterns. To honor cultural location is a profound transformation of a way of thinking.

I think it is important for white women to acknowledge the risks involved in exploring a woman-valuing white spirituality. While the fantasy image of the "Indian" has been romanticized and spiritualized, the fantasy image of the "witch" is as sinister as ever, despite the occasional "good witch of the North." Women accused of being witches were burned and tortured. We carry in our collective European psyche the memory of this gynocide.

When we face ourselves as white women, we face this loss, this tremendous assault on female power and value, perpetrated upon us by our own people. To embrace woman-valuing spiritu-

ality that is Euro-based implies a rebellion against the dominant "spirit-world" of Euro-Christianity. For white women to reclaim the word witch is to bring this rebellious aspect of our search into the open. There is a risk in this and tremendous power.

To be allies in the struggle against cultural appropriation, to find grounded cultural sharing, we need to realize that the answer will not evolve as a set of rules we can follow. Nothing will earn us a certificate of innocence. Cultural appropriation is much bigger than any specific, individual dilemmas. We need to understand it in the context of structural racism. Racism is a system of oppression in which the structures of society are operated and controlled by white people. Racism combines prejudice against people of color with political, economic, and social power over their lives. Cultural appropriation is the use by a dominating or colonizing people, in this case Euro-Americans, of cultural and religious ceremonies and articles of a people experiencing domination or colonization, in this case Native Americans. On a fundamental level, cultural sharing will not be possible until we end racism. In the meantime, only when we wholeheartedly join the struggle to end racism, and all oppression, can we begin to experience cultural sharing.

I want to close with some advice offered by Chrystos:

*Take nothing you cannot return
 Give to others give more
 Walk quietly Do what needs to be done
 Give thanks for your life
 Respect all beings
 simple
 & it doesn't cost a penny¹⁷*

— Chrystos

17 "Shame On!" in *Dream On* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991), p. 101.

Aspen

Fat Woman Strides

From my car I see
A fat woman stride
In shorts and check shirt
Moving like a dyke
Defiance Outsize
Brave woman pushes
The stares aside
Ignores giggling
Teenagers, wears
Hard face on
Her sanctuary.

Fat woman strides
How proud she looks
I wish I could be
Right by her side.
Hate on the streets
Such courage needed
I put on my shorts
Defiance Outsize
Electric wheelchair
Moving like a dyke

Fat woman rides.

Sadie green

My Life Would Have an Altogether Different Shape Without It

I used to think if I just grew a mustache then everything would be alright. As an adolescent I thought this. Now I should have known the difference in anatomy by then, but that's when my birth defect first rose to the surface in my list of major problems, passing the priorities of finding food to eat, places to sleep, places to hide in from a mother who believed I had the devil's mark. By the time of adolescence, years of her shame and violence toward me banished me from the family farmhouse to a life outside, like that of an afraid, defensive animal.

Cleft Palate and "Harelip" were not the taunts she used against me. It was words like "Idiot!" "the devil's child," "no one will ever like you" and "what sin did I do to deserve YOU!" that she threw at my face a thousand times. I was a burden to the family.

At age eleven I tried in several ways to run away. At twelve I attempted suicide. By the time I was thirteen I lived outside year round in Minnesota, and stole every scrap of food I ate.

At fourteen I escaped. My gate to freedom was a psych ward, called Station 64.

1970. On Station 64 of Macey Hospital, the doors lock shut behind me. This is safe Heaven to me. Here, there is routine; the meals are regular. I share a bathroom with running water and flush toilets. I have a real bed to myself and a roommate I'm allowed to speak with. And there are mirrors. My self-awareness takes on an entirely new dimension.

1969. Before I came to Station 64, there was the school counselor, a Mr. Wrenshaw, who, leaning across the desk one day with his thin tie falling on the papers in between us, suggested in almost a whisper, "You know sweetheart, all you have to do is

wear a little pancake make-up and no one will know the difference."

I just gripped the armrests of my chair and wondered what he meant by that strange comment, how his words had anything to do with me. When he pleaded, "Please, just talk to me!" I sat motionless in that big chair. Silence was the only safety I knew. Endure, slow-burn, and wait. Wait for the man to finish, then shrink back into the crowd again, invisible.

1961. Back further, when I was six, I jumped rope with other girls in the dirt driveway beside our little country church. Two girls giggled behind their hands and pointed. I heard "ugly" in the middle of their sentence and stopped jumping. I looked behind me thinking they meant someone else, then stood completely still, confused. Because until that moment I was proud to wear the pretty striped dress that fit me perfectly. Soon afterwards, before my seventh birthday, we stopped going to the country church.

Twenty-five years later, when we sat awkwardly around the family table on one of my rare visits home, Ma told me flatly the reason none of them returned to church (ever again) was because of my embarrassment to them.

But on Station 64, I am accepted and included. We're like a family of misfits. All of the kids and staff go on regular group outings. While I stand in line for ice cream at Como Park one day I notice a small boy who clings to his mother's legs, staring at me. By now I cover my face in public when I talk, look away self-consciously when people notice. But this boy is so little. With one finger in his mouth he pulls his mother's blouse, leans into her body and whispers. She glances at me, then straight ahead in the direction of the ferris wheel, pretending she doesn't really hear him. She pats his shoulder absently instead.

