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Lesbians & Religion



questions of faith and community



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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

Yes, this is my last issue as editor. What follows are thoughts about this issue, religion. On page 124, I say goodbye.

My interest in this issue is the politics of religion. I started out with the basic anger of being a Jew living in a christian country.* Working on these notes, though, I began to get into the messy business of how religion, the religion we're brought up in (or deliberately not brought up in), plays out in our lives. Reading the contributions, I found something I suspected to be true: religion is important in how we understand our connection with our families of origin and how we define not simply our sense of ethics, but our deepest sense of how-best-to-live as individuals and in community. The spiritual functions of religion overlap, interlock with the political often enough to make the difference between spirituality and religion a difficult distinction — which is one of the reasons why I think religion has been so effective in maintaining social control for so long.

When my friend Dolphin read the first draft of these notes, she told me I didn't make it clear enough that I was talking about religion as distinct from spirituality. She suggested I hadn't given the womyn's spirituality movement enough credit for providing radical openings in consciousness that allow womyn to express our spirituality, however we define it, outside of the organized, traditional religions.

* Which is why I originally called this issue "fuck xmas" — in a letter I unfortunately lost when I moved last year, a christian minister dyke asked if I thought there was no way to ethically practice christianity. Although my libra nature wants to say it's a tough world, we all have to find comfort where we can, my mind says: no, given the history of christianity worldwide, nope. And then my mind says: but what about spirituals, about the Virgin de Guadalupe? All these icons, that give texture to culture, have a political meaning — start from a political necessity and get embroidered into our emotional lives. Dissecting them seems irreverent, arrogant, impossible at times — and still I believe we need to encourage that critical investigation, be really clear about what we're doing when we introduce elements of our religions-of-origin into our lesbian communities.

I agree with her. Many womyn find community, purposeful work, meaning in their lives through the various forms of womyn's spirituality. Certainly some of those forms mimic christian practice, adopt oppressive missionary stances or take from other people's cultures with an imperialistic arrogance — and some of the authors in this issue examine those problems. On the other hand, many womyn's spirituality groups grapple with questions of culture and politics, and move honestly towards reclaimed and new ritual/spiritual practice. Most of us appear to need at least some of the things religions (including goddess religions) provide.

Some things religion is used for:

- to institutionalize greater-than-human figures (gods or goddesses) on which we can hang blame, praise or responsibility for what happens to us
- to organize communities for their own protection or advancement
- to establish unquestionable hierarchical lines of power
- to regulate sex*
- to provide hope for intercession in adversity: pray and you will find peace, if not a change in circumstances
- to cope with evil beyond our comprehension
- to comfort the grieving and create rituals that help people get through predictable moments of despair and fear
- to provide a context for sensations of awe and wonder
- to maintain & rationalize class, gender & race oppressions and to determine and enforce codes of behavior for those divisions
- to provide the state with a moral imperative for any behavior the state wishes to engage in (crusades, wars, property rights, divine right, marriage)
- to link individuals to their ancestral past.

That religion provides for all of these needs at once (and likely some I've missed) makes it extremely powerful. Attempts to create a synthesis of non-hierarchal spiritual practice, even

* Susan Jill reminded me of this one, which I had somehow forgotten. She added that she missed a discussion of how concepts of God replace connection with, and awe of, nature.

among dykes from similar backgrounds, often come to quick ends, and often the participants rejoin traditional religious structures.* It's hard to keep one function that dykes might mostly agree on (for instance, linking ourselves to our foremothers), discard another entirely (hierarchy/priest/priestess/rabbi) while modifying others (season-based rituals). To even talk about belief systems with another lesbian usually requires a tremendous amount of intimacy, trust and time.

So mostly this important thing, this marker of identity, the way we maintain our faith in "making a better world," how we evaluate right and wrong, just and unjust, runs underground. It's not something we talk about easily, comfortably. When we do discuss religion, it's often within the boundaries of race and ethnic identity, and immediately subsumed in those categories. What we don't know about religion, we don't usually find out, at least, not from other dykes — we simply ascribe religious belief and practice to being a characteristic of a group of people, belonging to them, either entirely private and respected or entirely a part of patriarchal baggage which we encourage dykes to discard for the sake of creating our own community.

The problem of "either/or" in addressing religion is tremendous. Either you support the traditional ways of your people, or you're a traitor. Either you understand "faith" as a superstitious response to natural phenomena, or you're a fool. If you think participation in some form of ritual is important in building community, either you have to invent totally new forms, or you're ripping off other peoples' cultures and/or caving in to your "religion of origin."

But individuals need many of the things religions offer. We need community, and a sense of purpose within community. We need a foundation for our morality. We need ways to bury our dead and mourn. When we have visions, when we are visited by apparitions or a flood of words fills us, we need ways to express that within the bounds of socially accepted

* In the category of traditional I count gay synagogues, the MCC (metropolitan community church) and any form of practice to which a queering dyke must submit herself to organized authority.

behavior. When some gentle or passionate emotion suffuses our consciousness, some sense of wonder or love that moves us beyond our daily life, we need a context in which to say: I feel my heart beating and it seems like a miracle to me today.

And we need a way to understand evil — the mass evils of war, our individual experiences of rape and abuse. We look for some “wise one” to guide us through our despair.

When my father died recently the rabbi told us that it’s Jewish law that a corpse not be left alone. My second brother arrived at 2 a.m., and asked why my first brother was spending the night in the funeral parlor. “Because we’re Jews,” I said.

I have turned my answer over and over in my mind these last months. I said that? Because the rabbi said it was right I passed it on with scarcely a moment’s hesitation: we do this because we’re Jews. I accepted that Jews have developed rituals to get us through these moments — death, birth, coming into winter, celebrating the harvest, the new moon. Even someone like me, a dyke who hates organized religion, the hierarchical rabbinate, who was actually excommunicated by the council of orthodox rabbis in New York (in 1982, along with all the contributors to *Nice Jewish Girls*) — is easily susceptible to “authority” that lays a claim on my cultural/familial identity in times of stress. The ritual may make sense to me — but I didn’t say: we decided that for our emotional well-being, our desire to underline the importance of this event, one of us would stay with the corpse until we buried it. I simply relied on someone else telling me Jews do xyz when someone dies. The clarity of that, the community acceptance, the fulfillment of what is perceived as a duty — is much more than comforting. It pulls alienated individuals back into a communal culture, a sense of belonging somewhere. It can be damn insidious.

Our ideal community would provide structures for making these experiences part of communal life — so everyone in a group “knows” that when someone dies you cover the mirrors; when the seeds are planted, you get drunk; when the harvest is brought in you take care of old business with your neighbors because you’ll rely on each other to survive the winter.

In actual communities, the administration of ritual practice becomes part of the underlying justification for patriarchy. Only men* are given access to the most secret part of this knowledge, which is handed down from god, to man, to control social interaction. In real communities, religious authority is reinforced constantly by life's emergencies. Social control is the same as it always has been: they use our birth families, our sense of loyalty to our ethnic and racial groups, against us. We need our ancestors, we need some sense of group — the folks we come from as well as those we join with voluntarily. So there it is: the gods of our fathers as interpreted by the sustaining hope of our mothers. You can't beat that for a double-bind.

My partner, Susan, refers to this as a failure of imagination: if we thought on how inevitable certain needs will be in life, we could invent our own ways to cope with them. We could have our own practice for death, burial and mourning. We could agree to celebrate seasonal change, menstruation and menopause, experiences of wonder, without invoking (or appropriating) some vague knowledge of celtic worship, fragments of Native American rituals or biblical stories.

Dolphin suggested that we often study other cultures because all humans are moved by common impulses: moons and tides, planting and harvest, birth and death, eclipse and blueberry season.** Even among urban womyn, it's not necessarily inappropriate to chant to a full moon rising above warehouses. We *could*, theoretically, develop practice that came out of our own communities, reflecting our own needs, using our various backgrounds thoughtfully. We could develop forms that acknowledge we have "big" emotions, life & death questions — we could say our friends and communities are the appropriate places to take all that deep stuff. We don't *have* to go back "home" (or romanticize someone else's home) to get the resonance we seek.

* Yes, I know some women are being allowed to share small parts of religious authority within organized religion. That doesn't change the nature of organized religion.

** Blueberry season is one of my sacred times — I recognize it might not be universal.



But I've come around to saying that religion is emotional — an expression of common needs. And I mean to say that it's political — that its politics prey upon the *manufacture* of emotional need, the constant push to encourage us to give up responsibility for our lives to some form of "higher power."

When I was in 10th grade, I learned that Mohammed and Moses were social organizers — what they wanted was to give their peoples unity and power. They decided the best vehicle for this was religion. So they went into the desert, received the word of god and proceeded to organize empires. I realize that this is a very basic rendition. But religions are, basically, myths to explain creation and to empower those who have or want power.

I have often thought that the power to change the world lies in creating a cultural/religious myth so strongly held by such a large number that it becomes the unquestioned fabric of reality. So that I could turn to a lesbian holy-dyke and say: what do I do when my mother dies? And she would tell me, and I would pass that knowledge on: we do this because we're lesbians. If we had a common body of spiritual practice and understandings, then perhaps there would be a way to disagree with each other without our organizations "breaking up" all the time. Perhaps we could make community centers where we felt it was appropriate to put disagreements aside, where we were glad to come together despite our many differences.

Perhaps we'd make a holy day in August, the dyke day of Midrangle, where every lesbian lit candles when she woke, again at 2 in the afternoon, and came together with everyone else in her community to light scentless candles at sundown, eat a ritual meal and stay up watching the meteor showers. And even lesbians who thought this a silly ritual, or not accessible, or had too many arguments running with the other dykes to feel comfortable coming, would pause to reflect: this is the dyke day of Midrangle — maybe I'll light my own candle and experience my connection with other lesbians around the world.

I have had the pleasure of meeting lesbian rabbis; of discussing buddhism with devoted students; of working with dykes who were engaged in the rituals of the Yoruban tradition. And I feel two things: whatever any dyke needs to communicate with her ancestors, to make peace, take on her racial or ethnic heritage — is certainly not for me to criticize, and is often a place of intimate depth. But then there's the other thing: any religion which supports a hierarchy, any cult of personality — is wrong, is death to dykes, is meant to keep womyn in place, is part of the state, becomes part of that nationalism which demands patriotism, and religion is full of its own patriots. I don't know how to reconcile these two things.

I don't really want a lesbian Mohammed, Buddha, Moses, Christ or Martin Luther to set herself us as charismatic martyr in forging a cultural/spiritual synthesis that could unite the many lesbian tribes into a people (a dykdle?). I find the "reclaiming" of goddess religions suspect — it's important to keep analyzing alternative spiritual practise for disguised christian and eurocentric values or for contributing to the colonization of other cultures. But I try to "suspend my disbelief" long enough to see how many groups are creating imaginative new forms.

And, wishing I could tie this all together, I am tempted to offer up poetry as the religious compromise. That is, a system of expression that any woman could turn to in joy or grief, that can be held privately or shared in groups. Imagine — oh, just indulge me, it's my next to last paragraph — if the creation of poetry were considered the common bond. Okay, us all being who we are, raised here, there would be poetry captains and poem bandits, competition and plagiarism — but there would exist the possibility of offering up poems in the place of authority. A possibility that every dyke could become the center of spiritual authenticity, and recognize that authenticity in every other dyke.

Our love, passion, anger, fear, frustration and grief could yet be turned inside out. With a little imagination.

Upcoming Issues

#55 Open — edited by Caryatis Cardea, Jamie Lee Evans and Sauda Burch. Great new dyke work — out in April!

#56 Language — The deadline for Akiba Onada-Sikwoia's, Kyos Featherdancing's and Janet Wallace's first issue as the new editors is **February 1, 1995**.

The subject of language is complex and evokes many responses on issues of power, privilege, class, race and color, culture. We envision works addressing questions such as: Who gets to speak for us? What is the importance or non-importance of being bi-, tri-, or multi-lingual? When words like sexism, racism, homophobia, fat phobia, ageism are used to define your oppression, do they define your experience? (For example, over the past 10 years the definition of racism has changed — at one time the dictionary equated racism with economical power; now it's hard to find a dictionary with that definition in it any more.) Who makes the definitions? Do our languages come out of our communities, do they represent the diversity of them?

When you use language are you representing yourself as you see yourself? Or the way you think others want to see you? What does it mean to be defined in the language of an oppressor? (For example, rape defined by men who 99% of the time are the rapist.) What does it mean to have your ancestors' language forcibly taken from you? Is language just words or is it a way of communicating our feelings? How about words like disabled, crippled, mute, blind, etc. — do they describe the abilities we may not have or do they make us victim?

You certainly do NOT have to express yourself in some sort of intellectual discourse. You can use just about any form that we can print on a page.

#57 Healing — More than ever before we hear the word "heal" being passed around. Some of us have stepped outside of Western medicine and formal psychology to our own paths as non-traditional "healers." Our communities are saturated with books, brochures and workshops that speak of alternative

methods of "healing" — from acupuncture to past life regressions. We all know at least one woman who, in time of crisis, has given preference to a psychic, channel, homeopath, or "medicine" person etc. in an effort to cure herself or be cured. By now most of us are either graduates of or participants in a 12 step program, a support group and/or some form of therapy. We're owning our "spirituality" and re-claiming our bodies.

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

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

Apology

In #52, *Allies*, we mistakenly published an edited version of Sadie green's "My Life Would Have an Altogether Different Shape Without It." This version was not the one we had agreed on with Sadie (a mistake due to inattention and saving the wrong computer version). Its appearance in that form has the effect of censoring her experience. We deeply regret this error and apologize to both Sadie and our readers.

The story as she intended is available from us by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope (52¢) to P.O. Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.



Glory
Laura Irene Wayne

go sistaaaah, go, go sistaaaah, go, go sistah go"
and that tall tall ebony sistah raised her hands
through the sky and
stretched her feets in the dirt till they became roots and
she say
"sunloveshe i found aplace to lay my head
earth deep resonant
blackness empowerin soulful blackness a
happyblacksong pulled
from blackness
to blackness beautifulpowerful
comfortinglovingblackness"
and don't you know soon it wuz
nightfall and alluh a sudden there wuz this
sound of crickets and
waves reachin
all the way up to them clouds where gawd
and alluh huh sistahs
wuz braiden and twisten each other's hair and makin up songs
for the second day we didn't git to read about in no
bible neither

From the chapbook *gawd and alluh huh sistahs*, by Letta Simone-Nefertari Neely. Available from the author, 104 Gates Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11238, for \$5 or whatever sisters send from 50¢ to something for barter.

Juliana Pegues

White Christmas

It is x-mas. It is my childhood. My parents are putting up the plastic tree like they do every year, even though in Juneau, Alaska, it seems hardly necessary to have a fake tree. We all ask for a real one. "Please, Ma?" "Please, Dad?" But my parents insist. This tree has seen us from Taipei to Singapore to here and x-mas isn't worth it if they can't put it up.

On the mantle, Buddha sits perched next to the nativity. I play with Joseph and Mary and Baby Jesus then rub Buddha's belly before walking away.

BUDDHAHEAD BUDDHAHEAD BUDDHAHEAD

Hey, my family had an x-mas tree just like everyone else. And we had ham too (though the smell of sesame oil still lingered in the air) and ate candy canes. My sister and I sang "Frosty the Snowman" and opened our red and green wrapped presents. We were just like any other family.

What do you mean, did we get Mandarin oranges in our stockings?

Grandmother converted to Catholicism in Hong Kong along with all her daughters in order to attend the British mission school. My mother was a young girl when she was baptized, having left the mainland when she was four. Yeh-Yeh never converted, remaining a nationalist, traditional, Cantonese talker to the very end.

I can't remember one cross hung in my parents' home and the only copy of the Old Testament was hidden under a stack of dusty National Geographics. Instead Buddha, incense, Chinese characters of luck, happiness, and prosperity tied up in loops of red thread adorned the house.

Mom still wore a cross that Pou-Pou had given her as a gift. But I think her memories of the nuns' harshness and cruelty to their young Chinese wards (always a shock to hear her call them sisters) helped pass on a disregard for Christian religion.

Grown now, my sister and I neither believe in God nor feel informed enough to practice Eastern religion.

Do you feel that something is missing in your life? Do you desire to walk on a greater spiritual path?

Then experience the wonders of Buddhism! Explore the mystic ways of the Orient with a guide who has actually visited Asia. Develop meditation skills in a modern, clean environment. Learn how higher planes can increase your personal and financial gains. (Macrobiotic meals available upon request.)

So easy for you. So very easy for you. Tai chi, karate, Taoism, Buddhism. You were a Buddhist monk in a past life? You've already taken our bodies, must you take our souls? Take it all away.

You just have so much guilt-ridden love in your hearts that you need to keep grabbing and grabbing. So hungry in your empty stomachs for a vision to easily eat up and assuage those pangs that maybe you've already done too much.

You love Asian people, Asian culture, Asian religion. So easy for you to love while it is so difficult for me. My love for Asian people, culture and religion is messy, intertwined with anger and shame. I cannot embrace my own heritage without your social message pounding on me that I am dirty, evil, wrong. This is the new age, the new rage of imperialism. I am choked to death by all your love.

Hey, lighten up.

I am at work at my service industry job when a young white woman my age comes in, a large jade pendant, a circular *pi*, dark green and heavy, hanging from a gold chain around her neck, hanging on the outside of her "peasant" blouse.

I am angry. And then I am ashamed. I feel under my T-shirt for my own piece of jade, small, light greenish gray, wedge shaped, and hanging on a thin thread. But at least I know that jade is supposed to be worn under clothing against the skin to obtain all the powers from the precious stone.

I use these powers to pretend I don't see her standing

there, requesting some "oriental rice salad." I continue to wipe the counter, then walk away.

HALF BREED MIXED BREED CROSS BREED HALF BREED

If I told you I was mixed, my mom Chinese, would I be as wonderful as your garments, objects? As jade pendant precious? If I told you I would be telling too much. And then could I still serve you with a smile?

Can I ever be a whole Asian woman being mixed blood? What is mine to reclaim? I feel tentative about it. Can I find identity in this fragmentation? I come from a culture of colonization and I am a product of it. I long for a homeland, any homeland, while being ashamed of it, ashamed for it, at the same time.

I am always incomplete. I am dreaming of myself but the white culture vultures swoop in, picking at my searchings, exposing me as a fraud. They leave me lying there, white bones gleaming.

1974. I am five. It is my second year in the U.S. It is winter. Snow on the ground, gray slush on the roads.

I am at the laundromat, sitting on a folding shelf, keeping watch on our clothes while they dry. Ma, you walk me home, helping me carry the laundry. From across the street, I see our apartment building and suddenly get worried, tearful. *How can Santa come to our house when we don't have a chimney for him to slide down?*

You don't miss a beat, and with mother sharp sensibility, you explain that in apartment buildings Santa has the ability to slide down weather vanes and TV antennas. It makes sense to my five-year-old mind.

Jingle bells, Batman smells. Robin laid an egg.

Years later when we moved up, moved out of the apartment and into a house with a fireplace, the intersection of race and class and culture made me envious of my brother, ten years younger, whose x-mases would be worry free. I was angry, bitter, knowing that the racist environment in his childhood would be tempered through class protection.

FUCK CHRISTMAS! NO CELEBRATION FOR WHITE PATRIARCHAL MATERIALIST HOLIDAYS! ACCEPTANCE OF THE OPPRESSIVE COMMERCIALISM IS COLLABORATION WITH THE SYSTEM! BLAH! BLAH! BLAH!

I learned an articulation through feminist process, developed a politic in anarchist and socialist and communist circles. A way to explain my anger.

Then my mother called me and asked what I wanted for x-mas and I answered, "Socks and underwear? Please, Ma, nothing fancy." I hadn't gone home for the "holidays" in over four years. I knew it hurt her feelings but I couldn't go home and direct this anger at her.

Whose words am I speaking? My own? What is my mother tongue? Mandarin was my first language, then Cantonese, then English. It is all lost to me. I articulate my anger in a language that is not mine, but it is all I know. I dream to dream in Chinese. Memory and dream emerges. I need to trust that it is within me.

Assimilation, indoctrination, this has been our education. I want to spit out my words, angry.

I'd like to be righteous, let my anger be focused. Claim an Eastern religion in defiance of Christianity. But I grew up in a white dominant, Christian dominant society and cannot escape the fact that my mother and all her sisters are literate because of missionary schooling. Colonization runs deep. Hearing my mother talk of the nuns' abuses, I realize her pride too is mixed with self hate. That she is Asian meant she went through the mission system. That she is Asian meant she struggled and survived.

No surprise that my defiance is built with anger and shame. Shame for myself and for my mother. Hating her for letting it happen and telling myself I would not be like her. But I learned this defiance from her. learned that shame and anger are tools of survival. I only want to turn these tools into weapons. Stop directing it inwards and strike outwards. With all my rage.

schism n. 1. a separation or division into factions. 2a. a formal breach of union within a Christian church. 2b. the offense of attempting to produce such a breach. 3. disunion, discord.

Confucius say: It's a white disease.

I've been brainwashed by coca-cola and MTV, the swinging sex-filled American dream has sucked me in. It's those women's libbers in the U.S. of A. My head's been filled with the books and words of *gwai* women's evil. It's a white disease. Dykes only exist in the west. Chinese people would never be gay on their own.

And I'm taking it on both sides. Not only do I continuously bloody my head against the walls of nonacceptance and homophobia in Asian spaces, I am now faced with white dykes who also believe these dangerous lies, all too ready to be my white saviour. It's a white disease.

How about that white disease that got my mother: Catholicism? How about the white disease that has killed more Asian people in the last half century than we could have ever done ourselves: Imperialism? Or its kinder, gentler virus: Colonialism?

I am an Asian dyke in the tradition of Nu Shu, the silk workers, torn sleeves and shared peaches. The only white diseases I seem to have caught are internalized racism, a speechless rage and a lingering shame over my mixed condition.

Is my shame covert Catholicism? Was my mother still teaching me what Christianity had taught her? If my mother had not been converted, would she still have learned English well enough to be my dad's secretary at Pan Am? Would I have been born?

There's tofu at every dyke potluck. It's such a lesbian food. TOFU TOFU TOFU. Hey, let's have a stirfry. STIRFRY STIRFRY STIRFRY. Yeah, a great big old stirfry, what a symbol of lesbian sisterhood. SISTERHOOD SISTERHOOD SISTERHOOD. Tofu and stirfries are such a part of lesbian culture.