Later I will discover it is better when they talk to me directly. Innocent. "Did you get that in an accident?" "What's the matter with your nose?" Then I can tell them how we're not all born the same. I can have some pride in explanation. Unless the parent interrupts, grabs the child away while smiling shallow apologies to me. Then all of us remain in shame.

When I realize a mustache isn't going to happen, I discover cover-up sticks in tubes like lipstick that you can buy in a variety of shades. All through my teens into my twenties, I don't go anywhere without one. The tube needs to be either on my person at all times or available first thing, like hidden in the medicine cabinet, in my shoe or bathrobe pocket. If I have a bed mate I get up before I face them and run to the bathroom. I make frequent trips to mirrors throughout the day to check on "caking" or to re-apply.

Bright sunlight is a problem. Easy to see make-up in bright sunlight, so I become obsessed with lighting. Sit with my back to windows in my own house or in public places. Prefer to be sociable at night. I don't go swimming because make-up will wash off. If I have a head cold, runny nose, all outside contact stops. No school. No job. No company or roommates. Barricaded in my room instead, hiding behind hankies.

Over-compensating with big hair-dos (takes attention off the face). Wild hair. Disheveled. Ratted up. Big earrings. Ragged sweaters. Preoccupied with clothing. I am driven to be noticed, but without a birth defect.

Fall of 1980. While waitressing full time at a workers' bar and restaurant, I manage to save two thousand dollars. At 25, I am earning a dream to go to Europe. Carefully I pack my canvas back-pack taking only bare essentials and I leave alone, to travel.

On a balmy blue sky day in February, I stand on a hill in southern Portugal and look toward a country town. It is one of those moments where I recognize how I live in my head, how I am lonely, when I feel my hand around the pale tube in my vest pocket. No one knows me here. I have nothing more to lose. I drop it in a trash basket inside a stone-walled castle and walk out feeling naked, with a sense of freedom.

By 1984 my alliances are exclusively with women. I spend a month alone in semi-isolation in the country. The high point of my days is walking the quarter mile to the mailbox. One day I get a letter from an old friend who spent jail time with me for protesting military buildup. As I walk I read the precious words she penciled on a page about a neighbor girl's cleft palate, hand-

written without apology or fear. I stop short in the middle of that country road. I hear the crows caw in the distance; and then my own weeping begins. All the way home I sob to myself, not understanding until later how important those words are to me. An excruciating silence has been shattered.

When I get home I place mirrors all around the house. I pick up mirrors at auction sales. I become obsessive about mirrors. Since I live without electricity, I light candles and kerosene lamps after dark. A huge 4x6" mirror is propped up on the table in front of me where I sit at night to write in journals. I wrap my head in scarves. I pull my hair back severely. I put it in clips, in rubber bands, I braid it. I let it hang loose in my face.

And I stare at all my faces. My face in moonlight. In candlelight. In daylight. I place the mirrors at odd angles for different views. I wear turtlenecks and t-shirts, bold colors, pale color, and I wear nothing. As the layers of fear and muffled self-denial peel away a clearer picture of myself comes into focus. I've worked out another level of my private self-acceptance.

But I stay scared. As a child, I fantasized how someday I'd be famous, like a grand radio announcer. Then Ma and Pa would hear my voice and be proud I was their daughter.

In 1986, at the age of 30 I go on the air. For two hours on Friday mornings I try to make radio accessible to women least likely to be heard. I do women's reggae and blues shows. I interview welfare moms and women AIM (American Indian Movement) patrols. But during the entire year, every time I walk into the studio to face that program board in front of me, I panic. I plan ten minutes playing time for records, tapes, other recorded voices, before I introduce my own voice. I go through my private hell of count down, deep breathing and relaxation, because I am self-conscious, terrified, to expose the nasal voice that is my own.

That fall Jane and I are contract painters for apartments in St. Paul. Both of us strongly identify as working class, as lesbian feminists. We both are secret fans of country music and we both smoke cigarettes. I'm on a ladder trimming out a ceiling when I pause. I ask her for a Lucky Strike, turn down the wailing radio and then I tell her how I read this book ... written by a feminist,

who casually lumps “harelip” on a character with a slovenly stupidity. “And there was another book...” Jane listens. She responds. She is right there with me when I expose to someone else how much this stupid stuff can hurt me.

1989. There’s a chance my partner will have access to a chunk of money soon. One night she casually suggests how maybe she can help me. Instantly I am defensive. “Don’t even say that to me!” In my privacy sometimes I wish ... but who would I be without it? And I can only see how cruel it is to let in just a glimmer. How could I accept that kind of gift from her? I have to slam the door before self-hating fantasies get out of hand.

Instead I experiment with wearing bright red lipstick to lesbian events. Breaking rules about the image of “real” lesbians is small compared to how I break through my own boundaries, how I draw attention to my crooked lip.

Deliberately, I visit a library to look for books about cleft palate and cleft lip. Until now I’ve been oblivious to any information. But I ask my friend to take them though the checkout line while I wait unattached across the room.

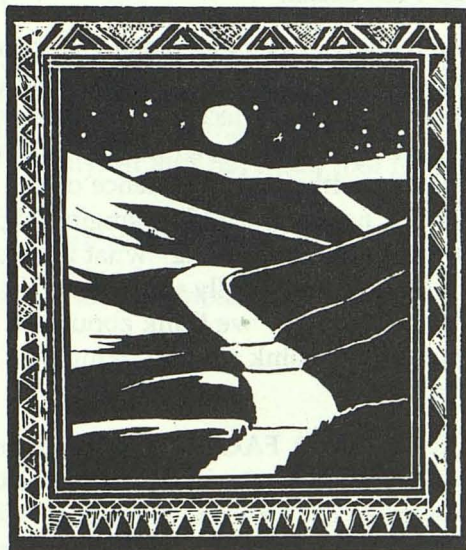
I hate the pictures in these books. I don’t want anyone I know to see them. I want to throw the books across the room, rip pages out and burn them. Just like I want to rip it off my face or with a sharp knife cut it out as if it were an apple core. Yes it’s true, sometimes I want to. Especially during those times of profound grief when I know my mother never loved me and in fact tried to kill me because of it. This birthmark is the hub of family shame, the punishment for family sin. But it’s not just my family. Three people in three separate incidents during the same week verified for me their families’ christian belief that a cleft palate was the devil’s mark, a print of the devil’s hoof, the “stamp of the devil.” I was also born left-handed which only reinforced the belief/the fear that I came from the devil.

Although this is the mountain underneath the molehill, it’s the molehill, or the superficial way it ties to my self-image, that hurts me on a daily basis. The way it takes over my face when I am introduced to someone new. The way every time I walk into a store or interact with strangers I wonder if they’re cool to me

because of it, or especially nice because of it. The way others never speak of it. The way I'm lonely with it.

One day my best friend Lin and I walk inside a bakery for coffee. We're talking about "difference" and for the first time a friend takes the risk of telling me how my difference affects her in my company. Those rare times when I've asked before, they say it doesn't matter, they don't notice anymore. Of course I'm dying to believe them. Truth is, I've never gotten used to it myself. For me, it's always there.

Now Lin tells me how it's not invisible to her, and never has been. As soon as we open car doors to get out she pays attention. Are they going to treat her differently? She is aware. It hurts to hear her say this, means it cannot be ignored, but pretending is a heavy burden. If she is aware I am not totally alone.



Billie Miracle

pen & ink
Billie Miracle

karen thompson

Q.& A

So you want to know what it means to be a dyke

after i woke up i strangled a little in my trying not to think about IT and HER and then i washed my body and then i washed the glasses and then the plates and finally the pyrex dish and when i was all done with that i washed the floor on my hands and knees. By the time i reached the door my whole body felt like a fraction of the grandmothers who had come before mrs johnson sho nuff you kitchen is clean as can be oh beulah what would we do without you you're the bestist maid a family ever had! i uncurled my spine and ignored the throbbing and thought how lucky i was that all i had to be worried about today was love and when i stood up i felt better.

we never have to freak because of forgotten pills/creams/placed diaphragm/requests to give half of the money for the abortion/IUD/norplant/cancer causing piece of hell made by some undisturbed testicle sporting doctor in a white coat and so the passion continues completely without the influence of the male gender we think about the heaving seething singing tight careening feelings without stopping or thinking "what if he puts his hand on the rolls of fat that cover my belly and screams in horror of my body leaving me here alone?" we think about our bedrooms as our own we want you to think about looking in a mirror cause that's it but different

MARLON RIGGS IS A FAGGOT African-american Jamaican-american don't want you you have no place in my revolution or god's see this war belongs to the straight and those of you who can't enter our heaven stop shaking the earth **AUDRE LORDE WAS QUEER** hell is made up of homosexuals who love children as they should be loved and homosexuals who survived death camps in

shame or died while still alive homosexuals who sang the blues on stage and to positive needles homosexuals who painted the sistene and the sky and hell is full of homosexual daughters mothers and your ancestors friends and progeny **JAMES BALDWIN WAS A FAIRY** but your brown don't give you no passport and neither does the kink in your hair isms only happen to the tinted and that pink triangle on your chest don't do jack but tell me to get the fuck away from you cause i never want to be without my stereotypes **LINDA VILLAROSA IS A DYKE.**

pressed snatch to snatch and feeling large and small and drinking without danger and loving without anger the beat sounds away in your skin and the smell of beads of sweat between the fine hairs on the space above her lipsticked lip draws you and the music loud and chaotic in your ears but no more chaotic than the soul that is dancing hard trying to escape out to join hers but seems to be stuck somewhere in the ribs between your teeth and her left breast

i am a queen a fairy a dyke a manroyal a sodomite eve a faggot a queer a punk a bulldagger butch femme bent as my natural hair and gay as a lily and anything that moves hell i'm so fine i should throw a party for myself and have god foot the bill

so what does it mean to be a dyke?

none of your goddam nosy ass breeder business

damn

Caryatis Cardea

Things To Do With Money

If you had fifteen dollars to spend, you could buy one cd, a medium pizza with two toppings or a couple of lesbian mystery novels.

Or, you could wait for a sale on the compact disc, settle for one pizza topping and a single who-dun-it, and give the difference to the next homeless woman you meet.

But maybe twenty dollars is a better place to start; it's the smallest sum you can get from your bank machine. For twenty bucks, you could buy Batman on videotape, get a couple pounds of truffles at Cocolat, or do a hot tub with a friend.

Or, you could deposit it, unchanged, once a month, in a lesbian emergency fund.

What one hundred dollars could buy: five pairs of socks, two half-hour massages and a coffeetable art book.