Ancient Chinese secret: Tofu is not dyke culture and stirfries only exist in the fast food chop suey minds of white connoisseurs.

I was hit the most of all the kids in my family. Wooden spoons, hair brushes, bare hands. I used to cry day after day yet still mouth off the next time. My mother always hit on the backside. The only time she hit me in the face, she balled up her fist, made like she was going to strike, stopped her hand in mid air and ended up digging her knuckles into my forehead and shoving me back. Then, crying, she locked herself in her bedroom for the rest of the day.

Everyone knows I'm her favorite now. When I hint about her hitting me, she hints back that it was because I was so much like her.

My aunt is going back to the old ways. Though she's been in the U.S. for ten years and is the most western dressing of all my mom's family, she's going back to the old ways. The I Ching, feng shui, Chinese astrology, Buddhism. My aunt even tells me she's been talking to my Yeh-Yeh from the other side. My aunt tells me she can teach me.

But I want to learn from my mom. Why isn't *she* returning to Chinese tradition and religion? Why is she scoffing at my aunt? I want to learn but I am too scared, a fearful bile rising up my throat when I think of discovering who I really am, or who I really am not. Maybe I'll be ready soon. The I Ching, feng shui, Chinese astrology, Buddhism.

My Chinese aunt, my Shou Yi, did my charts, Chinese astrology, this new year. Confusing. Was I studying the I Ching? Was I studying Buddhism? No? Well this make no sense, no other explanation, she tells my mom. Are you sure? Did I want to become a Buddhist nun? No? Well, this make no sense.

Charts say, I would never get married. And in my next cycle of the rooster, the next twelve years, there was not going to be a man in my life. The charts do not lie.

Was I studying the I Ching? Was I studying Buddhism? Did I want to become a Buddhist nun?

KUAN YIN, GODDESS OF MERCY. CHINATOWN TALKING STORY CALL HER LADY BUDDHA. KUAN YIN, ONE WHO HEARS THE PRAYERS OF THE WORLD.

They think that Kuan Yin came from the legend of Miao Shen, a beautiful princess whose father reigned during the Chou dynasty. But Miao Shen refused to wed, giving no sons, no heirs, to her father. *Pa, I do not want to marry. But, Pa, I do not want to marry! But, Pa!*

Miao Shen fled to the White Bird Monastery. Enraged, her father tried to burn it down. But the god of rain showered upon them, keeping Miao Shen safe. Her father ordered her beheaded, but the sword shattered into a thousand pieces. Finally, through trickery, he had her strangled. But when Miao Shen arrived in hell, her touch turned it to paradise. Yama, the god of death, ordered her back to life. She returned, a Buddhist nun.

This Buddhist nun, this story, Miao Shen, they think that is where Kuan Yin comes from.

KUAN YIN, GODDESS OF MERCY. CHINATOWN TALKING STORY CALL HER LADY BUDDHA. KUAN YIN, ONE WHO HEARS THE PRAYERS OF THE WORLD.

recognize. tr.v. 1. To know to be something that has been perceived before. 2. To know or identify from past experience or knowledge. 3. To perceive or show acceptance of the validity or reality of.

My mother shows me a Kuan Yin pendant she bought for herself last Chinese New Year. She pulls down the neck of her blouse to reveal the beautiful jade hanging on the same chain as her cross. But now the crucifix is upstaged by the much larger and heavier goddess. Kuan Yin hangs proudly in the center of the chain while the cross is knocked askew. Sideways, crooked, it's barely visible. Mom is beaming.

Judith Berns

The Making of a Jewish, Lesbian Buddhist

I. Mother's Death

Lama Dorje's question was about my family. He wanted to know if I had one. I told him what was left of it, and added, "It is a mess." He reminded me, "It's all how you look at it."

Mother died from breast cancer when she was 46. I was 7. Within a year father remarried a woman who soon got breast cancer herself. Since I was 12, she has been on and off psych wards. "Do you have any brothers or sisters?" Lama Dorje asks. "Yes, Michael is 8 years older than me and lives with his two wives in Canada."

My voice is as distant as Michael has been in my life. I watch my words like an audience watches the bouncing ball jump over lines in a singalong. The audible echo in the void, not to be confused with Shunyata,* is the hole of Samsara, the cycle of rebirth, suffering, and death. My suffering is built on longing for the family my karma** didn't give me and fear that it never will. I spent all of my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood searching for this family, especially a mother, and grasping to fill up with food, geographic cures — anything that would momentarily relieve the loneliness and hunger I felt.

As a 6-year-old I sat in the back seat of father's custom Ford. The Ford was parked in front of our modest, three bedroom ranch in what was then a predominantly Jewish part of the city. Father and mother sat in the front seat of the car. Wanting to hold onto something of mother, I pulled a hair from her head, later to learn it was a wig.

* Emptiness or understanding that nothing holds inherent existence/permanence. Awakening to one's reality through moral, meditative, and intellectual education, thereby becoming free from ignorance.

** The force generated by all that an individual does, says or thinks with consequences in future lives.

At 30, I returned to this house for a visit. The same people that bought the house from father when I was 13 still lived there. The Mezuzah* was on the doorpost and the same reed blinds were in the front window. One of mother's plates with a bird on it was still hanging, surrounded by the current owner's plates and adornments.

Father planted honey locust trees in the yard. While one was cut down to make way for a garage, the other was the tallest tree on the street. The backyard cabin father built for me is long gone and a concrete slab remains in its place. The owner let me take the Mezuzah; it is now hanging on the doorpost of my house. Mother's plate remains on her kitchen wall.

II. Taking Refuge

Taking refuge is the initial ceremony where one chooses to become a Buddhist. About five years ago I returned from a trip to India and Nepal with my lover at the time. She researched different Buddhist groups in Chicago and I followed her. Prior to the trip I had been studying and meditating with a Sufi group whose roots were in India. When I started studying Buddhism I was struck by how Buddhism was choosing me. The Four Noble Truths spoke to me like no other religious doctrine: 1) To exist is to suffer. 2) Suffering is caused by self attachment. 3) There is an end to suffering. 4) There is a path to enlightenment.

While growing up, I thought that life was supposed to be joyous and that suffering was a sign of personal failure. I have yet to meet a human being who does not suffer, and I have yet to have any situation, miserable or joyous, last permanently. I spent most of my life searching for a mother and suffering because of my attachment to whatever I thought this mother could give me. Dharma, Buddhist teaching, told me everyone had been my mother at one point or another. I had also been their mother during prior lifetimes. Furthermore, Tara who is the universal mother and female represen-

*A sign put on the doorposts of Jewish homes as a reminder of their faith. Inside the small case is a prayer written on parchment.

tation of the Buddha, chose to be a woman. She is unscathed by the patriarchy and free to lead me to liberation.

Unfortunately I have not been able to find a sangha (community of Buddhist practitioners) I am comfortable in but, like everything, this too will change. I have also struggled to establish a sense of community among lesbians. Perhaps I need to let go of my attachment to what I think community means. Buddhism speaks to my spiritual homelessness and the terror of being a woman under a patriarchal regime.

During the refuge ceremony you are given a name and a small piece of your hair is cut. Refuge from what? Refuge from the meaningless cycle of lives and deaths. Inherent in this cycle is the suffering that comes with impermanence: no life, no joyous moment, absolutely nothing lasts. I took refuge vows in 1991, at 34. For me, taking refuge was like returning home while at the same time accepting homelessness.

"It's all how you look at it." Was mother's death somehow a gift? Can I tell you it makes me more mindful of impermanence and precious human life? Does it force me to become an impartial member of the human family looking at all sentient beings* as having been or becoming mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons of my own during one past or future life?

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist, wrote, "When you lose your mother, you lose the universe." My ability to experience the gifts of this loss and transcend suffering are in direct proportion to my universal homecoming. I am not there yet.

Taking refuge is a way to enter a life larger than my own. A Buddhist takes refuge to the Three Jewels: Buddha (the enlightened or awakened one), Dharma (Buddha's teachings) and Sangha (the Buddhist community of monks, nuns and practitioners).

During a refuge ceremony, Tibetan Buddhist Monks gave me the name my mother would have given me if my parents

*All living beings including human beings and everything in the plant and animal kingdom.

had not agreed on Judith. Translated from the Tibetan, the name is "Joy." I am glad my name is not Joy. In this lifetime, Judith, the Amazon warrior, is more appropriate. Genuine joy or bliss, the kind that is not like a leaf in the wind, comes with enlightenment. The Vajrayana path (one of the three vehicles that classify Buddhist teachings) means diamond or thunderbolt. It centers on compassion as bliss and the use of imagination to reconstruct oneself and the universe. It offers everyone the opportunity of freedom and enlightenment in this lifetime.

If and when I reach Nirvana, this state of bliss, I will no longer risk returning here as a human, an animal, or a hungry ghost entrapped by the karma of prior lives only to be stuck once again in samsara, the wheel of lives, deaths and suffering. I would have a choice. If I want to return to help other sentient beings, like Tara or any Bodhisatva* chooses to do, I can. However, I am not sure I would. The world is getting very weird.

Fifteen years ago, as a lesbian separatist, I would have defined samsara as the patriarchy. Today, I still would agree with this, but samsara is also bigger than the patriarchy. Nirvana is bigger than healing the inner child, developing unconditional love, and serenity although it includes all those things.

III. Dreams and Vows

In the winter of '93 I took Yamantaka vows. Yamantaka is the ferocious form of Manjushri. Manjushri is the Bodhisatva of wisdom. Yamantaka is the death terminator. Truth is, I only mumble the prayers daily, often in my car while driving to and from work. A practitioner is supposed to visualize oneself as Yamantaka and even transform into this deity, but I rarely get that far. Nonetheless, even with my lazy approach, I feel myself changing. I am much less fearful and increasingly protected in this world. This protection comes from both the prayers themselves and my own sense of ferocity.

*An enlightened being who does not enter Nirvana so that she/he can save others who still struggle.

Recently, I had this dream: I am walking in what I take to be father's winter coat. He wore this coat, as he wears all his clothes, into a smelly, worn remnant of the original. Father, although affluent, has often struck me as a homeless person since mother's death. I remember one of the few buttons left on his coat dangling precariously from a thread. The coat I wear in the dream has the same fake suede skin with lamb-like interior and big leather buttons, but it's brand new. It is too big for me. I put my nose into the material and there is no old man's smell that I have come to associate with my 78-year-old father.

What does the dream mean? On the surface, it means a reunion with the father who has been estranged from me since mother's death — a connection in the form of protection and warmth. Wearing the coat is as if I have grown a protective, heavier skin of my own. It is a way to return home and put a mezuzah on my door, so to speak. It is important to note that although I identified the coat as father's, it's also new and my own. What is new is that I am learning to have both mother and father reside internally for guidance, intuition and protection.

IV. Motivation

Buddhists believe it is "better to be a Buddha than a Buddhist," but for now, I am a Buddhist. I chose Buddhism because I want to feel at home in this short life, to make peace with impermanence. This individual existence is very elusive. Now, I exist relative to you, the reader. No offense, but that is not enough to give my life meaning. Although most of you are lesbians, some Jewish, and perhaps even Buddhist, each of you has your own experience of me through this article. Which reader is right? Which of you is closest to the truth, assuming I know what my own truth is right now? What does it mean if you do not continue reading this far in the article? Do I cease to exist, assuming I ever did?

Nirvana means no duality, separation, me and other, writer and reader. How does this fit into being a lesbian, or a Jew for that matter? Both are such threatened existences, always under siege.

People often ask if there is conflict between being a Jew and a Buddhist. Lesbians may ask why accept any patriarchal

religion as one's own? For me there is no conflict. Both Tibetan Buddhism and Judaism are non-proselytizing, religious traditions that firmly establish individual responsibility as the focus for growth. This means I start by cleaning out my own mess.

Buddhism teaches that interconnectedness and compassion for all sentient beings, as well as developing wisdom, are antidotes to destruction. Judaism teaches essentially the same.

Significantly, both Jews and Tibetan Buddhists have confronted near genocide. As women, especially womyn who love womyn, we live under daily threat of rape or murder. The Burning Times are not exclusive to Europe, circa late 1500's when thousands of women thought to be witches were burned at the stake — women are being mutilated all over the globe today. The rain forests of mother earth herself are being burned for the furniture and meat of the grasping West. A rain forest takes millions of years to make itself but is wiped out in days. At times I feel I will not be able to survive the devastation around us. Buddhism gives me hope that one precious human life can turn this devastation around.

Lesbians may wonder why trade in one set of boys for another? First, the question hurts. The patriarchy has long been destroyed and with it the lineage of our mothers' guidance. If this was not the case, we would not be where we are today. Lesbians make many choices in actualizing spiritual power. In Buddhism I found an unbroken lineage of teachers as well as teachings that are all inclusive.

There are female deities who have chosen to be women over men. Tara is one example. She manifests in many different colors, each representing her different powers. She is both the mother of all Buddhas and represents the miraculous activities of all Buddhas. We can count on her to remove any obstacles that get in our way to enlightenment. She rescues all beings from suffering. Green Tara, representing longevity, hangs in the living room of my house.

There are numerous female deities called yoginis and dakinis who are both angelic and wrathful. I have never encountered any homophobia from either the teachers, teach-

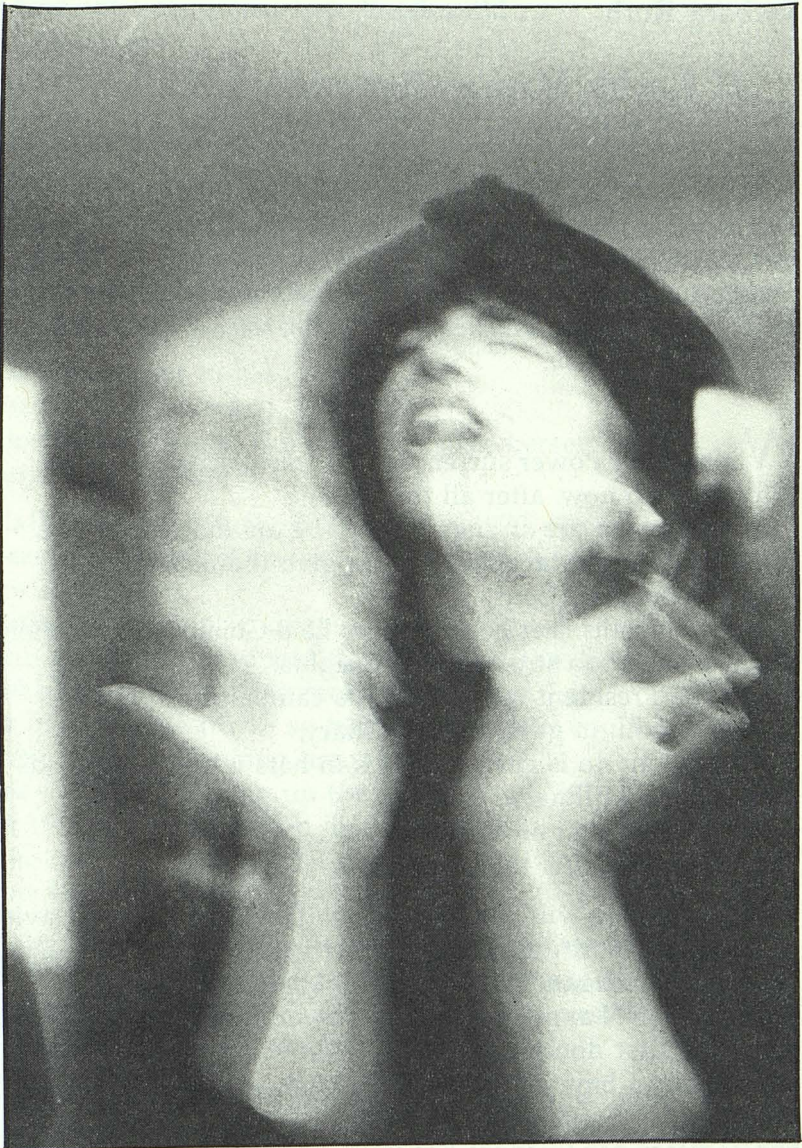
ings themselves, or members of the Buddhist community. I cannot say the same is true in the Jewish tradition.

V. Longing and Freedom

Since Buddhism and Judaism start with individual responsibility, what of my own graspings? My greatest conflict and source of suffering originate in desire and attachment to the trappings of samsara. As an adult child of a mother who died young, I am especially in touch with the fear of being unloved and alone. I have used various addictions as ways to avoid this fear and pain. Today samsara comes out in what I desire: namely, I want a life partner, some reconciliation with my sick and aging father, fine rugs, great sex (perhaps on the rugs), a 4 by 4 pick-up truck, a trip to Israel, Turkey and Greece and to be a published writer. That is just what I want this morning!

Some may argue that Buddhism is one more attempt to grab and cling at spiritual desires (i.e., enlightenment/Nirvana). Some Jews may hold a grudge against me and wonder why I do not put more effort into studying Torah, Talmud, Kabbalah, dietary laws and the women leaders of the Jewish heritage. I wonder about this too. How will I ever get IT? "IT" being enlightenment when most of my life is driven by "constant craving" as so eloquently sung by k. d. lang?

But whether you have lost a parent early in life or your homeland is invaded causing you to flee, or all of society considers you a freak of nature, there is something sacred about claiming an outsider/exile status. I have already met the monster face to face. There is nothing more to fear. I am Yamantaka, the death terrifier. I am an Amazon-dakini (sky walker), armed and able to conquer ignorance and continue the lineage of lesbians, this orphaned tribe, homeward, as Judith led the Hebrews out of bondage. This begins with my own freedom from bondage and compassion for all sentient beings.



Ecstasy

Nancy R. Levine
(© 1994 Nancy R. Levine)

Barbara Ruth

If Kathy Power Surrenders, Can the Millennium Be Far Behind?

This poem was written during the High Holy Days, 1993 c.e. (christian era), a time when Jews are called upon to perform t'shuvah, which is usually translated as repentance, literally it means returning, and can also be translated as change, revolution, reconciliation. This is a poem about t'shuvah.

When Kathy Power surrendered, I was pissed.
Why give up now, after all this time?
I tell you, these are strange days to be an anarchist Dyke.
Clinton chooses Maya Angelou to give the nation
 an Inaugural Poem
then four months later he withdraws Lani Guinier's nomination
because she's too strong on civil rights.
When the President reneges on his campaign promise
to lift the ban on gays in the military,
the best I can do is cheer the fags in hats whose sign reads
Gays in the Millinery.
Camp humor isn't an analysis
but at least it shifts the paradigm.
CNN says there will be more Branch Davidians, more David
 Koresches, more doomsday prophets as the year 2000 comes.
I change the channel, go about my business,
but when CNN announces Kathy Power has given herself up,
I feel the first domino
of the story I have built about my past
fall over.
For 23 years her freedom has been
an article of faith for me.
She was the Dyke
the FBI couldn't catch.

There are stories near two decades old
 I haven't told
 because I feared
 in some way I didn't know
 they might lead to Kathy.

And now it turns out she's gone straight,
 sees a shrink, is tortured by depression,
 — hardly appropriate behavior
 for the icon she'd remained
 in my mind.

Lesbians went to jail
 for refusing to testify about her.
 Doesn't that mean she shouldn't give herself up
 no matter what?

Kathy Power says she was naive in 1970. We were students
 passionately against the war. Then after the invasion of Cambodia
 for some of us
 protests were not enough.
 She and Susan Saxe and three ex-cons (the pros)
 robbed a bank, to give money to the Panthers,
 to blow up the tracks so trains of weapons could not pass.
 We called it "Bringing home the war."
 We called it "Picking up the gun."
 In 1970, I was a married, battered addict.
 The war was in my body every day.
 The war was in my home every night.

Kathy drove the getaway car while inside the bank
 policeman Schroeder, responding to a call, was shot and killed.
 His death, a certainty, amidst the murky questions of
 assigning guilt and innocence.

The three ex-cons, the men, were caught right away.
 But the women escaped, their faces on post office walls,
 all across the country.

The FBI, who infiltrated, sabotaged
 and did their best to kill

every social justice movement in my lifetime,
 the FBI, with all their armaments and spies
 could not track these women down.
 And as the months and years went on
 as I escaped my marriage and some of my addictions
 I wanted Susan and Kathy's freedom
 as I wanted my own.
 So five years later when the Jewish poet Dyke
 I'd sat next to at an Audre Lorde reading
 turned out to be Susan Saxe
 I mourned her loss of freedom
 and prized Kathy's even more.
 Following revolutionary protocol
 when captured, Susan greeted her brothers and sisters underground
 told them to stay strong, stay free.
 Then she said, "I continue to fight on,
 as a lesbian, a feminist, an amazon."
 Here was a Dyke outlaw we could love,
 and some of us did not.
 Even though we knew that banks,
 denying loans, investing in apartheid,
 were repositories of evil,
 even though Susan had not pulled the trigger,
 still, a man had died.
 I made a sign "The war is not over"
 and carried it outside the courthouse
 at Susan's arraignment. Those times were thrilling,
 terrifying: I dropped the names of father, husband,
 and vowed to become
 the woman I invented for myself
 Barbara Ruth
 — Born in flames.

Last week when Kathy's lawyer did the talk show circuit
 no one said the L word.
 Time magazine calls Susan Saxe her roommate
 Phil Donahue portrays both Kathy and Susan
 persuaded by their male lovers to rob that bank.
 Actually I don't think it's bad strategy

for her lawyer to edit out
 Kathy's lesbianism.
 And the truth is I don't know
 what her sexuality was or is or might have been
 beyond the slogans on our buttons
 or the interrogations of the Grand Juries.
 On the TV, no one talks about the plans that Kathy stole
 from the National Guard Armory
 to quarantine all civilians in Boston
 in the event of insurrection.
 The plans that Kathy and Susan and what I think of as their
 male accessories
 then turned over to a radical newspaper.
 My favorite parts about Kathy Power
 have been deleted from the screen.
 And me, with my cognitive impairment, incomplete data
 to begin with
 and personal labyris to grind,
 I end up being the memory retrieval system. I have to.
 It's my job
 Because the erasure breaks my heart.