Or, one extra hour of attendant care, every month for a year, for a disabled homebound lesbian.

With five bills, a person can get two nights at a seaside inn, a six years' subscription to a lesbian journal, a medium-size television set or one hundred blank video tapes.

Or, you could find out who in your community hasn't seen a movie in three years because she's paying off medical bills, and dig her out of the hole.

Or, you could make the security deposits for a lesbian who can't otherwise get off the street.

Or, you could just pay the rent this month for someone you know who struggles to make ends meet; give her a little breathing space, four weeks of not counting pennies, searching jacket pockets for change, writing bad checks, buying only rice and oatmeal, and one orange for a treat.

Five thousand dollars will get you an Olivia cruise to the Caribbean or cosmetic surgery to suck the fat out of your butt and inject it into your face to smooth out wrinkles.

Or, you could still take your vacation, in the Everglades,

maybe, or Yellowstone, and then buy a computer to set a dyke up in self-employment. You could definitely skip the body mutilation, treat yourself to a massage and help some working stiff get transportation to her shit job which you're glad you don't have to have.

What I'm saying is, most of you don't even have to deprive yourselves of anything, really, and you could still make a difference.

But, those of you with money to spend probably will not recognize yourselves in this piece. You tend to think that the amount you have is just enough, that it is always others who have abundance, cash to spare. But if you took a vacation this year, and it wasn't your first, or even your first in five years; or, if you took a vacation and still managed to buy some major appliances or go out pretty much whenever you felt like it or made loans to friends who already have money like yours, then I'm talking to you.

You can have two toppings on your pizza, buy your new tv, go to santa cruz for the weekend, take in a movie, buy all the socks you need, and you could still make a change. You could materially alter the quality of life of a lesbian, possibly even a lesbian you know, or know of, without depriving yourself of anything you now enjoy.

And about the ways you share among yourselves, the loans and investments that float about among you: I hope someday you'll realize that if you have \$1000 you won't miss for 3 to 5 years, you have at least \$100 you can do without altogether. If you can contribute \$5000 to your good friend's dream of ideal self-employment, you could also make it \$4900 and give the remaining C-note to someone with no job at all. While it's true that \$20 a month won't change anybody's life much these days, you can charge a lot of money, increasing your payments by only \$20 a month. You could buy tools of the trade, or a computer, or a couple of courses at night school, to help someone achieve self-sufficiency, and it'll cost you less than your pledge to KQED.

Next time you're sitting around, a middle-class dyke among middle-class dykes, think about this: if each of you makes at least \$20,000 — and many of you do, and many of you make much more — and you have among you one friend who cleans houses,

say, or is disabled and homebound, or does odd jobs, she's probably living on \$4000 to \$6000 a year. Assume it's four. You, and each of three friends, could agree to live on \$19,000, instead of \$20,000, and the one thousand each going to the poor dyke would double her income, while depleting yours by only 5%. She'd still be living on less than half what you consider just enough. But that's OK: we have different opinions about what is enough.

Some of you are already doing some of this. But it is the barest of beginnings. The next step is for you to convince your class sisters that this is the way to go, so that the benefits can be spread around even farther.

There should be an account, for instance, from which attendant hours, above and beyond what SSI will cover, can be paid in cash. There should be a free box for clothes, blankets, household goods and appliances. There should be a canned foods drive for lesbians. There should be a group of dykes who see to it that homeless lesbians can get their laundry done and have a shower once a week. We should ask any woman begging near a restaurant what meal she would like as we go in, and order it to go for her as we leave.

There are those of us who object, loudly and long, to the numbers of lesbian hours that have been given so freely to men with AIDS. If you do not donate your time and money and energy to men, I am glad. But if those hours not being given to men are going to no one at all, the guilt is the same. There are lesbians who need your help. We are not caring for our own, and that is not a community.

I know you all read the newspapers. But when welfare and benefits are cut, don't just bitch to each other about the governor and the legislature. Look around you: someone you know is now living on less money. Someone who was already more strapped than anything you've ever experienced. Make an offer. Make a difference. Make it count.

The only question is this: If you were arrested on a charge of loving lesbians, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

 Books Received

About the Books Received List: We list (almost) all the books we get in the mail. Unfortunately, we never have room to review everything we think should be reviewed. I tend to list books here by books/authors/presses I think are important (although all books from one press are listed together), with an emphasis on lesbian-owned presses. If I've read all or part of a book I may add subjective qualifiers like "read this." While the presence of adjectives can be interpreted as editorial endorsement, the absence of them only means I'm going by the publisher's press release — *Elana*.

Forty-Three Septembers — a collection of engaging, important essays exploring Black, lesbian, Native American, raised poor, ex-catholic, family and writing issues by Jewelle Gomez. 1993, \$10.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Experimental Love — new poetry by the gifted, compelling, challenging Cheryl Clarke. 1993, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Before Our Eyes — a photo journalist comes of age, finds her way through dysfunctional dynamics, discovers her bond with her lesbian mom, by Joan Alden. 1993, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Dykes to Watch Out For 1994 Calendar — OK, so it's April — but if you haven't seen this calendar yet, check out these cartoons by Alison Bechdel. 1993, \$10.95, Firebrand.

Spawn of Dykes to Watch Out For — if it's too late for the calendar, it's never too late to spend a night with Mo and the rest of Alison Bechdel's cartoon gang, even if they are indulging in the lesbian baby boom. 1993, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice — the latest in the women artists' monograph series, and an important group of essays by six First Nations women. 1992, \$6.95, Gallerie Publications, 2901 Panorama Drive, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7G 2A4.

In Her I Am — intense, disclosing sexual poetry and thought, intended as "a gift given to other Lesbians," some of whom will not want it while others will eat it up, by Chrystos. 1993, \$12, Press Gang, 603 Powell St., Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6A 1H2.

Out on Main Street and other stories — vivid, thoughtful explorations (read this!) of racial, cultural, sexual identities from an Indo-Trinidadian dyke, by Shani Mootoo. 1993, \$12.95, Press Gang.

Home Movies — a lesbian deals with death, both AIDS and leukemia, close to home and close to the bone by Paula Martinac. 1993, \$10.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Ste 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

The Mother I Carry: A Memoir of Healing from Emotional Abuse — by Obsidian Mirror author Louise M. Wischild. 1993, \$12.95, Seal Press.

Trouble in Transylvania: A Cassandra Reilly Mystery — a mix of politics, passion and intrigue, set in the Balkans, by Barbara Wilson. 1993, \$18.95 (cloth), Seal Press.

Dog Tags — a novel on lesbian love and sexual harassment among WACS in Korea by Alexis Jude. 1993, \$9.95, New Victoria, POB 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

The Black Woman's Gumbo Ya-Ya: Quotations by Black Women — found words, observations, thoughts, poetry and dreams of 350 Black women world wide, edited by Terri L. Jewell. 1993, \$10.95, Crossing Press, POB 1048, Freedom, CA 95019.

Writing From the Heart: Inspiration and Exercises for Women Who Want to Write — by Lesléa Newman. 1993, \$12.95, Crossing.

Eating Our Hearts Out — *Personal Accounts of Women's Relationship to Food* — the 92 contributors offer something for any woman who's ever tasted, edited by Lesléa Newman. 1993, \$12.95, Crossing.

What Is This Thing Called Sex? — large format cartoons, straight and dykely, edited by Roz Warren. 1993, \$12.95, Crossing.

Without Wings — collection of interwoven stories of lesbian life, by Jackie Manthorne. 1993, \$9.95, gynergy books, POB 2023, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, C1A 7N7.

Triad Moon — the past and present lives of three independent women, a novel by Gilleen Chase. 1993, \$9.95, gynergy books.

Miss Autobody — a play by the Quebec feminist theatre cooperative Les Folles Alliées about a group of feminist mechanics who thwart a porn showing. 1993, \$9.95, gynergy book.

Woman in the Rock — interwoven stories about forgetting and remembering incest by Claudia Gahlinger. 1993, \$9.95, gynergy.

Black Slip — good poetry by Terry Wolverton. 1992, \$7.95, Clothespin Fever Press, 10393 Spur Court, La Mesa, CA 91941.

Amazon Story Bones — Greek mythology from an Amazon's perspective, by Ellen Frye. 1994, \$10.95, Spinsters Ink, POB 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403-5170.

Trees Call For What They Need — a novel of three women born at the turn of the century, a mill worker/tenant farmer, a Spiritualist medium and lesbian, a Polish immigrant who owns a bar, by Melissa Kwasny. 1993, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink.

The Other Side of Silence — a lesbian newspaper columnist is drawn into a San Francisco murder mystery by her dog Agatha Christie, by Joan M. Drury. 1993, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink.

Give Me Your Good Ear — 15th Anniversary Edition of Maureen Brady's classic feminist novel about three generations of women who share a hearing impairment and secrets of violence. 1994, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink.

Happily Ever After — self-published novel of a lesbian life by Stacy Chandler. 1993, \$10, Speculators, Inc., POB 99038, Troy, MI 48099.

Learning to Sit in the Silence: A Journal of Caretaking — a straight Jewish woman records the last years of her mother-in-law's life, by Elaine Marcus Starkman. 1993, \$9, Papier-Mache Press, 135 Aviation Way #14, Watsonville, CA 95076.

First Refrains and Sister, I — the first two poetry chapbooks of a promised "Seven-Course Feast," covering the period 1984-92, by Kay Stoner. 1992 & 1993, Stoner Productions, POB 8116, Santa Rosa, CA 95407.

A fucking brief history of fucking — a very lesbian poetry chapbook by Janet Mason. 1992, \$5, Insight to Riot Press, c/o 2300 Pine St. #9, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

Goblin Market — A Caitlin Reece Mystery by Lauren Wright Douglas. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad Press, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Not Telling Mother: Stories from a Life — a lesbian couple goes through a series of dyke vignettes, by Diane Salvatore. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Friends and Lovers — the complications of lesbian romance in "quiet" Wisconsin by Jackie Calhoun. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Long Goodbyes — a Virginia Kelly mystery which unfolds during a high school reunion, by Nikki Baker. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Stay Tooned — more lesbian survival hints in cartoon form by Rhonda Dickson. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Silverlake Heat, A Novel of Suspense — passion and intrigue, set in L.A.'s gay Silverlake district, by Carol Schmidt. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad Press.

Car Pool is romantic story set in the Bay Area, by Karin Kallmaker. 1993, \$9.95, Naiad.