Despite the pieces of my life
 I am reluctant to claim today
 because they are too difficult, too dangerous
 to reconcile
 with my current incarnation,
 I love that Barbara Lipschutz
 Barbara Ruth
 born in flames
 hard edged, hard assed
 hard to live with
 as she was
 wild in the sheets
 wild in the streets
 in a pre-Reagan
 pre-Aids
 pre-Recovery
 world.

When the FBI invaded our community
 searching for Kathy Power
 many Dykes went back into their closets.
 Anxious to keep their jobs, their kids, they
 decided this would be a good time to play it safe
 and some of us did not.

My compañeras and I
 formed a revolutionary girl gang of lawyers, seps and prostitutes
 became a myth ourselves, an army of lovers who would not fail
 We egged each other on
 danced to the edge of the cliff
 and when the bullets came too close
 we kept on mixing metaphors
 then splintered
 into more parts
 than I could keep track of. We'd learned the early verses of
 our litany of the apocalypse:
 Black Panthers, Weatherman, MOVE, SLA...
 Death and violence grabbed us by the short hairs
 but Kathy Power was free.

Looking back on all this
 with my 1993 Buddhist, disabled, middle aged perspective
 I think:
 we could have used some loving kindness.
 I think:
 part of why I (think I) remember it so vividly is because
 I could and did
 briefly go to jail
 and it was not life-threatening.
 I could and did
 get beat up by the cops
 and it was not life-threatening.
 (In the past ten years
 poisoned, homeless,
 cut open three times,
 imperiled by disasters both natural and otherwise,
 my radar's been trained to recognize

when my life is threatened.)
 In the mid-70s
 even when the death threats came,
 even when my lover was kidnapped and raped by men in suits,
 I did not think that any of us
 would actually die. We were Bionic Dykes, too young,
 too clever, too mythic for death to catch us.
 And even if we couldn't quite become
 the revolutionaries of our dreams,
 even when the litany made stops at Jonestown, then at Waco
 on the way to Armageddon
 at least
 Kathy Power was free.

Today, in this fragile body, this mind prone to despair
 I learn to resist temptations of the martyr — dead in flames
 as though one St. Barbara
 tortured to death by patriarchy
 were not more than enough.
 Today there is a part of me
 wishing I could learn my dharma lessons
 as a street-fighting woman.
 Today there is a part of me
 so grateful the primary way
 I'm following the dharma
 is learning how to be
 a non-combatant.

I hate Kathy Power giving up on herself, on who I thought she was!
 There is a part of me
 who'd rather have her die taking out a munitions truck
 than be a depressed housewife (like I once was)
 who thinks she ought to go to jail (like I once thought).
 And where in that
 is my loving kindness?

At her sentencing, Kathy said, "My whole adult life has been
 an act of on-going contrition."
 She wants to reconcile her past with who she is today and so
 she's turned herself over to the criminal injustice system;

she got eight to twelve years, with an injunction
if she profits from her crimes,
through books or movies she writes or consults on
she'll stay in prison till she dies.

I feel such loss in this.

I want to know what she has to say

I'm sure that I could profit
from learning how this woman
regretful, moral, human as myself
is following the dharma.

She'll probably be in and out of prison
before the year 2000,

while the false messiahs, the prophets of the Last Days
burn up their followers on CNN.

And eager as I am to scorn the criminal injustice system

I wish David Koresh

would have decided a year ago
to clear his conscience by turning himself in.

I want answers

outside the confines of the state

or the authority

of sanctified secret societies

that twist the yearnings of the soul

to torture and murder the souls of others.

I want to not forget

that casualties of war

are never casual.

I want to shift the paradigm.

I want to reconcile

the parts of me

I don't know how to piece together.

I want more loving kindness.

I want to not give up on myself.

I want to know the real story.

Julia Malott

Speaking in Tongues

As an Appalachian dyke, I find white, class-privileged, dominant culture discussions about most anything intriguing, but religion has its own strange twang. I listen to the comments about bible-bangers and the hell-fire and brimstone bigots alongside the comments about white trash. Somehow many working-class and above white folks feel it's safe to lay claim to my culture as theirs. *Dirt farmers. Hillbillies. Inbreds.* A comedienne at a womyn's coffeehouse makes jokes about furniture littering porches in an Urban Appalachian neighborhood and the white working/middle-class dykes all laugh. *See, I'm not a racist. I can see there's trash in white culture too. Lil Abner. PoFolks.* Appalachian womyn wonder how they wandered into this hatred so easily, feel stupid for having believed/trusted so simply just because we are in womyn-only space. *Must be fifteen people living in that apartment.*

Why is it that class-privileged white womyn just don't get it — even womyn who recognize their skin privilege? *Snuffy Smith. I'll take a Poor Boy and a Coke.* And I'm tired of being lumped in with working-class womyn when class issues are discussed. Most times, I can't even tell the difference between working-class and middle-class status and values — it all looks like incredible privilege to me, and the bigotry of oversight feels the same regardless of who perpetrates it. *Beverly Hillbillies. Hicks.*

Maybe this is why cultural appropriation infuriates me so much, even when the culture being occupied is not mine — because I live with a kind of forced class and cultural appropriation daily. I'm being yanked into some other womyn's reality that confuses me. And these same class-privileged white dykes assume the same homogeneity among white "christians" that they assume across white class lines. *Rednecks. Holyrollers.*

So how do I talk about religion to the dominant lesbian culture, without feeling like I'm speaking in tongues? *Must be brain-damaged from all that moonshine and inbreeding.* I can't do it without backing up and talking about my culture, Appalachian women, and myself.

I am born of a family of women. Men die or they leave. Sometimes they wander in and out of women's lives, but in general they're viewed as temporary. As a girl child in Appalachian Kentucky you are taught that women are permanent, women persist, bonds with women are deep and forever. Men die in mine fires and cave-ins, from black lung and in union battles, in accidents while working the land. Or they go off to find work or they go off to drink. Strength and endurance are passed from the grandmother to the mothers to the daughters. Cultural identification is matrilineal. In my own family, five generations of women are alive — from my great-grandmother and her sisters to my daughter and my niece.

Appalachian culture is a blend of Celtic, Native American (mostly Cherokee in Kentucky) and African traditions. It's sometimes hard to determine what came from where, just as it's hard to separate families into neat racial packages. My great-grandpa was Scottish, as is my great-gramma; my biological/first grandpa was and my gramma is Scottish; my second grandpa was a migrant worker whose ethnicity I do not know; my third grandpa is Cherokee (later in life his mother took in my forty-year-old "schizophrenic" mother, becoming both great-gramma and gramma to my brother); my mother is Scottish; my biological/first father is Irish, English and German; my second father was African American; my sister has the same biological father as I do; my brother is the son of my mother and my second father. I explain my heritage in this way to demonstrate the interweaving which is Appalachian culture, and the many sources of Appalachian religion. We are not unusual — we are a traditional Appalachian family. The only thing unusual about us is that only one of us is biologically bi-racial.

My roots are along the Green River in the plateau region in Southern Kentucky. I am from a family that worked the land, not coal miners. My great-grandpa owned a few acres of land, a cow, a mule, hound dogs and some chickens. He and my great-gramma built their barn by hand, as well as their small house, which burned to the ground twice. There was a well for water and an outhouse behind the chicken coop. Milk and butter came from Whatamatter?, vegetables and animals from the land, blankets and clothing were repaired and re-quilted when necessary. What couldn't be produced was gained by bartering. Only rarely were things store-bought. The nearest neighbors were miles away.

This is my family home, where my grandma, her sister and my mother were born and raised, and where my sister and I lived sporadically as children. It was sold when my great-grandpa died, so my great-aunt Gladys, who works in a textile factory, "could look to Mom easier." I think after nearly fifty years in that house, Gladys secretly wanted indoor plumbing like they had at work. It didn't suit her worrying about snakes in the summer outhouse anymore. Now another family lives in our home with lots of dogs and kids. The barn still stands, but lightning took out the peach tree by the well. And I make my home in Northern Kentucky, living in a mixed Urban Appalachian, older working-class and young professional neighborhood. I feel okay as long as my feet are on Kentucky soil.

I know you're wondering what this has to do with lesbians and religion, but I'm Appalachian — you have to sit through lots of details so the context makes sense. I became a woman when I was ten, and quit school to support myself when I turned sixteen. I "lived around" in Urban Appalachian neighborhoods for a couple of years (I resist the dominant culture descriptive "homeless" — my people took me in). When I was eighteen I had my daughter, and from twenty to twenty-five I was a welfare mother.

Becoming a welfare mother was an experience of incredible freedom for me — I knew that my daughter and I would

be sheltered, that my child would eat. The first of each month, a check for \$170 arrived to be spent on rent, gas and electric, and sometimes, if I balanced my money right, a monthly bus ticket, which cost \$30. We also got \$97 in food stamps and a medical card, which covered me, too, until 1983 when I turned twenty-one. It was guaranteed money, guaranteed food, guaranteed health care for my child and I'd never felt safer in my life. My neighbors were always loud, we lived with rodents and roaches, and you had to be inside before dark, but I loved feeling financially secure. I would get up in the morning, walk through my apartment and swell with joy. Such times, I would sing "Amazing Grace."

Now, christianity means something very different from the privileged place of being white working/middle-class than it means when you're economically impoverished/culturally oppressed. When you are oppressed, your only source of solace may be within yourself, regardless of what you name it. My culture names it "God," a word I now reject. Alice Walker likens god to a "twin self": "the inner, the human compulsion when deeply distressed to seek healing counsel within ourselves, and the capacity within ourselves both to create this counsel and to receive it." Although I reject the word and tradition "God," when I read this, I sighed a deep *yes*. Alice would understand, in her gut, my culture. For us, the land of Kentucky is that "twin self."

My family would say we are christian, and my culture is without question deeply religious, but the religious right would not claim us. Attendance at an actual church is not required. In fact, many ceremonies take place outside. My memories of childhood "religious practices" are of planting according to the moon, dancing and singing without inhibition, baptisms in the Green River, messages delivered in frenzied tongues, processions around coffins where the unadorned corpse of the mourned is kissed goodbye, and, yes, snake-handling.

Handling, in my mind, is about facing your fear, taking impossible risks, and having faith. In Kentucky, the snakes are usually copperheads, although an occasional timber rattle-

snake makes an appearance. They are rounded up, blessed, handled and released. Snake handlers, when bitten, most often do not die. Some old timers have been bitten many, many times and survived the test. Many others have never been bitten.

Although I have never handled snakes for religious purposes, my working/middle-class friends view me as rather fearless at times. I don't see the point in worrying over whether or not something will work out just right or what the dominant culture will think. I believe that if you mean well and act honestly, no matter how scary an action is, what happens will be the right thing. It might not be what you expected or wanted; it might even be hurtful or harmful, but there will be a purpose for it. If your heart is right, you can "handle it" — honest action is never wasted. This is Appalachian faith.

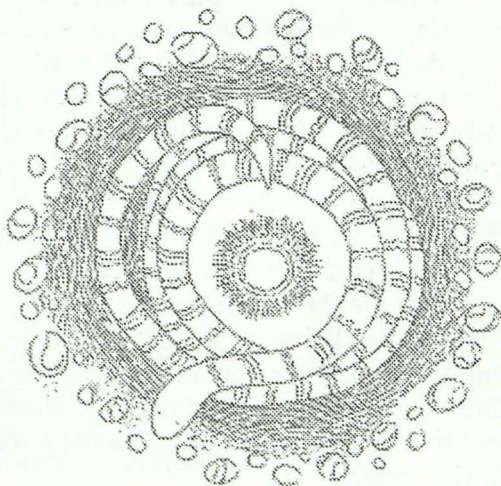
It is natural that my sister chose witchery over christianity when she became a woman — much of our culture is moon-based. Becoming a woman is marked by bleeding. At first blood, a girl child is immediately welcomed into the circle of women and is no longer sent to play with the young ones. There is a gathering of kinswomen with much cooking and pride. When my daughter left her girl-self, non-Appalachian women who we have claimed as kin were invited to celebrate. They apparently thought I had created this ritual to rid my daughter of cultural shame and distaste for bleeding — this is how I learned that dominant culture women are taught to hate something which, for me, has always been a source of pride.

In my family cemetery, engraved headstones that acknowledge the moon as mother stand alongside stones proclaiming the deceased has "gone home to Jesus." Many decisions are made according to the phase of the moon and "right timing." Some folks find Appalachian "right timing" frustrating. It's a cultural strain to learn to "be on time" to keep from offending people all the time.

Appalachians are raised to believe that people are basically good, but that they make mistakes and life is hard. We don't measure ourselves or others according to the "success/

failure" scale that the dominant culture brutalizes its members with. We may be overly concerned at times with what's "right" or "fair," but I've yet to meet an Appalachian woman with the "self-esteem" problems dominant culture women struggle against. I think we tend to take joy and pleasure in what we have and view it as a gift, rather than berate ourselves for not having "achieved" more. And we certainly know that we're entitled to what we **do** have.

As a lesbian feminist, I do not call myself christian or religious, although gospel folk songs still move me and I am often taken over by the wild pre-verbal sense of play (called joy) that causes my people to cry as we sing, and "speak in tongues." As an Appalachian womyn, I carry a deeply rooted sense of place and purpose. The land of Kentucky calls and counsels me. I listen closely to what she says.



Snake Circle
Karen Burns

Winn Gilmore

The Funeral

Louise, get on in there and dress that girl! I done already ironed the white cotton dress for her. It's hangin on her bedroom door there."

Louise switched the radio station from the piercing, self-righteous exhortations of Reverend Ike to the equally loud, but enjoyable, screams of Tall Paul on WENN. "Right on! Right on! Down to the bone!" 1966 Black Birmingham's favorite DJ yelled. "Sock it to me-e-e, Brother James!"

Louise stepped in front of the mirror, pulled the afro pick from the back pocket of her dun-colored, bell-bottom dress slacks, and began teasing her do. She stepped back, smiled at her smart (but appropriately somber) outfit, and snapped her fingers to the dying bass beat of James Brown's "I'm Black and I'm Proud!"

"And now, y'all," the DJ belted out in punched syncopation to the fading sounds, "a new one from yours truly, Tall Paul! We taking a soulful ride from the Godfather of Soul to the High Priestess of Soul: Nina Simone, y'all, with 'To Be Young, Gifted, and Black!'" Louise took down Pookie's fresh white dress and looked at it uncomprehendingly. *I'm a mother. She's really my daughter.*

"Louise," Mrs. Martins called again, anger replacing the weariness in her voice. "Darn it! I said to put that gal's clothes on her!" She nestled the black felt hat on her head like an ominous bird perched above a chamber door, and pulled the finely netted veil over her tear-lined, creamy face.

Mrs. Martins was tired. *Dan finally gone, praise God*, she thought. *Finally out of his misery, but he sure didn't leave me much. And now this child actin foolish ...* "I ain't gonna tell you no more, heifer," she warned, walking into the dining room and looking up like an immovable, squat mountain into her daughter's hooded eyes. "That ain't my child, you know.

Ain't nobody told you to go out an get yourself in trouble when you was just sixteen. Lord, Lord, I got too many crosses to bear."

"BJ," she yelled at another daughter, "you call the funeral home again, now. Don't want that hearse to be late. Don't want none of the neighbors to be jokin bout Dan being late to his own funeral." She hitched up her girdle, then went back to her room to finish dressing. "Louise, put that gal's clothes on, and right now!" she threw over her shoulder.

Later, the Martins clan was all gathered. BJ sat on the front porch swing, rocking gently and fanning lackadaisically with a Harrison's Funeral Home fan. Except for chirping crickets and the swing's lazy creak, the air was heavy and still.

JoJo was the only one missing. She'd called from California and apologized tearfully for being unable to get time off from the new, integrated nursing program she'd just started. Mrs. Martins nearly slapped Louise when she quipped over the phone line to her tearful sister that "Tears for the dead are useless, Sister. It's those of us still struggling that need to be cried for. Especially those of us still fighting in the South. And anyway," she'd concluded into the receiver as her sisters stared gape-mouthed and teary-eyed, "Dan wasn't no good, anyhow. Never was a good daddy, even before he got sick, and you know it." Despite the itch to slap Louise, Mrs. Martins stayed her hand. She decided to bless her out after the funeral.

The hearse pulled up in front of the house in all its grand, black, dreaded glory. Behind it flowed its somber entourage, like vultures dining on carrion.

The screen door squeaked open, then slammed behind Louise as she came out of the house. She wrapped one of her daughter's hands in one of her long, sweaty palms. She looked out stonily at the cortege which was to carry Daniel Martins to Macedonia 13th Avenue Missionary Baptist Church. *Hearses ought to be white*, she thought. *Death is white, but of course the racists link it with black.* "I can't believe I'm actually going into a church," she said absently to her daughter.

Church was the voracious beast to which world-weary Black parents took innocent children for the beast's weekly feast. Over her hard-won twenty years, Louise had learned that it was not child-hate that caused the parents to sacrifice their shiny young charges to the beast: it was their own inscrutable sense of guilt and, therefore, need for redemption.

Every Sunday would find them waking to the world from within the Black skin they'd been taught was proof of their sin and worthlessness. Every Sunday would find them, stiff-backed and sweating, marching their little ones through the church's white doors, the beast's gaping mouth grinning with anticipation of the virginal human feast it was being offered.

"Damn church squeezes your mind between its white knuckles until you come out thinking you're worse than a murderer. And why," she asked, looking down at her daughter, "because you're a beautiful Black queen."

Left thumb stuck firmly in her mouth, fist balled up tightly in Louise's hand, the three-year-old looked up sagely at her mother.

"Lord, Dan," Mrs. Martins screamed as she burst onto her front porch and stood as still as death. She snatched her eyes from the gleaming black hearse. "Too bad you ain't alive to see this," she mumbled, shaking her head and smiling sadly. "You'da appreciated it for sure. Too bad you had to die to get your first ride in somethin so grand." She threw back her head and shouted, "He gone! Gone?: Gone!"

"Will Mae, stop that shouting before you raise your blood pressure," Louise advised dispassionately. "No need to go screaming and crying. You didn't even live with the man anymore."

Mrs. Martins stopped her tirade long enough to shoot a baleful glare at her youngest daughter. What she saw made her red-rimmed, puffy eyes bulge. "Gal, you ain't even dressed yet! Neighbors an friends already here, an you still dressed like you goin to one of them funny-ass clubs."

"I am dressed," Louise retorted, pulling herself taller. Pookie looked up admiringly at her mother, the tall woman

who loomed like an oak above her, her brown trunk and limbs crowned by her incredible bush. "I told you I didn't want to step foot in that place — or any church — ever again, Willie Mae. At least I'm going to the funeral," she pleaded. She lowered her voice and said, "I will not wear a dress."

"And your hair," Mrs. Martins moaned, unbelieving. "You can't expect to go into that Church, that House of God, with your hair standin all over your head like some jungle woman! It ain't right, Louise! What'll Rev'ren Blackmun say? And it says right in the Bible that a woman ain't supposed to wear a man's clothes. Lord, what have I done to deserve this punishment?" she asked the palpitating, hot blue sky.

"Please, Louise," BJ begged. She wrung her hands nervously. Like her mother, she clutched her black, patent leather purse anxiously. "I straightened mine, and it's just for one day. To show respect. Just wash it out after the funeral, and it'll be good as new. Please?"

Louise's nostrils flared, and she stepped away from her family and the curious eyes of their friends who'd come to pay their last respects. She squeezed Pookie's hand and looked down intensely into her eyes. "See what happens when you start to compromise, Pookie? You start giving in just a little bit to make somebody else happy, and soon they're asking for your soul!" The child smiled at her mother, hoping this could make her happy again.

"Runnin round after all manner of womens," Mrs. Martins continued, shaking her head and throwing her hands heavenward. The loose, tender yellow flesh below her biceps quivered, then lay still.

"Cut it out, Willie Mae!" Louise seethed. "It's my life."

"Now, Dear," BJ said soothingly. She wrapped a black-clothed arm around her mother's shoulders and shook her head hopelessly at Louise. "Dear, don't get your pressure up. You take your sugar medication today?" To her sister, she spat, "See what you done did, girl! Ain't it enough that Daddy's laying out there dead an bakin in that death car in the sun? What you gotta go an upset Dear for?"

"They was gonna throw you **under** that jail, gal!" Mrs. Martins insisted, stepping away from BJ's sheltering arms. "Talkin bout some 'Black Power' an 'All Power to the People'."

Louise sucked her teeth and looked into the cloudless sky. *Here we go again.*

"Where was your Black Power friends when the white folks had you in the jail house, them thinkin you was that colored Communist from up the hill?" her mother insisted. "Not that you look that much like her, but both of you got that wild hair stickin out on your heads, an you know we all look alike to them. You shoulda learned your lesson then, gal. Lookin like you do, ain't no way you ever gone get nobody's respect."

"Look," Louise said patiently, "all you old Black—"

Her mother flinched. "Don't you dare use that word on me. Colored, gal. We **colored**. Black is the color of that hearse yonder." She pointed a shaking finger at the recently tarred road, the air above it shimmering as if an invisible kitchen stove were beneath it, frying the Sunday chicken dinner.

Mrs. Martins remembered the road's being tarred. It had been a cause for celebration among the newly Black neighborhood's residents. She was among the first wave of light-skinned Black émigrés to settle in the vacated houses like magpies warily lining up on a choice telephone pole. The streets were impeccably maintained then. But somehow, after the last white family scraped together enough money to flee, Birmingham's city funds for street repair dried up. It had taken the younger, bolder residents three years to get the city to repair the lewdly potholed street. Even that only happened after a pothole-ignorant driver's new car torpedoed into a hole and flipped, smashing little Becky Daniels beneath the upended blue Buick. *But that's water under the bridge now, Lord*, she surrendered. *Let bygones be bygones, an get on with the business of livin.*

"All you old Black people turned your backs on her," Louise was insisting, "and I know you want us liberators to do the same. My friends were there for me, but how could they get me out, knowing they would've been thrown in jail,

too?" Her cold voice cracked like thinning ice. Her mind leapt back to the greasy-haired cop kicking her down the stairs, to her head bouncing dully against the vomit-stained concrete walls. "I'm tired of fighting with you about this," she sighed. "Look, you can have me in church with my hair like it is, or you can have me **not** in church at all. And," she added more gently, "I ain't wearing a dress, OK?"

There was a plea in her voice, a begging for understanding. Despite years of arguing with her mother, a faint hope for understanding still flickered. There was a spark wrapped protectively inside the callous hardness, which blazed forth mightily when unwrapped, as now.

Mrs. Martins' eyes softened; her heart lurched. Was this her baby? Could it be the same one who — just yesterday, it seemed — was shooting marbles, wrestling with boys, and fighting for her sisters? *I shoulda known then.* How had she grown up already? How had she missed it? *My head been bowed too long while I stood over them boilin pots an hot stoves in them white folks kitchen,* she thought angrily. Her Christian sense of acceptance returned and she thought, *It's too late for all that, anyhow. What's done is done.*

The phone rang and she rushed from this stranger, her daughter. Louise's tense shoulders drooped as she heaved a weary sigh. She couldn't meet her sister's razor-sharp glance. *She almost saw me. Almost. I felt it.*

She knew it was Jean by her mother's iciness on the phone. "What you want with her?" Mrs. Martins spat loudly, holding the phone a safe distance from her wigged head. "Don't you know we got a death in the family? She ain't here." She slammed the phone into its cradle.

Louise rushed into the house past her mother and picked up the dead receiver. "Don't you ever do that again!" she yelled.

Mrs. Martins recoiled from the fierceness of her child. *What did I create here?* Her hand flew nervously to her heart. "You better leave these women alone, Louise. They ain't nothin but trouble. Nasty, that's what it is. Just pure D nastiness." She stomped out of the house.

Louise dialed Jean's number. "Hey, baby," she murmured into the cool black speaker. All anger dropped from her voice like dew sucked from the grass by the sun's fervent kisses.

"Back at you, girl," Jean whisper-said. Her voice was cool and low, and fluttered from her lips like a soft summer wind. "Your mom's got to go," she chuckled. "Can't believe she's still up to her old tricks."

"Yeah, I can't either." Louise ran her fingers along the wall. "I mean, she calls Yvonne 'that colored Communist;' you, everything but your name; and she can't stand me."

"Yeah, but she does love you. Baby, I know it's hard. How are you holding up?"

Louise leaned against the wall and exhaled tiredly. "I just got to keep on keeping on, sister. I mean, Dan wasn't a saint, but I will miss him, you know? It's this damned church funeral that I can't dig. I mean, even he never went to church, Jean. Dig?"

"Yeah, baby." Jean wrapped one long, cinnamon-brown finger in the telephone coil. She stretched her long, patent leather-booted body across her bed. "You and your daddy sure didn't have much in common, but neither one of you put a lick of faith in 'The Church.' What did he call preachers?" she half-laughed, remembering. She propped her naturally red bush-crowned head on a pillow.

"Chicken-swipin, uninvited Sunday supper guests!" Louise mimicked her father's drawn-out growl. Jean and Louise bellowed laughter.

Finally, Jean closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and made the suggestion that always put Louise on edge. "Louise, we can move in together. Shack up." Her heart raced.

"You know I can't do that, Jean. As much as I love you, as much as I love the Movement, I need to take care of home first. My mom, you know. And Pookie," she added softly.

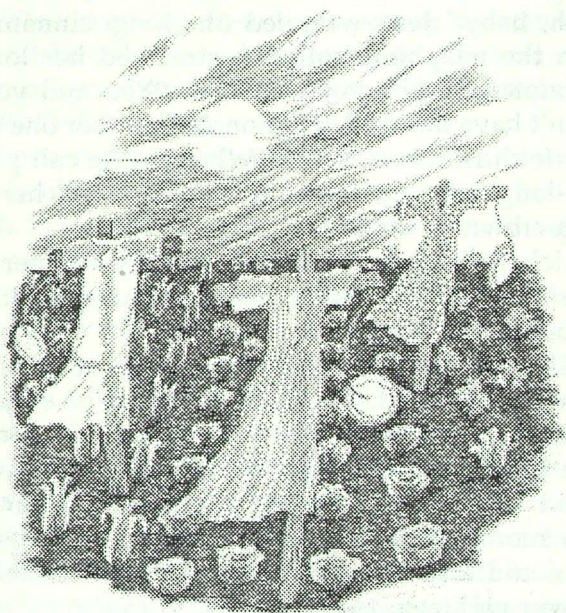
"We could take her with us. You're her mother, after all. You're over eighteen, too."

"Jean, stop jiving yourself. What court would ... I don't even want to talk about it," she moaned. Tears sprang to her

eyes. *What I wouldn't give to just lie in your arms right now. Just lay my burdens down for a change. Not worry about the funeral, my family, or the demanding Movement. "I've gotta go. The funeral, you know."*

"OK," Jean said with false bravado. Astutely, she snatched the unresigned sorrow from her voice. "Call me later if you need me. Be cool, baby."

"Power to the people," Louise said, raising high her clenched right fist. She rested the phone in its cradle and headed for her family assembled on the front porch. She stopped in the living room, looked in the mirror, and patted her fro. Then she walked on toward the front porch and the funeral.



Dresses
Karen Burns

Avotcja

Halleluyah Y'all

From the Buddhist I learned compassion. They taught me that the end of suffering came with the end of desire.

From the Moslems I learned the art of being rational while mystical, and I learned that to be strong I must first master submission.

From the Hindu I learned that time & space are only illusions, created by those who find typewriters and adding machines more interesting than making love.

The Quakers taught me humility and gentleness that even the life of the smallest ant is important.

And the Jew showed me the importance of unity & education.

The Taoist taught me that competition gave birth to the seeds of war & greed.

And from Jesus I learned never to disagree with white folks, or you'd wind up nailed to a cross!!!

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Herlinda E. Arellano

My First Holy Communion

It was spring in Tucson, Arizona, and already the temps were over 90 in the late mornings. It was so hot the beads of sweat were making rivers as they traveled down my front and back. The year was 1960 and I was about to make my first holy communion at the church of Saint Joseph. I was eight years old and attending catechism classes in preparation. My mother had already bought my patent leather shoes, some white jobs with those little straps that go over the top of your foot. The white dress she was making! Yards and yards of white satin and netting for the petticoats lay in a heap. I loved my mom but I hated dresses.

After much instruction from the nuns the day was finally drawing near. The nuns promised we would be so filled with grace we would be able to float out of the church. I was counting on having that experience. We even had a trial run in the confessional so that we wouldn't make any mistakes. OK, the day is tomorrow. Now I have to go forward into the confessional and report all the true sins of my eight-year-old self. Confession takes place on Saturday so you're pure to receive communion at mass. "Please try not to commit any sins between leaving the church on Saturday after confession into Sunday morning when it is the time to receive the body of christ." I would try not to have any impure thoughts like wanting to kiss girls. "Bless me father for I have sinned and this is my first confession." I must remember to always tell the venial sins first (these are the small ones).The mortal sins are saved for last (being big and serious). I don't have any mortal sins this first time, but I have compiled a list of venial ones. After all, I have two older brothers who I continually fight with, so there's plenty. And it's not OK to disagree or argue — this is considered fighting and sinning. So many

things are sins it's hard to keep track of them, but if you don't that's a sin too.

Confession felt so serious and scary. I mean, look, you enter a little closet and kneel down, bow your head in shame and hope for mercy. Some male priest opens a little sliding window with some kind of fakey net over it for privacy but I can see him so I'm sure he can see me. You pour your guts out to this stranger who is acting as a go-between you and an almighty he-god. You better be scared and straighten up! Anyway, I do my confession, say my penance, which consists of three hail marys, two our fathers and one act of contrition. These are names of prayers. I go home, have an early dinner and am told my fast would begin. No food till after I receive holy communion tomorrow morning! Oh no, I think, that's a long time to go without food, not a good idea. See god, I am suffering from hunger. This is making me a good catholic girl. I hope this helps me get into heaven even though I love girls and not boys. Next morning my mom wakes me up at 7 a.m. I bathe and am ready to dress. I have this little curly hairdo because my mom gave me a Lady Clairol permanent the week before. Ugh, I hated it. Now here comes the dress! It could of stood on its own — so starchy and stiff. The petticoats make me feel like I'm in a cage. Then the little white socks with lacy cuffs for the tight white shoes. Last, but certainly not least, the little bride-of-christ veil. So here I am, in this sissy get up, all ready for church. This outfit is messing with my identity. Off we go into the hot morning. I am hungry, nervous and bundled tight in that outfit. I'm a fat kid and the patterns my mom used were never designed quite right for my round body. We arrive and I go to the front of the church where all the others who are there to receive god are seated. There must be fifty of us! Oh no, it's going to be a long morning.

The mass feels like it is taking forever. Finally we get to the part where we go up and kneel in front of the altar. That's the closest you will ever get to the crucifix of a bleeding Jesus who is nailed to a cross. I think, that's why I'm here. I don't

want to end up that way. Here comes the priest, handing out the hosts. I close my eyes, lift my bowed head and open my mouth to receive this moon shaped wafer. Now remember, you cannot touch the host with your teeth or fingers because that's a sin. After all, it is the body of christ. I go back to my seat in the pew and the host becomes stuck on the roof of my mouth. I begin to gag. Quietly, but I am gagging. I have a couple of dry heaves on my empty stomach and know I'm in big trouble. I'm praying really hard to not vomit in church.

Finally the service is over and we begin to file out of the church. I push my way through the crowd, my hand over my mouth, running to the nearest restroom. Once inside I throw-up and think, oh no, there goes my body of christ down the toilet! When I am finished being sick, I go and find my mother and tell her I am a catholic failure. I don't feel full of grace, I didn't float out of the church and I just threw up my host. "Please mom take me home, please! I don't feel so good." We finally do go home, I eat breakfast, feel better and decide I will ask my mother for permission to stop going to church and catechism.

But I had to continue church, confession and catechism until I was 13 years old. I kept protesting — the older I got the more threatening and scary the teachings became. Finally my mom says, "Alright, you are old enough now to make that decision for yourself."

I was free at last. It has been 30 years since my last confession. I am still healing from catholicism. At 42, I can see the racism and colonialism that the church imposed on my childhood. I'm finding my own ways to float in grace, without having to crossdress.

Diane Anderson

Diana The Reincarnate

I was born on a Thursday, under a full moon; a bleeding, crying, wailing woman child, and I was named Diane. The American melting-pot name for Diana, Queen of the Underworld of Spirits, Supreme Huntress and midwife on earth. Diana. The word "devil" once meant "Diana of the wild woods." Today the word devil means nothing and the word Diana means me.

It is a Thursday evening and the moon is full. I step out of a hot tub full of sea salts and roses and menstrual blood. I blow out my twelve candles, place my crystal and pentagram back on the alter, douse my sage and remove my rosary. In the Old World tonight, my followers feasted and danced in my honor to insure the fertility of the fields. Thursday was a most important day. Sabbats were held on Thursdays and so were some of the yearly pagan holidays. My followers practiced different sexual rites on different days of the week and Thursday was the day for homosexuality.

Every Thursday I celebrate — my birth, the moon, the goddess Diana, my spirit guide, the Virgin de Guadalupe and my sexuality. Each celebration is different for I am a solitary witch, an Indian psychic, a pagan Chicana Catholic, a lipstick lesbian. I am pagan. I was born pagan and queer — the ethnic product of many cultures, and named after one of the earliest dykes.

Paganism is in my blood. It is my cultural heritage. My mother's mother is a Mestizo — a Texas borderland Chicano — a direct descendent of the Aztec Indians. A direct descendent of Coaxicoatl — the Snake Woman — the most powerful Indian goddess figure in Mexico. Years ago a statue of Snake Woman was discovered under one of the many ancient squares in Mexico City. When they pulled it up from the ground and placed it just yards away from its burial site, the people called it the most horrifying and powerful sight. Coaxicoatl de-

manded attention and exuded power and female sexuality. Her successor, the Virgin de Guadalupe, is revered throughout Mexico and the Southwestern U.S. She is regarded by Chicano people — people who practice our folk form of pagan Catholicism — as the most important Catholic deity. Guadalupe protects us and gives us food and life. Guadalupe is seen all over walls and kitchens and halls of churches. In many homes, Guadalupe is certainly more important than Jesus.

My mother's father is a full-blooded Indian of mixed heritage — Cherokee, Choctaw, Tigue. The Cherokees had a name for women who were different — warriors, leaders and influential council members — Beloved Women. In tribal worlds, girls who rejected women's work as children would be accepted as men and they married other women who were not cross-gendered. They would be united in marriage with a Rope Baby ceremony and they would have an open, lesbian, sexual relationship. This was commonplace until the mid-1880s, when the empowerment of women was suppressed for white, male approval.

My father is of color, but he was adopted by a white Anglo-European family. From this I have my Wicca background. The power of the European goddess. The origin of Diana. From this white European background I have found the myths for who I am; the rituals my followers used; the invocations of my own dieties.

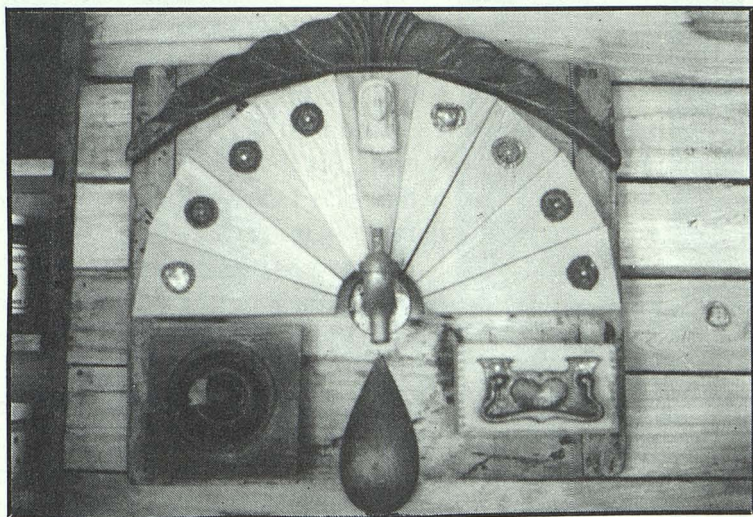
My sexuality is the final thread — the one that weaves together my cultural spirituality, my paganism, my self. I am a femme to my genderfucked butch girlfriend. I am pansexual. I can relate to both the masculine and feminine. I can call on the horned god to fuck me and bring me rain or I can invoke the moon goddess to ritualize me and fertilize our earth. I can host many genders. I focus on women — for power, sex, ritual. Women bleed — they are there for the goddess. Unlike men, they need no ritual to “become” women. They have power.

My religion — a combination of pagan practices and rituals — is dominated by the celebration of the goddess. It is

about independence and growth in women; it is about the personal as political. Witches and shamans can heal the earth, protect our children, end gay bashing. I am a solitary witch because there are no Dianic circles in my home state of Idaho; no women-centeredness in our rural farm state. There are male-centered Druid cults and covens led by straight, white men.

I've seen what happens to women who spend all their time focusing on men. The religion is lost. The goddess is lost. My color, my sex is lost. So every Thursday night I sit in a tub with candles and sage and my ruby-colored rosary, and I call the Supreme Huntress to midwife my spiritual birth. In solitude, in my women's world, I reclaim who I am.

Pledge to Diana. So Mote it Be.



Goddess of the Kitchen Sink

wood assemblage

Rainbow Williams



Pagodess

wood, clay, shells

Rainbow Williams

Myke Johnson

Of Cowboys, Mystics & Lesbians

*(We all, everyone of us, have to come home again)**

My lover's hands
reach inside my skin
leaving trails of surrender.
My mouth takes communion
between her thighs.

Growing up, I never heard the word Lesbian.

But I knew about love that was forbidden, determining, disruptive. My father was the renegade. He was a mystic — passionately in love with a God who demanded total surrender, whose glance imparted total ecstasy.

I must have learned to love like that, as I learned to name the colors. I cannot remember how I began to talk to God, only that God was as present in our lives as the eternal dream of my father to return to Wyoming, to the distant mountains and wide blue skies of his childhood, to the cowboy life of his youth.

I was my father's first born, I was my father's daughter. I remember at the age of six, living on a rented ninety acres in Metamora, Michigan. I remember my father teaching me to ride, small girl on a huge golden quarter-horse, hanging on to the leather horn of the saddle. I learned to shoot cans on a fence with a .22 rifle, my careful eye and his steadying arm, hitting right on target.

Much later, my mother told me some of the details of the move to Metamora. The original plan had been to buy the land to start a pig farm with the Mangan family, close friends of our family. But there wasn't enough money and that dream, like many others, never came through.

*Title line from song by Bernice Johnson Reagon (Songtalk Publishing Co., 1977), recorded by Sweet Honey In The Rock, on *We All Everyone of Us*.

It was my mother who bore the disruptive backwash of my father's passions. In the early days, she shared those cowboy dreams of a ranch or farm on land somewhere. I have pictures of them with their horses, in jeans and t-shirts and cowboy boots at the riding club in Detroit where they met and fell in love.

When my father turned to God and returned to the Catholic church of his growing up, she was baptized, too, early in her pregnancy with me. Her French Canadian mother had drifted away from the church and never got around to baptizing the last of her eight children. I think for my mother the church was community and a place to belong. She always seemed at a loss to understand my father's religious intensity. The deeper his passion for God, the more she felt supplanted from his heart. As he led our growing family across the country trying to follow his visions, she began to hunger for a rooted home, for normalcy, security, an ordinary life.

After *Metamora*, the dream took us to Texas in the fall of 1960, our family and the Mangans. I was just starting second grade. We were there for only six months, the last few months all of us together, scraping by in an old house in the country.

In the midst of a blur of memories — about having no money, eating corn meal mush, playing rodeo on the backs of our dads and looking for magical cities in the last glowing embers of the hearth fire in the morning — I find my first distinct memory of a prayer of my own. I was kneeling on the floor of the small windowless bathroom, doors carefully locked. Our electricity must have been turned off by then, an oil lamp was burning on the back of the toilet seat. There, seven years old, I made a secret vow to God that I would become a nun. I knew that a nun was the bride of Jesus, and I was in love.

I don't remember when I learned that such a love was not to be proclaimed to the world, that it would set me apart, subject me to disdain, be incomprehensible to those who did not experience it, rendering me both strange and special. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "You have seduced me oh Lord and I let myself be seduced!"

Eros and spirituality were inextricably, queerly, linked. I had never heard about, nor imagined, the hidden love of women for women. But this hidden love for the divine lover was kindled in me, as it had been in my father, and it shaped my passions, my sexuality, my path into a deviant way.

While in my everyday schoolgirl world I felt myself to be quite an anomaly, I found books to read which told the stories of others who yearned as I yearned. My father's books. Books in the Catholic school library. The Catholic church has an abundant history of saints and mystics who were in love with God. Sainthood was never about perfection. It was about desire. It was about surrender. And there was the satisfaction of ritual — the weekly or daily communion celebration — the tangible host in one's mouth like a secret kiss, an erotic tryst.

It seemed like my father never quite found a way to bring his dreams to realization. We made it to Wyoming once for nine months when I was twelve. He worked as a cowboy there for a while. But how could he support a family — with six children at the time — on a cowboy's pay? So we left the mountains on the horizon and went back again to Michigan, where he worked as a draftsman after that. Despite his lack of a high school diploma, he eventually became a mechanical engineer in a number of small companies which fed off the auto industry of Detroit. He never saw it as his true identity, but only a job.

When I was sixteen, we finally came across other people who were in love with God. In 1967 the Catholic Pentecostal movement had begun igniting small groups of folk, creating a new kind of Catholic, a speaking-in-tongues, reading-the-bible, prophesying, evangelical kind of Catholic. In 1970, in a talk at a parish high school religion class, a dark-haired college-aged woman spoke feelings which I'd never heard anyone but my dad speak aloud before: "You have to fall in love with Jesus."

My parents and I became a part of a little spiritual utopia in Ann Arbor, Michigan — full of students and hippies and other radicals, all on fire with a direct line to the Holy Spirit,

gathering for prayer meetings one long evening each week. Later, I went to college and found several kindred spirits among my classmates, and we created our own prayer communities.

Now, I'll joke with Lesbian activists about how I got the worst of both worlds, growing up Catholic *and* evangelical Christian. They laugh and sigh with horror.

But that early road was something more than horrible. It was Saint Francis talking to the sun and moon and animals and revolting against materialism and greed. It was my hands learning to heal as they sat upon the shoulders of a sick or troubled friend. It was a still familiar feeling of not fitting into the mainstream world, but holding to an inner vision of loving. It was knowing in my bones that I was precious, valuable — even if unknown, ignored, passed over, despised by the important people of the world.

It feels strange to write about those days. I never imagined then what I have now become. And yet, years later — chanting and singing with other Lesbian women in a witch's coven — I noticed there was nothing so similar as the singing in tongues at the prayer meetings — all of us moved to ecstasy, beyond rational language or dignified containment.

It was absolutely necessary for me to leave. The prayer meetings became more and more structured, emphatically placing men in positions of authority and admonishing women to be submissive. Radical Catholic progressives — to whom I migrated for politics and activism — weren't heeding the voices of women challenging their proclaimed but elusive commitment to equality. Ultimately, feminism turned my life upside down to the core.

I sought out the Goddess like I began to seek out Lesbians, eros and spirituality inextricably linked. Like a lover She wooed me and I went to Her.

Years later, my father also left the Catholic church. He joined an evangelical church whose focus was on healing and following the spirit. My mother joined him, as she had so many times before, but continued to remain a part of the Catholic parish they had belonged to for over twenty years.

My father still talks about the dream of a ranch out west. Sometimes I try to talk to him about the Goddess. I think perhaps he understands the compulsion of a vision upon the heart.

Back here in my Lesbian life, we speak about the right-wing-evangelical-Christians. They are the ones who target us, describe us as abominations. Sometimes we make jokes, and act as if they were all nuts. We identify them as the enemy. Sometimes they talk about wanting us to die; they speak as if we were the devil's own children.

I know it is more complicated than that. I am my father's daughter.

Sometimes I feel like an orphan, far away from roots or home, following queer and female dreams of a land we might celebrate in. As a child, I never heard the word Lesbian, or really knew what a woman might be. But I remember my father's forbidden love, determining, disruptive. I remember his search for a place in this world where that queerness in him might be valued. I remember his hunger for distant mountains.

I am my father's daughter.