Under My Skin: A Robin Miller Mystery — the third entry in the highly charged series by Jaye Maiman. 1993, \$10.95, Naiad.

The Romantic Naiad: Love Stories by Naiad Press Authors — edited by Katherine V. Forrest and Barbara Grier. 1993, \$14.95, Naiad.

Keeping Secrets — the first Gianna Maglione mystery by Washington D.C.'s well-known TV-news reporter Penny Mickelbury. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Michaela — a romantic interlude with a ballet background, the 10th novel by Sarah Aldridge. 1994, \$10.95, Naiad.

Butch — a coming of age and coming to consciousness novel by Jay Rayn. 1993, \$7.95, Lace/Alyson, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Lesbian Quotations — somewhat after Bartlett's, silly and fun, compiled by Rosemary Silva. 1993, \$9.95, Alyson.

The Alyson Almanac, 1994-95 Edition: The Fact Book of the Lesbian and Gay Community — a handy reference book, covering the current U.S. Congress as well as historical figures. 1993, \$9.95, Alyson.

Word Gaymes — large format crosswords and crostics with gay themes by Kathleen DeBold. 1993, \$8.95, Alyson.

Eyes of Desire: A Deaf Gay & Lesbian Reader — lesbians and gay men tell about their lives in a world too often afraid of differences, by Raymond Luczak. 1993, \$9.95, Alyson.

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe — and four other Lily Tomlin tapes, sold separately or as a set, makes your VCR happier than 99% of the videotapes you can rent. Available from Wolfe Video, POB 64, New Almaden, CA 95042.

I Asked for Intimacy: Stories of Blessings, Betrayals, and Birthings — African American, christian, womanist short stories by Renita J. Weems. 1993, \$11.95, LuraMedia, 7060 Miramar Rd, Ste 104, San Diego, CA 92121.

A Legal Guide for Lesbian and Gay Couples, Seventh Edition — if you need practical, detailed, examples of contractual relationships, this is the book to get, by Attorneys Hayden Curry, Denis Clifford and Robin Leonard. 1993 (current revision), \$21.95, Nolo Press, 950 Parker St., Berkeley, CA 94710.

Making the Estrogen Decision — pros and cons of replacement therapy, by Gretchen Henken. 1993, \$10, Fawcett.

The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War — deep and thoughtful investigations into the relationships between militarism, "masculinity," patriarchy and women, by Cynthia Enloe. 1993, \$15, Univ. of Calif. Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Tendencies — "queer" as it translates into academia; that is, a collection of essays from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick whom Rolling Stone calls the "queen of gay studies," with a heavy accent on gay. 1993, \$15.95, Duke Univ. Press, Box 90660, Durham, NC 27708-0660.

Empathy — the latest NY gay scene novel from Sarah Schulman. 1993, \$10, Plume Books, 375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014.

Gossips, Gorgons & Crones: The Fates of the Earth — a feminist analysis of nuclear-age popular culture and the accompanying return of Female Powers, by Jane Caputi. 1993, \$12.95, Bear & Company, POB 2860, Santa Fe, NM 87504.

Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians — a new discussion, with theory and personal articles, edited by Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony. 1994, \$15.95, Univ. of Mass. Press, Amherst, MA 01004.

Protest & Possibility in the writing of Tillie Olsen — a literary examination by Mara Faulkner. 1993, Univ. Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

Resurrecting the Body: Feminism, Religion and Psychoanalysis — a theoretical and personal examination into those fields of thought, with a lot of struggle around the legacies of famous men, by Naomi R. Goldenberg. 1993, \$14.95, Crossroad, 370 Lexington Ave., NY, NY 10017.

Parable of the Sower — Octavia Butler's latest "science fiction" novel, chronicling the odyssey of an 18-year-old black woman in the dangerous California of 2025. 1993, \$19.95 (cloth), Four Walls Eight Windows, POB 548, Village Station, NY, NY 10014.

A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels & Radicals — a historical examination focusing on six late 19th-early 20th century activists and their social contexts, by Naomi Shepherd. 1993, \$27.95 (cloth), Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, MA.

Hyena — a remarkably good, woman-centered first book of poetry by Jan Freeman. 1993, \$10, Cleveland State Univ., Poetry Center, Rhodes Tower Room 1815, Cleveland, OH 44115.

The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance — Poems 1987-1992 is Audre Lorde's last book of poems, a treasure for us all. 1993, \$18.95 (cloth), W. W. Norton. 500 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10110.

Contributors' Notes

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

Billie Miracle is a 49-year-old Euro-American who has lived on women's land in southern Oregon for the past 19 years. She is a visual artist working in pastels, acrylics, woodblock printmaking, and nature installation.

Caryatis Cardea: I am a 43-year-old white, dyke separatist of Irish and French-Canadian descent. I am the fourth of nine children who grew up working-poor in Buffalo, NY, with much humor of Irish origin and much violence of multiple origins. I have known music and homelessness, hippiedom and disability. I think of my life as a tragedy with a laugh track — and a rock 'n' roll score.

Celia Rodríguez is a Tepehuan twospirit artist & teacher, celebrating new home/studio in Oakland, California.

Jamie Lee Evans is not a mother of any kind, laughs hearty, spits fire and sings out of tune when alone. She dreams of blue blue skies, dark brown pottery and a clean bedroom. She is from the lower class, of Asian and European descent and just turned 27.