Lisa Gray

In The Bathtub

In an attempt to stir up matted down memories of my life as a fundamentalist, I braved an Assemblies of God Sunday morning church service. I am proud to say that I came out alive ... alive with rage and insight! I went home to take my Sunday afternoon bath, and while in the tub, this piece poured onto paper

My tattoo looks really sharp under the water. I was 24, and I permanently marked myself with a two inch dancing cow surrounded by little red musical notes. Why? What bizarre impulse moved me to do that?

At that time I was newly free. I was beginning to think for myself. I was beginning to become myself. I was coming out as a feminist and coming out as a lesbian. I was trying everything for the first time, everything from allowing myself to question important principles and beliefs, to allowing myself to drink, dance and have sex.

My cow is my symbol of chaos, freedom and celebration. Her leg is kicked high and her arms above her head. I think her leg was kicking down every door that had locked in my thoughts; every door that had hidden something from me. Her arms were reaching to the skies, reaching for something, anything. What is out there? And the song was my celebration of new truths, new loves and new ways.

Sounds wonderful? To get it I had to sit through millions of needle jabs into the softness of my belly. I grit my teeth. I bled. I kept my wound covered for a while, and cared for it daily before I showed anyone.

I'm showing it now ... over and over in as many ways as I can. Do you want to see it? Do you think I'm weird? Do you wonder how I could have done such a thing? and why? Am I different from you because I am marked?

Going to church this morning was like going back to the tattoo parlor. The people there were ugly to me, and the

needles, this time switchblades, went into me a million times. The nostalgia lasted only for a minute.

If one more woman with big earrings and red lipstick would have smiled big into my face I think I would have burst into vulgarities! I don't need you to save me. I've already been saved — once by you, and once from you. The first time felt warm and fuzzy, the second time felt cold and dangerous. But your long fingernails dug deep into my belly could not keep me from writhing free of you. I bring with me only my scars. They look like the stretch marks I earned in my adolescence when I grew so fast.

You are such an idiot! Can't you see it? It's all a weird lie — a cult! And not only that but they *hate* you! want to *fix* you! want to take away your rights, your freedom! and they say so. This is not hidden. Is that okay with you, to "let the Lord have His way with you?" You must hear the songs, "Come unto Jesus, give Him your life today. Come unto Jesus, let Him have His way." You want to be fucked, raped, dehumanized by God? By His messengers? I heard the preacher today, "Pray for your pastor, your shepherd," your rapist. Jesus will tell him what to do. He ought to know.

They raped my mind too ... again and again, and told me it was my calling. I have a calling and they used it to get their rocks off. "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Sometimes I want to turn away and forget it all. Sometimes I want to cut off God's penis, and all the little penises that point to Him. Maybe that's what I want to do by writing about it ... cut off their penises, their power. I want to subvert their power and use it against them, and for my purposes, for our purposes, all of us who resist them.

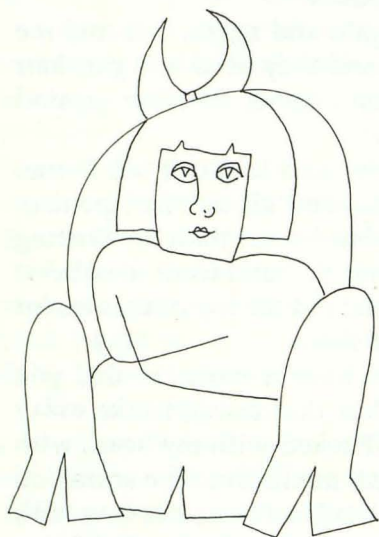
You, Mr. Fundamentalist, you have a name to me, you have a face, you have a family, but that doesn't take away from the fact that you fucked me. Fucked with my head, with my body, with my past, my present, my future. The scars you left are deep inside my body. "Let the Lord have His way with you," and then you sing, "Oh to be His hand extended." Are

you His presence on earth? "Ma'm, spread your legs. Let the Lord come inside, and let Him fill you with His Holy Spirit, and then the Love of God will come bubbling out of you. bububububblin, bubububububblin, Jesus love is bubblin' over, Jesus love is in my soul."

My heart is beating fast. I am mine now. I do have rights. And the only love that bubbles out of me is my own.

I am sorry I defended you over lunch today. But I am still a little bit, maybe more than that, afraid of you. Who wouldn't be? But you don't deserve to be defended. Pitied maybe.

I'm looking at you now! I'm facing you like I used to face the bitter winds in my Montana home town. You roar at me and terrify me, but the only way you will not conquer me is if I face you head on. *I am looking at you now!!*



WIN

Winifred Eads

Lisa Williams

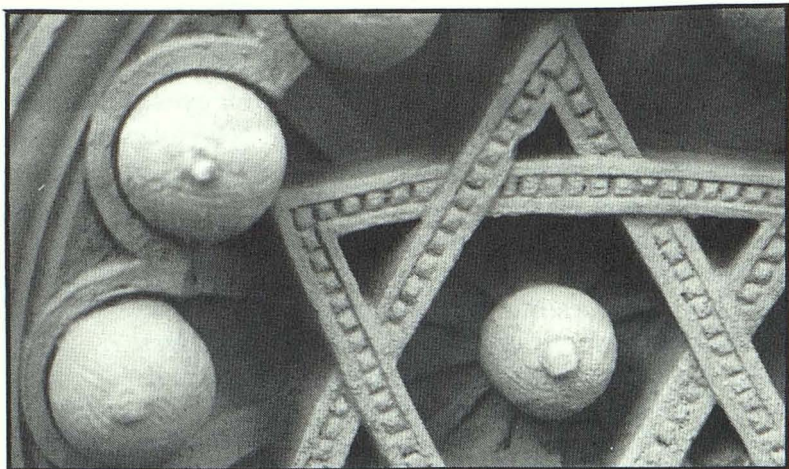
let us banish god

Let us banish god
 dispatch him (her it them) to the place
 where worn out legends go to die (the john wayne rest home
 for dispossessed titans)
 storm valhalla
 turn out the deities
 who have settled
 on our land

we could eat them chop them up into god soup
 enough for all certainly
 so many are there crowding the globe
 elbow to elbow jostling
 for breathing room
 space to cry in
 to attract attention
 to wail like babies
 who need their milk

and don't they look like us? creatures with our eyes and smiles
 hair the same color attitudes propensities for violence
 for acquisition of material goods
 yep our offspring all right
 monsters of the mind let loose and become large
 refracted through the cultural mirror
 turned into the immortals who would run our lives
 with their suggestions of ways to improve ourselves
 sadistic old things with straaannnggge ideas about
 how to cure what ails us immolation
 genocide human sacrifice holy wars hatred
 what a waste of the imagination
 if we're going to create saviors how 'bout some
 with a sense of fun?

slapstick goddesses who throw pies in our faces
splatter creampuffs on our suits and skirts
toss water balloons at our heads
lily tomlin goddesses
whoopi goldberg goddesses
we could fill up the sky with guffaws
hoots and howls belly laughs
each morning the sun could rise
a tee hee low-in-the-throat chuckle bursting
by noon into haw-haws dissolving by twilight into giggles
fading away in evening
to the satisfied sigh of the very amused
and the moon a pun at midnight we could salute her
with our own upraised buns
millions of bottoms upturned awaiting her kiss the buss
that betrays our lunacy



Like Pap?...

Nancy R. Levine
(© 1994 Nancy R. Levine)

zana

spare me the solstice tree

hibernation might be the best idea. i'd love to be unconscious for the whole damn season!

i can show you family pictures, christmas mornings: tree, gifts, me and my sisters in our pajamas. mom was the photographer. it's her holiday, the one she always feels "blue" after. i didn't know that till sometime in my thirties. i knew how *i'd* felt though — down, going down the downside of the roller coaster. the last present had been opened, nothing i got was ever wonderful enough, no pose for the camera made us a happy family basking in togetherness. after months of anticipation, it was all over with no real climax.

daddy isn't in the pictures. i remember him being part of the ritual, though. did he stay for all the present-opening, uncharacteristically quiet and subdued? or did mom arrange it so that he opened his present from her, his presents from us, then disappeared?

it wasn't his holiday. he didn't want to do the jewish ones either; if not for mom's old college friend nearby, i wouldn't have ever even gone to a seder. daddy rejected his mother's kosher kitchen, the rules of orthodoxy. and if you didn't want the religion, why identify as a jew? it was just something they'd kill you for. he fought in that war. in the fifties he said, "i'm not jewish, i'm an agnostic." he'd married a gentile, and got to live (probably nervously) in a "restricted" community where blacks and jews were not supposed to be allowed. we all attended the community's "non-denominational" (protestant) church; he sang in the choir. neighbors must have known he was jewish from his looks and last name, but they didn't "mind," or pretended not to. i was called a "little gypsy" because of my dark coloring. not a little jew, which is what i was! white people think of gypsies as romantic, mythical beings (until *they* try to move into the neighborhood!).



i hate christmas because except for a few passovers, i had no jewish holidays. i was denied half my heritage.

i hate christmas because i was addicted. i was taught to be addicted by my mother passing along white gentile american culture. when i was married, my gentile husband and i made a big fucking deal out of it too. divorced, i shuddered when a friend told me of a christmas he'd spent alone, eating tuna from a can. i was suicidally lonely that year, saved from despair by a christmas dinner with friends, one of whom was also a passing jew. a few years later, alone in the flat while my dyke roommates went home for christmas, i deliberately ate a can of tuna fish and smiled. it was the beginning of my liberation.

i hate christmas because you can't get away from it. oh yeah, *maybe* deep in the woods — if some chipmunk doesn't jump out in a santa suit. or in the homes of jewish or pagan or buddhist friends — if we all don't start talking about how much we hate christmas. i get catalogs featuring christmas stuff as early as july. just when i think it's safe to go in stores again, in january, people are returning christmas presents, talking about how glad they are it's over, buying christmas wrap on sale. the decorations are still up, the music is still playing. (music that continues in my head against my will!)

i hate christmas because everyone has to take part. i wanted to frame some of my art work, and though i usually avoid buying things during november and december, i thought i was safe. it was still before thanksgiving. i didn't expect to be "merry christmased" this early. i didn't think of an art supply store as a source of christmas gifts. (silly me.) at checkout, the cashier said, "you must be framing pictures for christmas presents." i said no. "then i guess you're redecorating for christmas." "no." "well," she insisted exasperatedly, "it must have something to do with christmas!" like i was trying to be difficult. after all, why else would anyone purchase six picture frames in the month of november?

i hate christmas because even living on lesbian land it is still in my face. even radical dyke separatists, of christian

background, find ways to rationalize christmas. if they're mothers, it's for the children. or it's their "cultural heritage just like your jewish holidays." maybe a grain of truth there, and we all want the comfort of our childhood pleasures. but what about the centuries of torture and genocide carried out in the name of christianity — pogroms, "holy" wars, the inquisition, the holocaust? millions of wimin were burned alive to complete the transition from the old earth beliefs to patriarchal christianity. i think we forget that because it's too horrible to think about.

i hate christmas most because most white christians don't even know when the holidays of other religions and cultures are, let alone feel engulfed by them as non-christians do by christmas. how come, "away from the patriarchy" on dyke land, i can't have a december without invitations for "everyone" to come to "holiday" parties, christmas goodies (which i'm certainly tempted by) offered in common space, "solstice" trees, children singing carols and showing me their christmas presents?

and of course, i hate christmas because of its overwhelming, inescapable commercialism.



please! don't send me christmas cards with "christmas" marked out and "chanukah" written in. (or "solstice." or even cards designed for solstice. no one sends them at summer solstice!) don't send me christmas cards where you've written in, "i know you don't celebrate christmas, but." don't send me those sneaky "season's greetings" cards. we all know what "season" this is. chanukah is not a major jewish holiday but has been puffed up into one to compete with christmas. kwanzaa seems like an attempt to give african-americans an alternative at the same time of year. these are fine holidays, but like solstice, they always seem to have christmas lurking behind the scenes.

i just wanna eat my tuna fish and get away from it ALL!

S. Naomi Finkelstein

McRunes and Mazdas

I had planned with my friend Sandra to make a Seder that year. But Rosie was dead and I couldn't face Pesach without her. I had been unable to feel much for about a week which was close to my usual state of affect, but just under the unresponsiveness was pain beyond belief. So I did what I do when I don't want to face what's happening: I left. I called Sandra and to her chagrin canceled the Seder. I went to the Port Authority and got on a Shortline bus headed towards Romulus, New York where the Peace Camp at the Seneca Army base was located.

I was there for a while during the summer of '83 and it changed my life. I had never spent time around womyn who believed our energy could make miracles and I had not, until that point, thought I could live in a way that might make peace. I come from a world where violence is a fact of life, a survival tactic necessary to get through the day alive and I learned that not fighting back means someone can kill you. I'm not putting down fighting for your survival, the first step towards a peaceful life is staying alive, after all. But at the peace camp I talked with womyn who thought the planet's survival depends on people not taking the first punch. And beyond that it means looking for solutions that are more creative than killing your enemies or passively being a victim. At the time this was news to me and it led to a huge shift in my thinking.

There was no deep meaning as to why I choose Seneca as a place to run to except that it was there, it was familiar and I could afford the bus ticket. So I packed a box of matzoh and rode nine hours through New York state. I called the womyn at the camp at 10 pm to say I wouldn't be in until 1 am, could they please pick me up at the bus stop. I hadn't realized that the bus trip would take so long. Anyway Lightening and Amy Giraffe met me at the bus, tired, crumpled and a bit put out.

They introduced themselves. Living on womyn's land was still new to me then. I wasn't comfortable taking off my clothes in front of strangers and I couldn't quite figure out how to change my name to an animal or nature name without sounding like a Native American instead of a Jew. So I apologized for the hour and said simply "I'm Susan Feinstein and I came to do some work."

Giraffe chimed in then "You're Jewish!! That's great, now we can celebrate Passover."

I made a noncommittal grunt. I didn't want to celebrate Passover with anyone. But they had just picked me up at a bus stop at 1 am and I didn't want to seem impolite. Then she pushed, "We can make McRunes."

"What are McRunes?" I asked, not understanding her midwestern accent.

"You know, those cookies you eat at Passover."

I frowned trying to make out just what kind of cookies she was referring to since my orthodox family did not, in fact, eat cookies at Pesach. I was just about to inform her of this when I realized that she meant *macaroons*. "You mean macaroons," I said wearily. I didn't want to participate in a culture lesson at 1 in the morning.

"Yeah. McRunes, know how to make them?"

"No," I said, honestly not knowing.

"Too bad," she said sounding disappointed as hell. Then she brightened. "Maybe we can look it up."

"Maybe," I replied. I actually hate macaroons, but she seemed to have her heart set on it so I stayed silent in order to not disappoint her.

The next day I got up and found out what needed doing around the camp. The compost pile needed turning. Being a butch from NYC I eagerly went to turn it, while the womyn who lived with the compost as a daily reality wondered at my enthusiasm. The same went for the woodpile I stacked. Then I started filling holes in the circular drive with seemingly endless wheelbarrows full of gravel. I had figured out a long time before that hard physical labor distracted me from suffering. While I worked the pain I was avoiding receded as

endorphins filled my brain. I stopped at 62 wheelbarrows and went inside to eat dinner.

I wouldn't eat rice or beans or tofu. It was Pesach, after all, and even though I had rejected much of my religious upbringing, habits of a lifetime were hard to break. Since rice and beans and tofu and peanut butter were staples at the camp I guess I looked a lot more religious than I felt. They seemed to gawk at me when I sat down with matzoh and cheese. I thought I should have brought along some gefilte fish too but I wasn't sure how these girls would react to seeing gefilte fish for the first time (it's an acquired taste, I admit, but one worth acquiring) and I wasn't sure meat was welcome on the land. Amy was in the kitchen trying to make McRunes. After supper we all went to the depot to join a vigil organized by the local christian peace group. When we drove up the christians were standing next to a cross singing "Were you there when they nailed him to the cross?" I tried not to take this as a personal question directed at me, but I stood back 'cause crosses ain't my thing.

After the singing was over they started to make communion. The next thing I knew Amy Giraffe was standing there giving away my matzoh, telling them that the last supper was a seder and that Jesus was eating matzoh not bread. My desire to get involved with communion was less than acute, so I went over to Night Sky and asked, "What is she doing with my matzoh?"

Night Sky replied, "Making a political point."

I didn't want my matzoh to be used to make a political point. At that point my matzoh eating wasn't political. It was just what I did at Pesach. I got pissed and went over to Amy.

"What am I going to eat?" I yelled at her as the christians sang "By the Rivers of Babylon" in an attempt to appear ecumenical.

Amy looked puzzled and said, "I am trying to be your ally at this overtly christian biased ritual."

Ally, schmally! I thought to myself. "I don't give a damn about the christians but I do give a damn about that matzoh. What am I gonna do without it?"

She looked at me deadpan. "I'm making McRunes."
At this I walked away.

Back at the camp I went through the kitchen for something to eat. They were vegetarians and I followed Ashkenazic traditions so all the peas, barley and lentils were out. I was pondering the phrases "when in Rome do as the Romans do," and, from the Talmud, "Don't separate yourself from your community," when Lightning came in. She offered me popcorn with Brewer's yeast and tamari on it. I wouldn't have been eager to try it even when it wasn't Pesach because it looked like shit, but the popcorn wasn't kosher for Pesach and neither was the tamari, I reasoned, because it was fermented. I wasn't sure about the Brewer's yeast. Back in Brooklyn we had never eaten, or even heard of, Brewer's yeast. I sat on the floor munching an apple, thinking that eating fruit and cheeses for a week wouldn't be so bad and reminding myself I was the one who hadn't thought the Pesach thing through. Still, Pesach without matzoh or a seder was seemingly more and more alien and alienating to me.

"I need more matzoh — you know where I can find some?" I asked.

"There's a 7-11 up the road. I'll drive you there after the news is over."

I went outside to catch a breather. It's still pretty cold in upstate NY in April. I went to the outhouse, not happy to have to use it, and slammed the lid to scare any spiders or animals I was sure lived in the pit. I sat down and wondered why I'd thought coming to the camp was a good idea.

When I went back in Amy had a wide smile and was offering me some amber colored gunk.

"What is it?"

"McRunes," she replied, like — why Susan, haven't you ever seen a McRune before?

I looked at the concoction again. "Well they must be McRunes," I said dryly, "'cause they sure don't look like macaroons. What didya make 'em with?"

She looked crestfallen — "sugar and almond extract."

"No coconut?" I asked. She shook her head no.

"Well I'm no expert on McRunes, but it seems to me they're probably made with some matzoh flour and coconut. What you have here is almond candy." I scraped the hardened flat goop off the pan and took a bite. "At least it hasn't risen," I said.

The next day me and Lightning went to the 7-11 in search of matzoh. I went up to the kid behind the deli case which contained jello with fruit in it, some olive loaf and spam. I made a bet they wouldn't have matzoh based on this evidence.

"Excuse me," I ventured. "Do you have matzoh?"

He stared at me. "What?"

"Matzoh," I repeated.

"No, we don't sell Mazdas here." He looked at me as if I were an asshole for not figuring out this was a grocery store and not a used car dealership. And I don't know, but something snapped. It was alright with me that they didn't sell matzoh but how could he not know what it was? I mean this was New York, not Kansas, and I knew what the hell spam was even though, barring starvation, I would not eat it anytime in the next century. So I yelled, "Matzoh, matzoh, a *Jewish cracker, not a car, a cracker.*"

He looked like he decided to not make one false move around me and said, "Maybe in Ithaca."

I stormed out. Lightning said real quiet, "I'll take you to Ithaca."

"How could he not know?" I mumbled.

"It's a small place without a lot of Jews. Don't worry, I'll get Amy and we'll find you some matzoh."

So we went back to the camp. I went and found Amy and said, "Look, you gave my matzoh to the christians. Now you have to go find me some more." She and Lightning went to Ithaca, about a half hour away.

"Find someone Jewish and ask them," I advised and paused. I had grown up in New York City where finding Jews wasn't a difficulty. I wasn't used to small town life. "Maybe at the university," I ventured.

I didn't want to go on the matzoh adventure. I couldn't face any more ignorance. And for some one who came up here to ignore Pesach I was sure putting a lot of energy into it. I wanted to be alone, so I went to the barn which had a mural on it with womyn dancing and the words "Circle for Survival."

Womyn had come and camped on the land the year before on corn rows so bumpy it felt like you were trying to sleep on a camel. Lots of stuff was left behind which found its way into the barn. I opened the door to a large junk pile and a bunch of rats eating bars of ivory soap. I hate rats. In the city they're seen as filthy, disgusting rabies-carrying, baby-eating vermin. I thought to myself — Why are they eating soap? — In a millisecond came the answer. Soap is made of fat. I wondered for another millisecond why I knew that and then I found myself on my knees barfing. I shut the barn door and went into the fields. I started to cry.

Helicopters passed over head as the army kept tabs on this small group of dykes resisting nuclear war. I hadn't cried since long before my grandmother had died. I stopped crying when I left home eight years before.

"She's dead," I said to no one. "My grandma is dead and what is left? Who's left?" I'd never speak Yiddish with anyone again. I didn't sing nigguns anymore. I didn't keep kosher or bench licht anymore. Shabbos meant nothing to me. I hadn't been to shul for years. I didn't want much to do with Judaism in general. I was getting whatever spiritual stuff I needed in moon circles. But here I was in the middle of a fucking field, crying because rats eating soap had triggered me into remembering that Nazis had made Jews into soap.

She was gone and with her I saw a whole world passing away. A world I wasn't sure I wanted. A world I hadn't had to stay intimate with because my grandparents had been intimate with it for me. But now if I didn't remember Yiddish, if I didn't sing the nigguns my family knew, all that simple beauty and laughter would be gone from my world. All I would be able to pass on would be death tales of the Nazis and a cardboard box of matzoh.

I keened with grief that night, not merely for Rosie who I had loved dearly, not only for the Friday nights she took me to her breast, fat and full and a little sweaty as she lit the candles, not only for her tears as she blessed me and all her grandchildren, but for the world she inhabited and for the culture her life had embodied. How was I going to be a Jew without her there being a Jew?

They say that you become a woman in Judaism when you turn twelve. I didn't become a woman until that day when I decided to take on the mitzvah of carrying on, of struggling with, of reinventing my culture. I was the door stop against genocide. The culture would not die if it lived in me. It was and is the only mitzvah that truly guides me to this day. It was and is the responsibility I took on. It was and is what ties me to my people, to my ancestors, to my grandmothers.

I decided then to learn all of what my heritage means: the beauty and the horror, the sustaining and the oppressive, the pain and the sources of joy. I decided then to learn about the lives of all those killed and make that as important as the way they died. I'd take time to remember what was so integral to Rose. It wouldn't die with her. But it wouldn't be all that defined me as a Jew either. I knew I couldn't be the Jew Rosie was. I knew I didn't want to be Orthodox anymore and that a shtetl never would have nurtured me — a smart, butch dyke who wanted the world.

But I couldn't turn my back on how I grew up anymore, even with all the pain Orthodox Judaism had caused me. I had been left out of the Torah. I was excluded from religious life. Every major life passage — my period, my coming out, my commitment to womyn went uncelebrated. Womyn in my family were treated like shit. I left in anger, in hurt and disgust. I left in search of freedom. But it meant something for me to stay a Jew. I couldn't walk away. Somewhere being a Jew and a dyke would meet and all of us would infuse Judaism with a radical lesbian spirit. We would renew it as well as remember it. I didn't want Hilter or an old guy with a beard and a tallis to be the first thing I thought of when I thought of being Jewish. I didn't want to be a Jew by proxy

anymore. I wanted to picture Jewish womyn laughing.

When I walked into the house there were two boxes of matzoh on the table. Say what you will about dykes. We make lots of mistakes but you can't say we don't try real hard. I smiled. It was dark in the house. A three legged cat rubbed around my ankles. I began to sing a klezmer tune I didn't know the name of But I knew all the words.

*For Rose, Rachel and Blanche, Alice, Rebecca and Leah, my beloved ancestors.
And for Otter, who helped.*

Glossary

- Ashkenazic: Eastern European descended Jews. There are also Sephardic Jews who are, or are of Mediterranean descent and Mizrachi Jews who are, or are of Arabic or Indian and African descent. Each have their own customs and traditions in the following of Jewish Law. Sephardic tradition says that many grains are kosher for Passover.
- Klezmer: Folk music of Eastern European Jewry
- Mitzvah: religious obligation
- Niggun: Wordless tune sung in preparation for prayer
- Pesach: Passover (in Hebrew and Yiddish).
- Schmally: Yenglish word that I can't really explain. Either you get it or you don't.
- Shabbos: Sabbath, beginning Friday at sundown and ending Saturday "when three stars are visible in the sky"
- Shtetle: a forceably segregated rural village of peasant Jews in Eastern Europe.
- Shul: Yiddish for school, used also for synagogue
- Torah: Five Books of the Pentateuch (bible)
- Talmud: Ancient rabbis' commentary on the Torah
- bench light: Womyn light candles just before Shabbos.
- Yiddish: language of Eastern European Jews. Derived from Middle Ages, high country German.

Rachael Rosen

Subjected

You have studied me well,
my books lining your shelves neatly
You know of my significant days,
yet you will never be able to pronounce them
You wander cautiously around my history, oppressions,
lowering your eyes in perfect timed reverence,
thanking me for offering you burnt remembering
Your respect is enormous, consuming my suspicions
momentarily

Bette S. Tallen

Dialoguing About Dialogue: A Jewish Lesbian Perspective

I have only recently realized how much in denial I have been about Jewishness making a difference in my life in the lesbian community. Having come out 15 years ago in a largely Jewish community, I never emotionally understood that my Jewishness was an issue in the lesbian community until I moved to Chicago ten years ago and began to live among women who had never met Jews.

Where I grew up, being Jewish was not something I thought about, I just was, as everyone in my neighborhood was. I was thoroughly insulated from non-Jewish life. I don't think my parents have ever entertained a non-Jewish person in their home. My father works with some non-Jews, but the context was so Jewish (a large New York Jewish funeral home) that it did not matter.

In 1988 I moved to a small city of about 40,000 in Minnesota to become Chair of a Women's Studies department. My lesbianism was not much of an issue, as the hiring committee wanted an out lesbian and the administration was supportive. My non-Jewish friends all asked me how I would feel being in a community with so few lesbians. I replied that I was not worried, that there were many women-identified-women there, both lesbian and non-lesbian, who understand lesbian politics. When I said I was much more worried about the lack of a Jewish community, no one but my Jewish friends and one non-Jew understood.

Thanks to Jeffner Allen, Judith Arcana, Elliott, Sarah Hoagland, Nett Hart, Anna Lee, Cherie Scricca, Margaret Howe and several of the graduate students in Women's Studies at Mankato State University.

The Welcome Wagon Lady asks my religious affiliation. I say "Jewish." She pauses and then tells me she talked to a "Jewish gal" three years ago. I feel alone.

I am only now coming out of my own denial about Jew-hating in the lesbian community. I have long been uncomfortable with what passes for anti-racist work in our community. Over the years, I have attended many workshops on confronting racism, but the underlying assumption they all seem to make is that our racism is unintentional. We talk about the first time we saw racism, we share stereotypes about people of color. These are not the same thing as understanding and confronting our racism. I have even heard women describe racism as a disease. We rarely take responsibility for our racism. We don't see our racism as choices that we make.

I sit at an anti-racist workshop. When we talk about Jews, a woman volunteers that she wasn't prejudiced, how could she be when she wasn't raised around Jews and didn't know any? This time, no one confronts her. I, the only Jewish woman in the room, am frightened.

What I have found is that we do very little to understand Jew-hating in our communities. What do I say to a lesbian who has just accused me of being too aggressive and has never heard the pushy-Jew stereotype? She uses her ignorance to prove to me that she isn't showing Jew-hating, because how could she if she didn't know? I explain that I hear it as reinforcing a stereotype. I am frustrated that she will not take responsibility for her own ignorance and the pain that causes me. Ignorance is no excuse; just because you have never heard a stereotype doesn't mean you can't perpetuate it.

A Christian friend, who knows I am Jewish, wishes me Happy Easter. I am appalled at both her insensitivity and her lack of knowledge. Doesn't she know the entire Easter holiday was a major pretext for the wholesale slaughter of Jews? Priests in Europe and Russia would incite their congregations to carry out pogroms, asserting that the Jews had killed Christ, Jews killed young Christian boys and used their blood in matzos for Passover, the Jewish festival that often coincides with Easter (the Last Supper was in fact a seder). I am angry.

I think it is time that lesbians, especially those who grew up in a Christian cultural context, begin to focus on understanding Jew-hating and agree to work on making our communities safe for Jewish lesbians — as they are not now. Question Christian privilege as you would any privilege.

I sit at a table in my own home with three close lesbian friends, all of Christian backgrounds. One suggests that lesbians should reclaim Good Friday as a lesbian holiday. I strongly protest, citing the history of Easter. Two of them tell me I don't understand. I leave my table in tears and full of rage. My home, a place sacred to me as Jew (many significant rituals, largely conducted by women, take place in the home) has been violated. Later one of them accuses me of having ruined a good time for everyone. I don't feel safe in my house.

So I'd like to start with opening a dialogue about dialogue. How do we talk to each other? Why is my Jewishness perceived as a disability by some or as obnoxious, undesirable or even male by others? Why are non-Jewish lesbians content to remain ignorant of anything about Jewish life and culture beyond the media's distorted presentation?

I talk with a Black woman colleague. She tells me she hates my interruptions. I try to explain that my interruptions aren't intended to put down but to show interest. I explain a little about Jewish conversational style. She says that if her culture taught her to do something that the rest of the world found offensive, she wouldn't do it. I think of the Black woman hotel clerk in Washington, D.C., who was fired for wearing her hair in corn-rows. I feel silenced.

Most non-Jews I've encountered have never thought about issues of Jewish style unless they grew up around Jews. Why haven't non-Jews looked at any of the studies done on Jewish conversational style or devoted any thought to it?

In my background and culture, interruptions were a way of showing interest. Someone says something that sparks something in you, so you blurt it out. Jews are noisy talkers. Jewish conversational practice is highly charged, exciting, and stimulating. Non-verbal Jewish women often find themselves left out in this atmosphere, which can be highly competitive. In reality, though, all Jewish women are at risk. If we

are quiet, we are silenced. If we are verbally aggressive, we are held up to the world for ridicule in the stereotypes of the domineering Jewish mother and the so-called Jewish American Princess.

Non-Jews assume that when a Jewish woman talks over or interrupts she is acting from the same motivations as a man when he talks over or interrupts, that the intent is to ignore or dismiss. Furthermore, non-Jews associate interruptions with a middle-class style and see it as silencing working-class women. This assumption, while occasionally accurate, generally compounds the problem, because it reinforces the stereotype that all Jews are rich or at least middle-class.

Working-class Jewish women interrupt not because of their class but because of their cultural context. I am often accused of not listening when I interrupt. Even when I demonstrate that I was listening by repeating exactly what the other woman was saying and by explaining how I am responding to it, I am accused of violating standards of feminist politeness — standards I experience as derived from Christian values. I do understand the issues that non-verbal women face. The point is to stop seeing all interruptions as being the same and deriving from the same motivation.

I am not saying that Jewish women should be given a blanket license to interrupt and that those with Christian backgrounds should never do so. I have felt, however, that much of the time when non-Jewish lesbians do interrupt, they are doing so to silence me and cut me off.

Sometimes non-Jews are right in criticizing a Jewish woman for interrupting: she may not be listening, she may be trying to dominate. What is important is that non-Jews need to understand the Jewish cultural context. If confused or irritated by an interruption, they should confront it. At the same time, they should stop comparing non-Jewish and Jewish style and deciding that one is politically correct and feminist and that the other is incorrect and anti-feminist. Feeling silenced cuts both ways: non-Jewish women feel silenced by interruptions, while Jewish women feel silenced when we

are accused of being "male-identified" in our conversational styles.

The background and intention of the interrupter are not the only issues involved. Context and skill level are also significant. When I teach a class, I often interrupt, asking students leading questions, encouraging them with body language, all of which are elements of good teaching. Clearly, what is appropriate in class may not be so in other situations, and different people have different levels of skill in knowing how and when to interrupt.

Judging interruptions is a complex process. What has been missing from this process is any credence given to my Jewish experience. Women have laughed at me or put me down when I have insisted it is a factor as much as are other women's cultural experiences.

When I try to conform to what I see as Christian-based standards of politeness, I get stupid. I stop really listening to others and focus only on my own performance. I have tried to moderate my style, but I've found that no amount of moderation is really noticed; what is expected is that I will completely change. I had not looked on my own attempts to change as internalized Jew-hating. I do now.

These are terrifying times for Jews and perhaps especially for Jewish lesbians. We all know about the tremendous rise in reported violence against lesbians and gays, but the rise in Jew-hating incidents is not seen as relevant in many of our lesbian and gay communities.

Non-Jews can avoid dealing with their own Jew-hating merely by avoiding Jews. I want every non-Jewish lesbian to realize that I cannot decide to refrain from dealing with Christians. I have no choice. The Jewish neighborhood of my childhood is long since gone. Further, many Jewish communities are hardly any more tolerant of lesbians than any other community. I cannot live in a Jewish community as an open lesbian without paying a significant price.

For me it often comes down to a true double bind. I can only live among Jews if I deny my lesbianism and I can only

live among lesbians if I deny or play down my Jewishness.

It is not primarily the task of Jewish lesbians to make our lesbian communities safe — we are not the ones who made them such perilous places. Non-Jewish lesbians must examine their own reactions to the conversational styles of Jewish lesbians. Stop associating Christian cultural norms with what is desirable and feminist, and Jewish cultural norms with what is wrong and anti-feminist. Realize that criticizing Jewish style can be a manifestation of Jew-hating.



Julie Blows Shofar

Nancy R. Levine

(© 1994 Nancy R. Levine)

Debby Earthdaughter

Non-christian: By Birth, versus the Privilege of Choice

I'm worried white pagans are recycling racist ideas — just changing them to apply to being european pagan instead of christian.

I am light-skinned, from european heritage, and grew up celebrating christian holidays. These three things combined mean I was raised with a huge amount of privilege. I've gone on to be a pagan. But I see myself and others who make that change still acting with a great deal of privilege. We had christian privilege. Even when we give it up, we still carry the effects of all those years of it.

That seems very different from never having had that christian privilege. Unless we do a lot of thinking, I see us as just continuing to do the same kind of cultural domination we were raised with.

Privilege stays, even when we give it up.

There's been a lot of debate about whether male-to-female transsexuals should be at women only events. When men dress and live as women, they often are not aware of the male privilege that they still carry. Things like taking up space, expecting others to pay attention to them, not thinking about others' perspective, having others doing the daily work — all those male role things.

Some never-het lesbians have also talked about differences in privilege with women who have lived as het and are now lesbian. It makes a lot of sense to me, when you're also taking other privileges into account. Race, class, disability, age, size, etc. affect coming out and finding like lesbians.

I was actively het for 5 years. I was also thin part of that time through starving and compulsive exercise. I was treated so differently when I fit in — being "normal," having a boy-

friend. Men treated me better. And I fit in with women better too — I could talk about men. When I came out as a lesbian, I lost some of that. But part of that ease, of having been normal, of proving I could do that — that has stayed with me.

And that seems a lot the same as being raised christian, and opting to give it up. I may have been uncomfortable with christianity. It didn't fit me. But I still had that ease of gluing on Rudolph's nose in school as part of *my* holiday. Singing the carols as *my* songs. Talking about christmas presents and easter baskets with the other kids. Having decorations up in my neighborhood for *my* holidays. And, of course, having school and work off on *my* holidays.

My school sure never closed down for the Jewish High Holidays or Dia de los Muertos, even though there were a significant number of Jewish and Latino kids. And christmas and easter were only on the roman catholic/protestant schedule, even though there were Greek orthodox kids. We never built a sukkah on the school grounds. We didn't make hamantaschen or enchiladas in home ec.

This all seems to carry over into lesbian culture, often dominated by white raised-christian lesbians. Dykes like me, still acting out ideas like:

My holidays are the real holidays.

We may expect solstice to have the same billing as christmas used to have. Now it's THE holiday. Of course the big events will be solstice parties, solstice gifts, solstice trees, solstice cards, solstice catalogs and shopping, solstice decorations.

As if every woman now celebrated solstice. And did it in a northern european way as well — complete with holly and wreaths and snowy scenes.

Everybody else's holidays are weird, extra.

Sure, we can sing a song about a dreidel too at our solstice party. We may even acknowledge Kwanzaa. Just like we might have had a few token menorah pictures up at christmas and a token Hanukah song in the christmas concert.

Everybody else's culture is inferior. (Conversion zeal)

Everybody used to have to be a christian (preferably protestant). Now everybody has to be a pagan (preferably northern european-style).

We still get to judge what religions are OK and what aren't. Of course we're still king — oops I mean queen — of the hill. Instead of other religions being primitive or "heathen," now it's that they aren't as evolved. We white pagans have it together, still the most pure and holy. Everybody else is clinging to their dirty patriarchal religions.

The needs of my group are most important.

Product catalogs, holiday fairs and other special sales promotions in December are common in lesbian culture. While they are usually labeled "solstice" or generic "holiday," they still seem like christmas to many non-christian women.

When a Jewish woman objected to a "winter solstice" catalog*, she got condescending responses like — yes, I too feel angry about christmas. But this isn't christmas. It's *solstice*. And it supports craftswomen. You're too angry. I'm a pagan — I'm a non-christian too. I'm like you. Being this angry doesn't help.

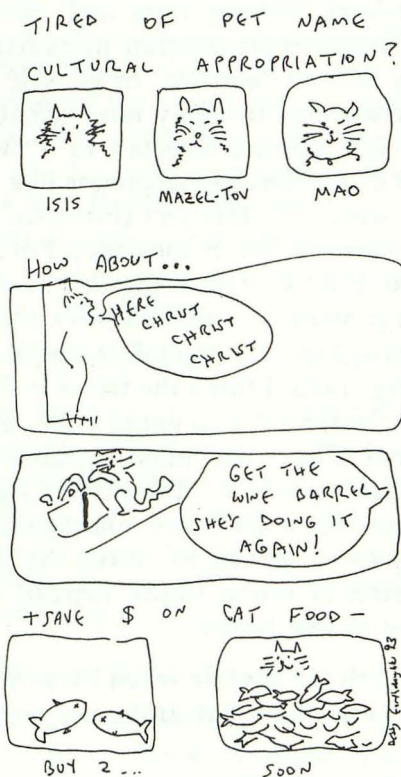
When the argument is — this allows craftswomen to survive doing crafts — I want us to look at who is getting to make their living doing crafts. I think the trend is that women with more privilege (class, race, etc.) get to work less in "the patriarchy," where they'd have the better jobs anyway. The women who have the shittiest jobs in "the patriarchy," due to fewer opportunities for education and connections, I think are the ones least likely to be getting to "leave the patriarchy." Sort of another version of white flight, instead of figuring out how we'll *all* get to live better.

I went to church for a while when I was a kid. I saw good stuff going on there. But what drove me away was the one-

*See Judith Stein's letter in *Lesbian Connection* (Jan/Feb 1994) and later responses (Mar/Apr, May/June 1994).

way thing. They couldn't just say "this is what I believe, my path, but many others are OK." I saw good people who weren't christians. So it just didn't make sense.

It's that one-way thing that I see carrying over into everybody having to be pagan. Pretty ironic too since a big thing in paganism is polytheism! I don't see a place for "my goddess(es) are the only ones." That's christian ideas smashed onto paganism. Really living out the idea of pagan polytheism means respect for other cultures, religions, ways of life.



Debbie Earthdaughter

Caffyn Kelley

Magic

You say it's magic
when we touch and I say
yes, magic.
If I dared I would
let that word resound with
all the things
you mean to me.

Is it magic? Well, yes,
if a hurricane is magic
as it tears apart the world,
regardless of cities, nations. Our lives
so carefully contrived,
collapse in a storm of kisses.
The harsh wind of your breathlessness
tears my flesh away. My bones
want you. I want you
with the marrow of my bones.

Magic? Yes, if that is
a woman's science, capable
of this ferocity. Magic, if that abolishes
the damn fool logic of
a life without your touch.

Open your legs. I will bury myself
between them. Open your eyes.
I will drown in your tears.
It's magic, if an earthquake is magic,
when mountains tremble and split apart,
and I fall into the gap. Maybe I'll fall
right through the earth and come out
the other side, newborn, feet first.

Magic, yes,
if the ocean is magic
when it swells
with a storm that will surely drown me.
But I'm diving in! Maybe I'll swim
for years, eating nothing but the salt
of your body, drinking your flesh.
For years, without sleeping.
For years, without dreaming.

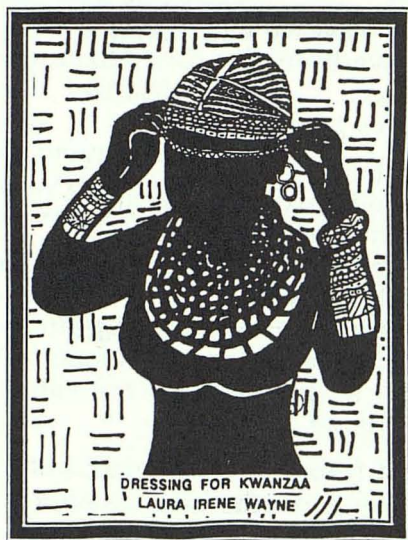
Until we forget our names, finally
forget to hold each other,
forget to swim. Magic,
that we wake up on an island
where we meet as if for the first time.
The sun has bleached our hair white.
We smell of seaweed. You are beautiful!
I remember three words, and say
by way of greeting,
"I want you." Magic,
that you crawl into my arms.

Magic, yes, if that is
a woman's science, capable
of this tenderness. Magic, if that creates a world
where pleasure is cause for joy.

Touch me. I am on fire
with wanting you. In the middle of a crowd
standing, watching, all intent upon
a magician, who pulls a burning candle
out of a hat, you hold me closer. Magic,
reaching under my shirt, and I
stop breathing, your fingers curl
around my breast. It's impossible!
My skin blisters and peels away.
Next, we will burn the whole world
where women scarcely dare to want each other.

And build a new one, so gently
that at last
love cannot bring grief to those we love.

You say it's magic
when we touch and I say
yes, magic.
If I dared I would
call it strong enough to be
a woman's science, capable
of knowing, making up a life
that's strong enough
for us.



Dressing for Kwanzaa
Laura Irene Wayne

Mañita Avila

Connection Between Womyn

If premonitions could be counted on,
I'd swing —
All day long your backyard blizzard
has radiated snow-shines
into my tinted lens,

(the essence of god in your fingers
moving curtain edge away from pane
opens my perceptions)

Connection between womyn
called feeling too deeply
is merely an intimidating
revolution —
Let the truths rest.

I will reach into the air,
for you,
singing what we must know
as womyn to survive
in silence,
your eyes greeting mine.

Remember,
sisterhood looks good in line
with setting suns,
and skin glistens in moonlight
still carrying on,
still carrying our mouths shut
most of the way
we want to stop looking
yet breathing

into and from
each other's mouths —
confessing in corners —
give me, please,
your delicate pleasures,
I cry with the trees.

Breathe to me hard,
I'll swing.

Give me each eloquent lie
and I will look
into the wind for god.
Give me each horrendous fear
and I will touch
my mouth and womb while kneeling,
while there is mattered candle wax —

I will exchange
vulnerabilities and screams.

I will exchange
release and tears.

I will exchange
orgasms and ejaculations.

I will tell lies
to protect you, possessing
every psychic ability
as formative self defense.

Pray your skin and sweat,
floating arms around hair in summer —
soft curls mixed with patchouli
are sacred, and sister,
to survive
the only prayer I conjure
creams my cunt —
Breath-takes the blizzard.

The summer of your childhood
stories will never end
your manifesting mind
And if premonitions could be counted on,
you'd swing too —
I know —

We would scream premonitions,
scream premonitions,
releasing every separation
until oxygen and carbon dioxide
meshed in blood

and we had become
one memory
of Witchcraft.

We don't usually publish contributor's cover letters, but this one spoke to the issue, and our hearts ...

Sinister Womyn Editors,

I have written this cover-letter many times; wanting to reach all of you within your souls, wanting to speak of the importance the "Womyn and Religion Issue" has begun to take on within my life. This time, I will not stop writing. I allow my self to communicate with all of you freely, honestly, and I must tell you, I am afraid.