Jean Weisinger is based in San Francisco and she has traveled to England, Amsterdam, Germany, Cuba, Australia, New Zealand, Bali, the South of the United States, East Africa: Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Later in the year she will travel to West Africa, Zimbabwe, South Africa and India. She is currently working on a black and white photograph book of women around the world called *A Community of Women ... Women Speaking about Community* through essays, stories, poetry, music, etc. Her vision is to travel around the world and take photographs of the beautiful, spirited EARTH PEOPLE, and to make powerful photographic books as gifts to the world.

Judith K. Witherow: Native American lesbian, artist, writer, creator of chaos.

karen thompson is a 22-year-old lesbian of color, newly transplanted to new york city. she is a lesbian avenger, a member of lavender light gospel choir and a graduate student at NYU. she is teaching herself how to play the guitar.

Lisa Huebner is a M.A. candidate in Women's Studies at the University of Cincinnati who is currently immersed in her thesis project on sexual harassment in waitress positions but often finds herself dreaming of the beach.

Myke Johnson is a working-class lesbian activist and spirit caller, beholden to her demanding and humorous Innu and European ancestors. She has been leading workshops on cultural appropriation since September of 1992.

Neta C. Crawford is African American, in her 30s, and is a university professor. She is from the lower middle class and has been a vegetarian for 18 years.

Rachael Rosen: I'm an Ashkenazi Jew Dyke Sep, 27, middle-class, disabled by chronic illnesses. I'm SICK, but just fine the way I am. I'm also a member of the San Francisco Bay Area's Jewish Lesbian Writers' Group.

Sadie green is a white working class rural lesbian in northern Wisconsin. She works as a lower management staff-person in a social change organization for homeless women and kids, and is finishing a memoir about rural poverty and violence.

Tarascon: I am an Engineering student in Oregon.

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 issues). Single issue \$3.50. New address: MAIZE, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

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

SEP — publication for lesbian separatists only since 1986. Ask a lesbian separatist how to reach us. Be a part of the contagious spread of dyke separatist courage!

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

SONGS FOR PEACE special issue "Healing Time: Songs, Stories and Poems of Women," \$3.50, POB 090-312, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

TRIVIA: A Journal of Ideas is still accepting for "A Journal of Rejected Ideas" — materials must have been rejected because of content. Include a rejection letter if possible. Trivia, POB 9606, N. Amherst, MA 01059-9606. Deadline: May 1, 1994

WHAT ABOUT US? Children Tell of their Lesbian/Gay Parent's Breakup: seeking first-person stories or thoughts from children of all ages for valuable anthology. Send work, queries to Jenn Christiansen, POB 1841, Champlain, NY 12919 by June 30, 1994.

FUNNY STUFF — cartoons, photos, essays, brief verse and stories by women for the 4th *Women's Glib* humor anthology, and shorter pieces for the 2nd *Glibquips: Funny Words by Funny Women*. Guidelines: SASE to Roz at Box 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004.

MULTICULTURAL LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS anthology. First-person, cassettes, interviews O.K. Topics: racism in and outside relationships, having/raising children; socializing/friendships; language differences, etc. For guidelines, info: SASE to Rene Dawson & Terri Jewell, PO Box 23154, Lansing, MI 48909.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE — Putting all "correctness" aside, let's be honest and claim ALL we are, have been and will be for centuries! All and every form (photos, bios, herstory, songs, jokes, rumors, anecdotes, fashion, art, names, organizations, bars, poetry, essays, stories, radical and separatist material) welcome. For guidelines, info: SASE to Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, running deadline.

INFORMATION ON HISTORICAL WOMEN for a travel guidebook to women's history in the U.S. Do you know a local statue, commemorative plaque, birthplace or grave; seen material about women in your local historical museum, heard stories of notorious women? Leads will be acknowledged. Contact: Kiriyo Spooner, 2 Meadow Place, East Haven, CT 06512.

LESBIAN FRIENDSHIPS — send 1-2 page submission proposal for anthology ed. by Jackie Weinstock and Esther Rothblum, c/o Weinstock, Center for Developmental and Health Research Methodologies, Penn State Univ., S-211 Henderson Bldg., University Park, PA 16802-6505 or JSW4@PSUVM.PSU.EDU (e-mail, Internet) by June 15, 1994.

RISING TIDE PRESS, a new lesbian publisher, seeks full-length lesbian novels. For guidelines, send SASE to: Rising Tide Press, 5 Kivy St., Huntington Station, NY 11746.

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

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

THE PAT PARKER MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD is open for submissions from May 1-July 31. Full-length manuscripts are considered between Jan 1-April 30. For fees and guidelines, send SASE to Woman in the Moon Publications, POB 2087-NR, Cupertino, CA 95014-1466 (new address!).

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/RETREATS

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

NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE & FESTIVAL, July 9-17, 1994, Brisbane, Australia. Write for info: POB 211, Red Hill, QLD 4059 Australia.

4TH REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF LESBIANS, GAY MEN, BISEXUALS AND FRIENDS is the first international event of its kind to be held in Israel, sponsored by The Society for the Protection of Personal Rights and the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations. Givat Haviva, June 2-4, 1994. SPPR, POB 37604, Tel Aviv 61375 Israel (Fax: 972-3-525341) for info.