I am a ritual abuse survivor and a great artist. I have struggled, for years, to free myself from the destructive effects of patriarchal religion. I am differently-abled because of it. Within my healing, I have discovered my great love of life, my talents as a literary artist.

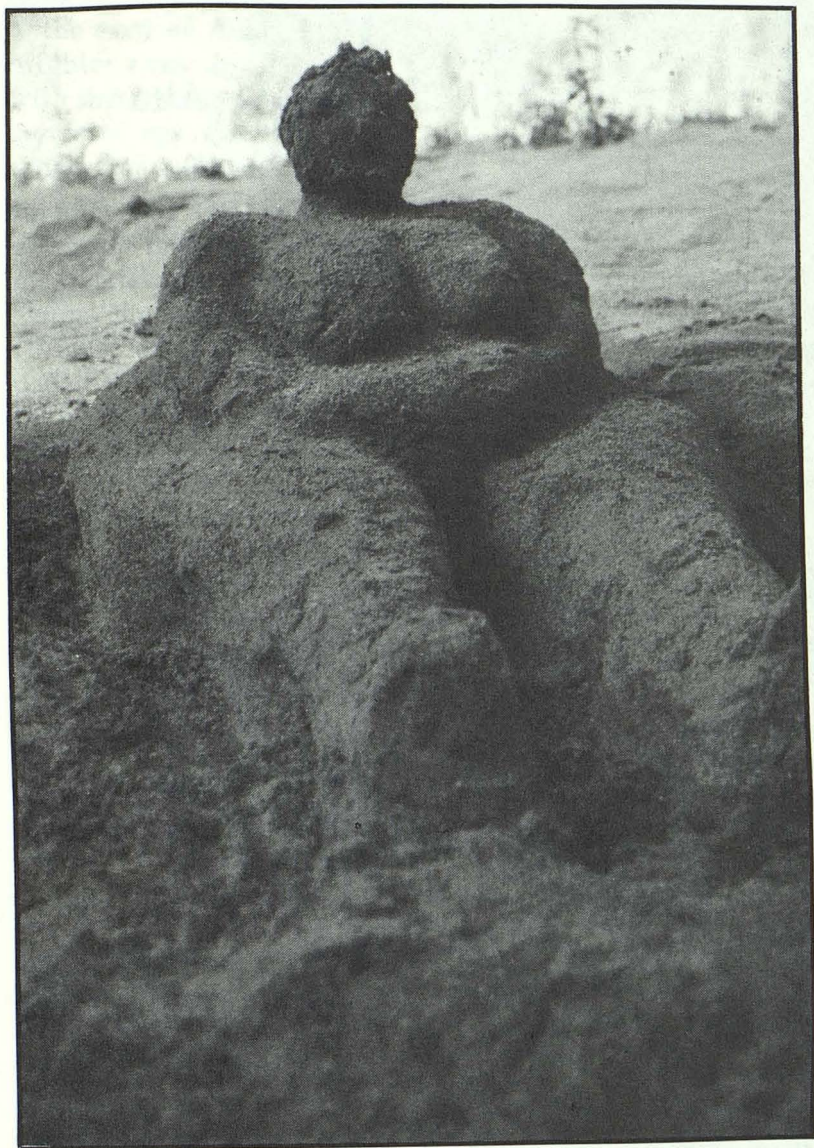
My power as a Chicana lesbian, poet and performance artist, mother and witch is my religion; the lines of my literary art are my prayers. I create beauty where sexual terrorism lingered. I create rage where silence falsified. I create strength where oppression mystified.

Each poem and performance I create is a spell. I am inspired by vast revelation. Each submission of my work is specifically chosen and sent with the energies of possibility, transformation, and peace. As I gather work for your publication, I watch the waning moon, I breathe and ground myself.

I discover hesitancy in offering you my work. I think of being young and poor years ago, coming out as a lesbian and reading Sinister Wisdom in awe of the beauty of our community. I sat on my porch, surrounded by violence in an impoverished neighborhood, and fell in love with the beauty and truth and hope of womyn's art. I mailed off a check for ten dollars, thrilled and wanting more. However, the check was not cashed for some time, and living on three hundred dollars a month with three children, I no longer had the funds in my account. I received an angry letter demanding payment signed only "The Dyke," and felt horrified, ashamed and excluded.

I still cherish my copies of Sinister Wisdom. I still am poor. And I am still a little afraid, I realize, of "The Dyke" within your publication. Yet I offer you the words of my witchcraft in hope of healing. I offer you the words of my literary art for the woman on the porch, looking to sisterhood, looking for faith and beauty and god.

Gracias,
Mañita Avila



Here today, goddess tomorrow
Samara

M.K. Stewart

Worshipping at the Body Altar

In my spirituality there must be a throne for the body. I'm not meaning a fancy, hard, golden throne, a pedestal for something which is to be feared and worshipped from afar. No, the body's throne is a warm sand dune in the summer sun; a haystack, soft and springy and more than a little scratchy; a fleshy red rock shelf under the dark desert sky with bats swooping all around; a futon underneath a skylight framing a totally eclipsed moon; or most loving of all, another precious body lying twined until she who cradles and she who is cradled are one and the same. The details aren't really important. What matters is that the throne be a fit resting place for the sacred which is to be touched and tasted and worshipped intimately, again and again and again.

I've known for a while that I experience the world more sexually and sensually than most of the women I know. So often what I perceive or feel or do in the world makes its way to my cunt.

Two nights ago my lover and I decorated our apartment for Winter Solstice. I was cutting out paper suns and stars; she was drumming. I watched her hands thump and slide on the taut skin surface of the drum and felt the pulse of her rhythm in my body. I wanted to wrap myself tightly around her and listen, pressing my body into hers until we were both breathing hard in time to the music, until we had no choice but to make love right there on the floor of our living room.

Sex as ritual. I know that making love through the night is traditional for Beltane, not Solstice, but for me choosing to be sexual is a shift of consciousness that's appropriate to any Wiccan Holyday. Of course, sex is not always magical. When it is, though, a kiss can cast the circle, invoke the four direc-

tions*, and ground my body right down to the liquid center of the earth so that I channel a fire immeasurably hotter and brighter than any I alone could generate. That connection with the root source of passion pulls me right out of my skin layers of ego and image, into a place where everything is touch and sensation without conscious calculation.

I have a hard time with straight people who accept my sexual orientation because "sex itself isn't really that big of a deal." Actually, they don't usually even use the "s" word. It's more like "what you do in bed isn't really important." I'm glad that they accept the fact that my primary affectional tie is with a woman, but this way of framing the issue still denies a core element of my being. Similarly, I dislike it when certain elements of the queer community downplay the sex aspect of queerness. Lesbianism is about much more than sexuality, it's true, and sexuality is more than who you sleep with. Even so, the straight community wouldn't have such a problem with us if we were all just dear friends. I've chosen to publicly affirm my lesbianism in part because sexuality is so important to me. These people want to disconnect sexuality from other fires, fire from the other elements. I want integration.

I started questioning christianity because it gave me no room to be my sexual self. There was no place in christianity for this body of mine, and the central problem was not that I'm a dyke. The most agonizing internal conflicts I can remember arose when I "lost my virginity" with a man. I wouldn't believe today that I was in so much pain at that time if it weren't for the evidence of my journals. I don't remember ever believing in hell so strongly, but my diaries from that time are very clear. I spent pages justifying and rationalizing my sexual behavior. "It's ok, god will understand because we

* Casting the circle, invoking the directions and grounding are steps in setting the stage for Wiccan ritual. Casting the circle creates a protective bubble, both a psychic barrier against the mundane and the harmful, and a vessel to be filled with magic and power. Calling the directions draws to the circle the powers and protections of the elements of life: earth, air, fire and water, which correspond respectively to north, east, south and west.

are really in love and that's a beautiful thing and Mark's the only guy with whom I've ever done or plan to do this and I couldn't possibly be eternally damned under those circumstances, could I?" I suppose that's one purpose of journals; they keep you humble. I'm not sure by what process I resolved this conflict between my body and my faith system. Somehow, christianity faded out of the picture. At 24 I decided that I had been on the right track after all at 17, when I fell love with a woman. By that time, christianity was somehow no longer an issue.

As far as I can see, christianity is fundamentally and finally about getting out of the body, getting out of this world. You live a good life and then your spirit goes on to the real reward. What is human and earthy is inferior to what is divine. Maybe it's because the physical passes; the body ages, dies, decays. The earth shape shifts as volcanos erupt, shores erode, summer moves into autumn. We don't want to get too attached to that which won't be with us for very long. We say it's not worth the investment, or the pain of loss. What we don't understand is that in its passing, the body is the most truthful thing we can know.

This is what I revere: the cycling of the earth, the slow pulse of the moon from new to full to dark again and over again. These rhythms I understand. They chart my life, I feel them in my body. My body is all the evidence I need, my body is my guide to what is real and essential.

All of this comes together at the cauldron of fire in my belly, where the moon turns, where the earth greens and decays, where air fire water and earth merge and explode into every new creation.

Mara Math

Shalom To All That: A Jewish Dyke Critiques The New Age

Although my pantheistic leanings have taken me as far as emigration to New Zealand, I find it more and more difficult to cuddle up to the New Age. For a long time I thought this resistance was merely personal, natural for a critical, mouthy type like myself. (When someone instructs women gathered for a meeting "Let's breathe," I'm the one in the corner muttering "What a good idea...") Gradually, however, I have realized that most of my discomfort comes from being a Jew.

I am fortunate in that I was raised Reform, the most liberal branch of Judaism, and so escaped the overt misogyny that drove many Orthodox and Conservative Jewish women away. Today I identify as more culturally than religiously Jewish, but I do want to credit my humanistic heritage with leading me directly to anti-war activism, and then feminism, and thus lesbian-feminism.

While New Age thought is a vast and various territory, with nearly as many versions as there are adherents, some common trends can be identified, and most of those I find unpalatable have direct antecedents in Christianity.*

The most difficult tenet of New Age philosophy for me is the fundamental assumption that everything happens for a reason. If there is not a silver lining to every experience, there is at least a valuable lesson which makes that experience worthwhile.

Like most Jews, I cannot remember a time when I did not know about the Holocaust. Six million Jews tortured, dehu-

*While many of the traditions may actually pre-date Christianity, I believe that contemporary dykes are comfortable with these trends because they are comfortably familiar to those with Christian upbringing.

manized and finally murdered — and then violated further by having their ashes made into soap, their skin into lampshades. The horrendous total rises another two million when the Gypsies, Communists, lesbians and gay men who were also victims of the Holocaust are included.

What extraordinarily valuable lesson can balance, much less outweigh, eight million lives? We didn't need a disaster of this magnitude to point up the dangers of assimilation. The best that my New Age friends can offer is, maybe we don't know the reason *yet*, but it must be part of the Grand Design.

With the Holocaust as heritage, it is nearly impossible for me to accept another New Age tenet, the one that says you create your own reality. (Never mind that the concepts of creating your own reality and participating in the Grand Design appear mutually exclusive. Logic has never been the defining characteristic of New Age philosophy). "You-create-your-own-reality" translates all too easily to blame-the-victim. You didn't want to heal your cancer. You perhaps wanted to be burned alive by napalm as a Vietnamese four-year old. You don't remember a desire to be raped by your uncle? It must be your karma from a past life. You must have wanted to end up as a lampshade. This is where I get off the New Age train.

The belief that we create our own reality is also an inherently anti-political belief. Change yourself, not the world. Heart attacks and breast cancer have nothing to do with the polluted air we breathe and water we drink, the irradiated food we eat, but are the result of our Type A personalities or our need to give ourselves permission to slow down and smell the orchids.

In a sort of spiritual Reaganomics, if we fail, it's because we didn't believe hard enough. A verbatim quote from a New Age acquaintance regarding a friend's death: "Maybe she didn't really *want* to be healed of her cancer."

If your chanting isn't bringing you prosperity? You must not have been chanting hard enough. (I think it's noteworthy that the reality so many seek to create is a shallow one, one of

material prosperity. The New Age is one long christmas shopping trip, you are what you buy, and your life will be so much better if you purchase the right crystals ...)

Belief is key to the idea of creating your own reality and to tolerating your position as a yet-to-be-enlightened pawn in the Grand Design. This preeminence of faith seems another precept borrowed from Christianity. New Age members don't call it faith, of course; it's called a belief system, or the power of positive thinking, or effective visualization. Nevertheless, the idea is the same: rewards come from belief, not actions. Christianity holds that faith equals redemption, and Catholicism specifies that you are saved "by grace and not by works."

In my Jewish heritage, your worth is measured by your acts and not by your faith. Judaism is not deocentric. My rabbi was fond of saying, "You don't have to believe in God to be a good Jew." (And when I sailed in to tell him with hip fifteen-year old fervor that I didn't believe in God, he gave me an archetypally rabbinical reply: "Good, at least you're *thinking* about the issues!")

And this brings us to another characteristic of New Age spirituality that I feel is essentially Christian in origin: you must not only have faith, but unquestioning faith. Critical thought seems to be definitely discouraged, even disallowed in the New Age community. Not only does doubt subvert your faith/belief/visualization, rendering it ineffective, it also begets the New Age sin of negativity.

While negativity about negativity may be linked to middle-class values, it is also a primarily Christian trait. Judaism as a whole is a culture of questioning, debate, sardonic humor and self-mockery. Jewish dykes tend to be verbal, stropy, articulate and yes, critical. I've noticed that if I instantly evaluate a new acquaintance as charming and likeable, then I'm perceptive; if, however, I assess a new acquaintance as a difficult person, my New Age friend labels me a judgmental bitch.

Another aspect of Jewish culture that does not mesh well with the New Age concerns proselytizing, something that

Judaism frowns on, at least post-Abraham. The proselytizing, “witnessing” and “testifying” found in Christianity are echoed by New Age followers.

This fervor to convert is not totally foreign to me. When I became a feminist, I, too, wanted to share the truth with those less fortunate, and I look back with both tenderness and a wincing embarrassment on that eager young woman. As a Jew, however, I am repulsed by the smug assumption of superiority and by the intrusiveness of many New Age followers (including those moments when we are instructed to *breathe*). Most galling to me is the assumption that Jewish dykes should abandon their culture in the same way that many wasp women think they have, as if there were no difference between philosophies—the term Judeo-Christian is an oxymoron— and no difference between being underdog and top dog.

I find many New Age lesbians insensitive to history. For instance, in addition to assuming that Jewish dykes should be glad to dump their own culture, these women feel that Jewish dykes must understand and participate in reclaiming Christian symbols such as the Christmas wreath, and we are just spoilsports if we insist on seeing it as anything but pagan. The Nazis took and perverted the swastika from an ancient Native American symbol, too, but at least so far we haven't had to see that reclaimed.

The New Age and Jewish culture are not completely canola oil and water, but they cannot be blended easily. New Age dykes need to meditate on their own biases if they are not to use this new philosophy as the bludgeon of cultural imperialism.

Jessica Stein

The Last Supper

You barely want to remember the words; they hold too much importance. That was the seder where Grandma sang, her weak voice quivering on air like dust, fading like the trailing last beats of a radio tune. Then you wore your darkest dress. The rain cut the sun off like a clipped fuse.

And now you float on the cadence of prayer, buoyed by routine, that lifeguard which lifts us to gasp above water. Heads bobbing up and down like floating balloons.
Yit ga dal v'yit ga dash shme raba.

Amen. Then the teacher suggested you remember a prayer. *Yitgadal v'yistabach v'yitpa'ar v'itromam v'itnaseh.* Your hair blossomed into *payes* like Shirley Temple curls. *Bri chu.* You *davened* on an island, suspended on land while your fellow pupils cruised by on costly yachts. **Halloo!** they call.
We pray the lord our souls to keep!

The only grace your family demanded was a proud head, lifted. You shrunk down into your seat. *B'chayechon oovyomechon oovchayeh d'chol beyt yisrael. Amen.*

Now Grandma taps your shoulder, inquiring why you don't sing. You realize if you don't add your voice to the chorus, the tale ends here. We need to continue the echo in the cave, dedicate new stories like hieroglyphs scratched into stone. If we swallow our tongues, we'll die choking.

Sarah Jacobus

from An Oral History of Lil Moed

Lil Moed (1927-91) made aliya at the age of fifty-eight and lived for six years in Israel. A working-class American, professional psychologist and life-long activist for progressive political causes and world peace, she was involved in Palestinian-Israeli dialogue and women's peace groups and was a founder of SHANI: Israeli Women's Alliance Against the Occupation. This is our condensation of Lil's oral history that appears in *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Tell Their Stories*, Tracy Moore, ed., London: Cassell, 1994. It may be interesting to compare this with the interview Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz did with Lil for *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology* (SW 29/30, reprinted by Beacon Press in 1989).*

I grew up during the Depression in the East Bronx in New York, a working class, mostly Jewish neighborhood. My own nuclear family and the people that became my parents' circle of intellectuals and friends were all socialists. It was *all Jewish, Yiddishkayt*. So in my formative years, I had a highly developed sense of social justice within the framework of being Jewish.

The issue of the day was unemployment. People were just scraping by at subsistence level. The idea of women's equality never even came up. Then came World War II, with a typical war economy prosperity for many people. People were going off to the army or finding war work, so the emphasis then became fighting fascism — fighting Hitler, fighting Mussolini. My parents were part of an anti-fascist movement.

But it was the dropping of the atomic bomb, the thought that America could drop bombs on two cities and kill millions of people, that was most earthshaking to me. To me, it was as

* aliya is Jewish immigration to Israel.

big as the death of millions of Jews in the Holocaust. It was from then on that I became involved in peacemaking. We were not apple pie Americans, so this became a comfortable place for me to hang my political hat: that the world was one and needed social justice, that you couldn't think of peace only for Americans, that there had to be peace around the world.

When I was living in Philadelphia, I spent about five years working intensely on civil rights. We were with CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, which was more left than the NAACP. My civil rights work was an incredible personal development — really knowing what other people were going through and what injustices meant in a very personal way. I've lived most of my life in black neighborhoods. The few of us who were in these integrated areas or predominantly black areas were privileged to see another slice of American life.

I got involved in feminism in the late '60s and really took off. My marriage broke up, a lot due to my new consciousness and being able to get over some of my fears about losing a husband and having to be a single parent. I had stayed married for over twenty years.

I grew up with a mother who felt that if you just had bread on the table, clothes on your back, and you could keep a clean little apartment, you had it made in America. So in some ways I bought that — don't ask too much of life, because if you don't die in your 20s or something horrible hasn't happened to you, you have a charmed life. So I didn't really think in terms of I should be happily married, or I should have a partner who's wonderful. After all, he didn't beat me, he didn't drink, he wasn't terrible, so we stayed married.

But the most marvelous thing with feminism, unlike all the other movements I'd been involved with, was a discovery of myself as a person. There was so much going on at the time, all emphasizing women's liberation. We did consciousness-raising groups and radical therapy groups, developed women's studies and worked with women's centers and collectives. I think at one point I was part of three or four collectives at one

time! I would move from meeting to meeting to meeting. It was exciting and very nourishing. Tiring, but nourishing.

I had never met lesbians before. In some ways it was exciting, because there were so many women coming out at that time. But it was scary too, in that I was changing my identity in my middle years. I went through a denial stage for a year or so of not calling myself lesbian. I wouldn't even say the word to myself.

I started coming out to some of my straight friends and telling them about myself. I told my kids too. I was a lesbian when my older daughter moved out of the house, moved here to Israel, and it was okay with her. But it was a time when it was okay, especially in southern California, to be living a different kind of lifestyle.

My younger daughter, Julie, was 14 at the time and still at home. I had a lot of trouble with her. She had the hardest time with my first relationship. Julie was angry, but when I look back, a lot of it was my own discomfort and hiding. But, lo and behold, when Julie was about 18, she started a relationship with one of the women in my lesbian community. And there she was, out!

I used to test myself, saying, "Okay, if there's some homophobia within me, it should come out around my daughter." Like, "Oh, my God, my daughter's gay!" or something like that. But I feel proud of her; I think she's doing the right thing. Why would she want to burden herself with some man?

My mother Rose also knew I was a lesbian. She would never have understood the word; my mother's English vocabulary was limited and we always spoke Yiddish with each other. For years, my mother recognized that my friends were extraordinarily caring to her. We would take her to many of our lesbian parties. She seemed to fit right in! People would always ask me, "Where's your mother?" She came with me to every celebration, especially around the Jewish holidays.

My older daughter had become Orthodox and moved here. I wanted to better understand her choice and the community she was part of, so I had come each year to visit. And I had

shifted into Middle East peace work after the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which absolutely floored me. How could Jews do this? Sabra and Shatila — it was like trying to understand what happened to Jewish justice.

Since I've been here a number of years as an immigrant, I've been very careful about telling anyone I'm close to that I'm a lesbian. My closest Israeli friends are lesbian and I think of that little inner circle like they're my family.

I'm not out to people I work with politically. It would never occur to me to tell them. I wouldn't feel safe at all. Here, I never thought much about feeling isolated as a lesbian, because I feel isolated as an immigrant. I feel isolated as an English speaker in a Hebrew-speaking country. I feel isolated as a staunch peace worker, a minority person in that political arena. Putting lesbian on top of that feels like the least of my problems.

And yet in many ways it feels like the *most* of my problems, because being lesbian adds such another queerness to the whole syndrome. I'm a minority in a minority in a minority in a minority and that feels like too much for me. So I have my own psychological defenses where I just push it away. Being an older woman and having no partner or love affairs here, it's easy to just say, "Forget it, what's the meaning of all that?" I have no *need* to identify as a lesbian. I don't have to explain living with a woman in the same house; I don't have to explain any of the things that I used to explain to some degree in the States.

So I have to answer that question, "What *does* it mean that I'm a lesbian?" Because it's the core of me. I see the world through strong feminist lenses and to me, going to the edge of feminism is being lesbian. My analysis of what's wrong with the world is that men have always run it and do run it and women are an undercaste, a lower class. That awareness *never* leaves me.

It's a little strange to be so deeply involved in such a core way and then go around in the closet. To not be able to say to people I'm in contact with, "I am not a heterosexual person." I absolutely believe that coming out is the best thing a gay

person can do as a political statement. But emotionally, I don't have the courage to do it, so I don't.