6th INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST BOOK FAIR focuses on Indigenous, Asian & Pacific Writing. July 27th-31st, 1994, Melbourne, Australia. Write: 6th IFBF, GPO Box 2681X, Melbourne, Australia 3001 for more info.

3rd INTERNATIONAL WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE, July 1-10, Adelaide, South Australia, over 32 countries represented. ICMS, POB 8102 Hindley St., Adelaide SA 5000 Australia for more info.

4TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S STUDIES CONFERENCE at S. Conn. State Univ., "Women's Voices/Women's Powers: Theory, Action, Transformation" is seeking session proposals by June 10 for Oct 1-2, 1994 conf. Women's Studies Program, SCSU, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515 for more info.

GAY GAMES open in NY June 18, 1994. Federation of Gay Games, 584 Castro St., Ste 343, SF, CA 94114 for more 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.

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

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. Much more info: Stonewall 25, 208 W. 13th St., NY, NY 10011-7799.

(AD)VENTURES

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

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

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

LESBIAN PARADISE! With 20 charming rooms, 100 mountain acres, pool, hot tub, hiking/skiing trails, yummy breakfasts, peace and privacy. We're your perfect vacation choice year round! HIGHLANDS INN, Box 1185R, Bethlehem, NH 03574 (603) 869-3978.

BUSINESSES

INTRO TO CULTURAL SKIT-ZO-FRENIA is a 10 minute experimental film exploring the raw-edge of being "Black Enough" as a Lesbian/Gay of Color, by Jamika Ajalon, available through Third World Newsreel, 335 W. 38th St., 5th Floor, NY, NY 10018.

A SIMPLE MATTER OF JUSTICE 57 min. official video of the 1993 March on Washington, by JEB. \$28.50, inc. shipping from Moonforce Media, POB 2934, Washington, DC 20013.

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

DYKE TV — some cables carry it but you can get it through the mail: 4 shows for \$75. For more info: DYKE TV/SANG FROID, POB 88, NY, NY 10002-9998.

30 FILMS AND VIDEOS ABOUT WOMEN are available from First Run/Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, 6th Floor, NY, NY 10014, 800-876-1710 — write or call for catalog.

SUPPORT

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

SHE — Sister Homelands on Earth has purchased its first two acres — Saguaro Sisterland — to primarily provide accessible space for lesbians with mobility/or allergy/chemical sensitivity disabilities and low-income wimmin. Money and support services are critical to SHE's survival — write to SHE at POB 5285, Tucson, AZ 85703, inc. SASE for reply.

THE LABYRIS PROJECT: Helping Lesbians Heal from Incest — wants a safe home for all lesbians having trouble surviving due to incest memories, as well as a meeting place for local survivors. Community-based, holistic, realistic, feminist healing. Send checks or SASE for info: New Mexico REEF/Labyris Project, POB 40097, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

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

WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS — desperately needs money to continue, as well as volunteers to read and type. WBP provides over 750 titles to blind, partially sighted and print disabled women, and publishes a great newsletter. Tax-deductible donations, queries to: WBP, POB 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408, 612/ 872-4352.

WHIPTAIL WOMYN'S COLLECTIVE provides a womyn-only dyke-identified, drug-smoke-alcohol free space in S.F. & needs all the help it can get. Send \$, questions, energy to: 3543 18th St. Box #29, SF, CA 94110.

LESBIANS IN CRITICAL NEED have been sending us increasing numbers of requests to run announcements for their personal funds. Instead of printing these individual appeals, we urge you to contribute frequently and generously to local organizations. Imagine it as if we just told you your childhood best friend, your favorite gym teacher, an admired dyke activist or your first lover had metastatic cancer and couldn't pay the doctor bills; or had developed E.I., could no longer leave her house and had no way to get or pay for groceries. Then make a contribution to Lavender L.E.A.F., The Dykefund, the Charlotte Maxwell Clinic, The Women's Cancer Resource Center (these are Bay Area resources, find the ones in your community). We need full support networks as well as money — dykes willing to shop, drive, talk, listen, organize.

IN MEMORIAM

GEe (Gwen) Elliot, of Oakland (formerly of NYC), passed on January 4, 1994. The cause of death has not yet been determined. She was a brave and inspirational lesbian. This is to let her friends everywhere know and to honor her life. —JEB.

AD RATES

Deadline for #53, Old Lesbians: May 10, 1994 (Pub: Aug. '94).

Classified: 40¢ a word, \$5 minimum.

Display: \$200 whole page, \$100 half, \$75 third, \$50 quarter, \$35 2x2, for camera ready copy. Write for other deadlines & size sheet.

TRIVIA

21



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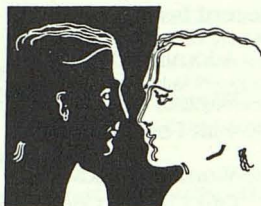
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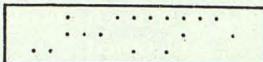
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- #50 **Not The Ethics Issue** we had planned (read it to find out why). But there is great new work on ethics and other themes. Guest edited by Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch.
- #49 **The Lesbian Body:** here's where flesh and theory meet — Includes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

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I want and need to know why and how dykes act as allies to each other. I want to hear stories, examples, successes and even failures. I need this issue for myself: to learn how to be an ally to others and as a resource to women who are trying to be good allies to me.

— *Jamie Lee Evans*