The driving force for me here is making the political situation right. That sounds presumptuous, I suppose, but the way I see the situation is that Israel has conquered land and people and resources and is oppressing Palestinians. I can't live with that, so I do whatever I can to correct it. That means ending the occupation, going beyond that, seeing what kind of just peace we can have for both peoples. I dream of Palestinians and Israeli Jews being able to live together in harmony and cooperation.

Jews and Arabs are so segregated now, and many Jews talk about "the Arabs" in some sort of abstract way with a lot of fear behind it. I found myself with some of the same fears and stereotypes when I first went into East Jerusalem and the West Bank. But having had this whole background in civil rights work, I could at least recognize that I was having an attack of fear because I didn't know who these people were.

I'm not a Zionist. As a Jew, I do not particularly see the need for a Jewish state. My parents weren't Zionists and I don't have an emotional tie to a Jewish state. Intellectually, I don't have the answer to what ends anti-Semitism. Being a socialist, I have always believed that the end of exploitation will bring the end to many of the isms, though as a woman, I know that's not true, because of the experience we've seen in the world of revolutions and the place of women. I recognize that sexism, anti-Semitism, and racism are very deep things that are learned. Just because you get rid of the economic reasons for those isms doesn't mean you get rid of the psychological garbage people carry in their heads about anti-Semitism.

But I don't see that the Jewish state answers the need for preventing another holocaust. In fact, I worry a lot about a nuclear holocaust in this entire area. I think that's much more likely than another Jewish holocaust anywhere else in this world.

If I think of the Middle East and my love for the Jewish people, Palestinian people, and people anywhere in this area,

I would say that the safest thing to do is build a state where both people can live in harmony and equality — with its problems, of course, as every nation around the world has. What I think is possible and good enough for now is a two-state solution. The way politics in this world goes, we have to see just little steps and that's one little step. I'm not into fighting windmills!

I'm also developing my spiritual side now, which has come late in life for me. This is almost embarrassing to talk about, because I've been a life-long atheist. There's something about being here in Israel and the land; maybe it's even more about Jerusalem for me. Having close friends who are religious, both Jews and Christians, and being around religious feminists, I've started re-evaluating that issue. I never thought there was an open door for me here. But I've opened those doors for myself and I want time to reflect on that. That feels scary, exciting, difficult and ridiculous. But I'm doing it.

It's almost like being in the closet! I don't tell anyone about it, except the same little core of friends, people I can say "I'm a lesbian" to. I think where the embarrassment comes from is immediately thinking of all my Marxist friends who say, "Come on, the opium of the masses" and all that bullshit.

But my feeling is that there is certainly something more than the materialism of this world. It makes me feel good to think that somehow there is a spirit, there is a soul in every person that's more than our cells and the chemistry and all that. The souls of people are meaningful and beautiful to me.

I've started asking myself what all this means for me. I feel like there is something to letting go of the idea that you can control everything, that I can control my life. It makes more sense to me to say, "I can give up this control and there is a higher power that's there working in some mysterious way, but that I *feel* is working with me."

I don't think I could have come to this without feminism. Feminism made me face my own detachment from myself. I had been so detached because I was living through a man, so none of my experiences had validity. I didn't even see them as

real. It was feminism that validated my experiences as a woman. Once they became real, I could own them and gain a better handle on who I was and know that I was important just for myself. That does extend into the spiritual side of me, which is also there and important. I don't have to deny that. I have a right to pay attention to the personal side.

I've been reading a lot about liberation theology too, which is a good mix of Marxism, or socialism and theology. Somehow it fits together and makes a lot of sense to me.

I've never been religious. The word Judaism connotes to me some understanding of the religion, which I have never understood. From time to time I read Torah, yet I can't connect with it. It feels patriarchal, these Bible stories with women who are so incidental. Everyone begets someone who begets someone. If this is the word of god, he gave it all wrong, as I see it.

But of course, I view the Bible as having been written by men and this is the way they saw their history. So when people talk about the "holy word" and the "learned rabbis who passed this down," all I can say is that a bunch of guys handed this down and it was not meant for me!

But I did grow up feeling Jewish, with Jewish parents who had no other identity. They came from Europe, but that was just a coincidence. They happened to be Russian, but they never felt Russian. They felt *Jewish*. I grew up with the idea that *this* is what I was. It's what I sucked in with my mother's milk. I threw it over in an attempt to be accepted by the American Christian world, but I never got rid of it.

It's at the core. If you peel layer upon layer upon layer of me, like I was an onion, you'd get to the core! And there's the Jew and there's the lesbian, or at least the feminist, because I became a lesbian much later in life. But the lesbianism has been very powerful, like a rebirth. The lesbianism became a rebirth, but I have remained a Jew.

Stacy Szymaszek

Lombardy, Italy

Her mother sang loud, talked loud and prayed
loud, loved Puccini, thought Pavarotti was
too sappy, got pre-blessed glow
in the dark rosaries in the mail which she used
to talk to Uncle Benny, all the Marias and Josephs and
the wolf hybrid her husband made a coffin for
and buried in their backyard after it choked
on an Italian sausage she threw it. For the wolf
she had a commemorative plate, for the dead
she had prayer cards and for Mother Cabrini she had
a special prayer card under her pillow from the summer
vacation they took to the Mother Cabrini Shrine in Chicago.
My mother was ten when she touched the nightgown
and bed Cabrini died in. No wonder she woke up
screaming when in her dream Mother
Cabrini's prayer card portrait was framed inside an iron
barred cage tumbling down a hill after her. Cabrini's black
eyes and white cloak behind a frame, behind bars
changed images like visions from death's kaleidoscope: a wolf
delivering cancer, the muted gurgle
of a lost soprano who got married, hung
laundry, lived in houses that were three inches
apart and followed her children around with Sciortino's butter
cookies; then she was a woman in Palermo, Sicily
who wanted to be a nun but became pregnant by a traveler
named grandpa Joe who took her to America where she became
crabby and hostile. My mother dreams
of the dead women who push the iron
cage with their bodies, acrobatic with anger. Nana Giganti
Pecararo, Bartolotta, their mouths fall open to tell
but ash pours out. My mother tries to forget

but the housecoats, the eyebrows, the cheese, the curse,
the voice saying, "Devils are afraid of saints,
not little girls." My mother dreams she has escaped
their spirits by marrying a sensible Polish man and giving
her children unsaintly American names. The Mass
for Martyrs and Virgins blessed the weaker sex
for the ability to be martyrs ("Anoint thee with oils
of gladness as I live a life of mortification
and penance") or mothers, like Saint Frances Xavier (Mother)
Cabrini — born in Lombardy, died in Chicago (1917)
but still alive in Milwaukee under my grandma's pillow
on her bed with five inch blocks under the headboard
to alleviate her hiatal hernia, like Mother Cabrini
draped in white light with black and blue eyes
in a cage chasing my mother (who is on a horse) down
a smooth Kentucky hill still headed southbound.

Gloria Anzaldúa

The Basque *Brujas* — c. 1492*for Angie Arrien*

1.

We prod the sheep up the mountain
 to the ungrazed heights, the shadows of
 the Pyrenees fall on our faces
 I play my bone flute. Amidst the bleating of sheep
 her dark hair flows, whirls. Mari spreads
 her shawl on the soft moving green.
 A tiny lamb nuzzles her throat.
 She looks up at me with the clear eyes of a lake.
 I milk the heavy-uddered ewe.
 Eating goat cheese and brown bread,
 we pass the milk jug to each other.
 We fall on the small yellow flowers
 rolling and tickling each other.
 Propped on my elbows I stare at
 her face, her smile pulls me down.
 Under our eyelids the sun glows orange.
 Our breath becomes the breeze.
 The yelping dogs wake us.
 I pull Mari up. Hand in hand we walk up the mountain.
 Small pebbles slide under our feet.
 A ram, unblinking and motionless,
 stares at us from the cliff top.
 The hair on my body rises. I shiver.
 On the summit, the wind is cold and sweet.
 The beauty of green hills and forest below,
 the winding path to the village, the tiny stone houses
 sucked the breath out from me.
 Dusk herds us down the hillside. We cross the river,
 dogs nipping the tails of the stragglers.

The trickling of water is lost in the sound of sheep bleating.
 Yelling shrilly we run. Behind us a cold wind drives the rain.
 We're soaked before reaching the rock and its shelter.
 Mari laughs, hugging the dogs and the lambs.
 We huddle around the smell of wet wool and wet fur.

2.

We wake, cold cheek shivering on a rude table —
 the rock where the Ancients sacrificed the goat.
 A rusted morning is rising.
 We walk down a path flanked with fern.
 On their way to the fields, *paysans*
 holding scythes in calloused hands pass us.
 They shut their lean faces, look away.
 We come to cobbled streets, stone houses and
 people who give us their backs.
 In a lane overgrown with bramble
 a horse cart forces us into the thicket.
 The driver pretends not to see us.
 When we reach our house, Mari bars the door.

She raises her hands to her hair,
 lets the pins drop.
 A shower of black hair canopies my face.
 I burrow in the warm crevasse between her breasts.
 Breathe in her smell from her armpits.
 Stroke the embedded cones of her spine,
 smooth the taut skin over hipbone,
 sooth the blue veins with my tongue.
 I seek the mouth of the philtre.
 Her roundness fills my hollows, her fingers
 pull a keening note from my throat.
 The well opens. The south wind stirs
 a tide in her belly, a song through my bones.
 The familiar melody shocks me.
 Pitching and heaving I flounder. Sink.
 My love, put your hands on my hips
 and your lips on my mouth and never leave me.

3.

A neighbor points his finger at Mari and me.
 Men come and take us away. The Inquisition,
 their whips and racks, never-ending torture.
 The sky dawns a clear blue as
 tongues of fire lick our faces. The hissing,
 the smell of burning flesh, the pain.
 In my eyes a blue light, before me a mirror,
 I enter. A wafting breeze and
 I'm blowing free and spinning slowly.
 The wind dies. When I come to myself
 I am lying on the floor by my hearth.
 I sit up, stare at the flames.
 On my left side a wound where she was torn from me.
 Never did I dream she would go before me.

4.

The quickening of a hundred wings. A pale sable sky.
 The world is in my grasp and not alien.
 The full moon watches me with its starched gaze
 and the silence has no ceiling.
 I, who have no wings, fly — not through cracks
 nor crevices but through stone walls.
 I ride the downward slope with the wind and the hawk,
 circle the Sea of Biscay, swoop over the moonlit cliffs.
 As the dull orange sun tugs itself out of the sea,
 I search the beach laced with rocks.
 Like surf for the shore, I race toward her;
 like the wave, I recede. I cannot reach her.
 Never did I dream she would leave me.

Cutting a swath through the meadow,
 I run down the rutted path to the hollow,
 leaving a wake of swarming flies
 and the smell of crushed grass behind me.
 The bracken bares its teeth;
 Vines and shrouding briar whip my face.

At my back the evening shadows grow hungry.
 I come to the circle of clearing
 beside the great cave between the beach and the forest.
 The sun drowns in the sea and
 night dons the clothes of longing.
 I never dreamed she would go before me.

5.

One by one the women climb down the hill to the hollow.
 I watch for her long gait, count the women.
 Twelve. My love is not among them.
 I drop my wide black belt on the sand, drop my *chamarra*.
 Breasts swinging, we clear our heads.
 A wind enters. Inside: a blue flame.
 Under the goatskin, behind the horn on her forehead,
 I seek my lady, queen of the Sabbath.
 Not she but another wears the mask.
 Who would have thought she would go before me.

With left hands we draw the circle,
 claim the crack between the worlds.
 We rub belladonna on each other's breasts and buttocks.
 Chanting, we dance to the center, dance back,
 dance to the right faster and faster.
 We aim our thoughts like arrows.
 Our spirits thicken, congeal into shapes,
 glide through the hollow, over the hills,
 then back to dip into the sea.
 We fall on the sand in each other's arms,
 pass the cup, sip our woman's blood.
 Dipping our fingers we paint moons on our brows.

The waves come thicker and thicker.
 Wings fan my face. Mounting the current,
 I whirl away in a blue light.
 The marrow stirs in my bones.
 Fur sprouts on my arms. My fingers retract.
 I stare at my claws, my pointy red tongue.

The current beaches me inside my own body.
 I raise my hands, command the tide
 to recede, but I cannot hold the memories.

6.

Gray skies on the bare forests, frost on the ground.
 My breath like smoke snatched away by the wind.
 To the south rain clouds mass;
 in the valley, fire boils the autumn night.
 Lightning strikes the horizon — its thunder piercing my skin.
 A veil of rain unrolls to the ground.
 I flee through the midnight wood
 banging into tree trunks like a bat in daylight.
 The full moon watches from the beech tree branches.
 Twigs and leaves sink under my soles,
 then spring up again behind me.
 My feet leave no tracks.
 I never thought she would go before me.

All around me cypress trees hum.
 I fall on my knees among half-sunken tombs.
 I bury my face in the damp earth,
 brush spider webs from the carved words,
 search for her name. Above me a shriek.
 Two branches fretting each other outline her shoulder,
 the glistening leaves tangle in her hair.
 She stares at me through the yellow eyes of an animal.
 When she vanishes I hunt for her in the old stone hut
 where my spear-throwing ancestors lived long ago.
 Look for her in the roots of the old gnarled oak.
 A sudden gust whips the leaves;
 a shadow passes over its trunk.

7.

I climb up the wild passes through the drizzling rain
 where night mists drench the flowers,
 and the crags and promontories brood.

Up the narrow, slippery path to the grotto
to the mouth of the cave.
She sits near the fire combing her black hair.
Lady of Ambato, Dama. She is a gust of wind,
a white cloud, a burning torch,
a woman with the feet of a bird.
Oh, Lady, bring my lover to my bed again.

8.
The soft fanning of her wings
follows me down the mountain,
from the sod path to the house.
The rusted iron gate to the garden grates.
The yellow roses she tended have wilted.
The grapevine wreathing the doorway veils my face.
I draw water for the three-legged pot,
hang it over the burning logs.
From the beams I unhook the bacon, snap garlic from the braid.
Chop potatoes, throw everything into the cauldron.
Hand curled around my waist, I stare into the flames,
raise the wineskin to my mouth.
My loneliness sharp like a knife blade.
I stoke the fire.

9.
Like light I want to sink into
love and a night tasting of nettle
where flowers bloom under invisible suns and plants grow.
Like night I want to sink into
earth to dwell in the damp cave of sleep
and swim in the lake of dreams,
arms embracing one another.
A tap on the shutters. Elated, I turn.
Just a branch unnerved by the wail of the wind
flailing itself against the pane.
A voice calls, "Angeles, Angeles."
The leaves of the plum tree rustle.

Oh, where are you? I cannot see you.
I will wait for you, best beloved.
And if you never come I will fling myself
into the flame that took you.
Two vessels of ash we will lie together.

In the corners shadows move.
A gust of wind. The flames leap higher.
Smoke billows into the room.
Coiling serpents twine around my waist.
Oh, best beloved, put your hands on my hips
and your mouth on my lips and never leave me.
How could I doubt that you would come back to me.

Lady of Ambato: Basque goddess of witchcraft
paysans: countrywoman/ man
chamarra: vest, sweater

Letta Simone-Nefertari Neely

i don't kneel

i don't kneel
or glasp my hands all the
time
the space between two hands is too small
to hold
me/hold u and all of us/ together
i fling my arms wide to hold
the ocean's breath in my armpits and under my tongue;
open my eyes toward the sky/ground/water/trees
to know what is possible
for us

i don't kneel
or glasp my hands all the time
i sings my grandmamas' spirituals
while washing collard greens
and they sing with me, snapping beans in rhythm, sitting in
they spiritselves on the backporch

i don't kneel or glasp my hands
all
the time or use the telephone too often
i can hear my people all over calling me/
and we talk/ we talk
with the wind

Alex Dalsheimer

Nature/nurture

The elegant birches who strip themselves
bare to their own woody bones
on a summer day. The tender white
things shimmering in the glistening light.

The sharp smell of cedar
high above the water (with its own
unplaceable density; not-smell) and
that snapping taste of pine.

As we are decomposed and constituted
by natural urges and then, too,
are not at all natural, we dividends
of our own macroeconomy,

rathering ourselves
into timely plots; if you do
think of living as holding a place
in line, then sing.

Through the proud and circumstantial
choristers in unfathomable disarray:
sing in the street.

Notes for a Magazine: Goodbye

Now I really do have to say goodbye. Akiba Onada-Sikwoia, Kyos Featherdancing and Janet Wallace will be the new editors of SW beginning January 1, 1995. They're in the process of putting together a great editorial board. I'm glad and grateful that such skilled and thoughtful dykes are here to move Sinister Wisdom into its next phase.

And this is a profound change in my life. I'll be driving somewhere and it comes to me, how privileged I've been to be doing this work for so long — to have had these opportunities. The quality of written interchange has been remarkable. Lesbians and writing are the passions of my life. As an editor I've been able to live in the world of my passion.

But it's about two years past due for me to move on. I started to wrap myself in Sinister Wisdom as an excuse for not attending to womyn and causes I love, and have neglected my own writing. After nearly eight years, my real enthusiasm was getting buried. Now I'm finishing my novel and going back to school to get credentialed enough to teach. Only tonight, going over these notes after midnight, do I begin to feel that surge of hope I haven't felt for quite awhile — yes, dykes can change the world with words.

There's a lot of power involved in being the editor. The more I understand that power, the more I know it has to spiral on — it can't concentrate on any one, or small group of, dykes for too long without starting to build defenses to protect itself. I look forward to what the new editors will bring. Their excitement makes putting SW in their care a pleasure.

I have many apologies to make — to all the womyn who sent us work who didn't get an answer soon enough, who didn't get the attention their work deserved. I apologize to that significant handful of womyn whose work got lost mid-process, and those who wrote difficult-to-answer letters I put into my difficult-to-answer file, then never found the time for. I apologize to my co-editors and colleagues for letting "the job" take more of my attention than our relationships. Too often, dykes had to deal with my classism or racism because I was the one with power they had to go through to get their work out, or to get credit for the work they'd done.

And I think all of us who've worked on SW in the last eight years have done something wonderful. There are issues we did that I like better than others, but each of them contributes to lesbian literature and politics. All of us — workers, writers, artists and readers — have cause to be proud of what we've made together.

I wish I had a whole new language with which to thank the many dykes who've worked on *Sinister Wisdom* over the last eight years — their visions of the magazine, their hard work, made it what it was. Caryatis Cardea was a wonderful and wonderfully challenging co-editor. She put an incredible amount of emotional, intellectual and physical energy into *Sinister Wisdom* all the years she worked on the magazine. Judy Freespirit has read 20 issues for The Women's Braille Press and continues to make *Sinister Wisdom* available to print-impaired womyn. Cath Thompson, Lisa Carlin and Betty Dudley were members of the editorial board from its beginning until issues 51, 49 and 46, respectively, and often did the manual labor that made these issues possible. Jasmine Marah contributed her insights and artistic abilities from the beginning through issue 49. Naja Sorella was a vital member of the editorial board from #34 through #45. For the past three years, Sauda Burch, Laura Munter Orabona and Jamie Lee Evans have contributed consistently to the editorial process and the daily work. Almost all of these womyn are working-class dykes. Their energy, intelligence and dedication have made *Sinister Wisdom* possible. Their class and race perspectives gave the journal its presence and depth.

Gloria Anzaldúa's thoughtful, encouraging presence has carried me through many rough spots. Her belief in writing, in the inspired and ethical application of our best selves to the work at hand, has helped me keep my heart and mind open.

I have relied on my intimates for many things during this time, including their extreme patience. There is no way I can thank enough Dolphin Waletzky (who, besides criticizing me lovingly, did fulfillment between bulk mailings), Susan Jill Kahn (who's worked on the editorial board since the beginning and has given me invaluable feedback on my notes) and Susan Levinkind (who's been volunteer coordinator, got our non-profit status and spent many hours working through the intri-

cacies of state and federal taxes & regulations the last five years).

There are so many more dykes to thank: Nina Wouk who held my hand through many tax seasons; Susan Goldberg who always proofread, came to mailings and made me laugh at myself; Carol Baker who volunteered whenever we asked; readers like Nancy Bischof who, when she read the call for solidarity with the lesbians of ex-Yugoslavia in #51, organized a local drive (in Michigan) for materials to send them; Barbara Ruth who gave me good advice, did many book reviews, contributed when she could; Bobby Rothschild and Rebecca Kutlin whose laser printer we've relied on for eight years; Irena Klepfisz who helped me understand the dynamics of editorial groups and whose deep consideration of many issues widened my worldview; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, whose parting words I've read and reread for guidance over the years. To name a few.

Relieved thanks to guest editors who came through with wonderful special issues (*Italian-American Women, Lesbians and Class, Lesbians of Color: Tellin' It Like It 'Tis, Not the Ethics Issue ...* and *Old Dykes/Lesbians*); thanks to every dyke who risked joining an on-going group in order to add her perspectives to a theme. Awe-filled thanks to the dykes who made Sinister Wisdom part of their community, who came to mailings and cleaned up the garage, sorted through exchange materials, did any number of tasks once or twice or three times a year because they wanted to, sent donations or notes of appreciation. Thanks to dykes for wanting to be a part of something. To us all for what we make by choosing.

And thank you. For your attention. For supporting Sinister Wisdom all these years. For my hope that you will encourage and support Akiba, Kyos and Janet. Get your friends to subscribe. Talk about the writing, the work, the ideas of community we bring to each other.

Loving each other means sharing what we have. Opening ourselves up. You all know cynicism, boredom, distraction. But you also know hope, or you wouldn't be on this page with me. Give in to hope. What's the worst that can happen?

May you (& SW) flourish with love, strength and joy.

Elana

Contributors' Notes

Avotcja is a poet, storyteller, musician and performance artist. She can be reached at P.O. Box 422340, S.F., CA 94142-2340.

Alex Dalsheimer, whose work appears in Sinister Wisdom for the first time, lives in Manhattan, teaches creative writing and also works as a freelance editor.

Barbara Ruth considers herself Buddhist 48% of the time, revolutionary 62% of the time. Once in a great while she doesn't feel disabled. She's always Lesbian, Indian, Jew. All in all, she's very queer. She likes that, but she didn't always. She fervently believes more will be revealed.

**INTERSTATE FLIGHT - MURDER; THEFT OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY ;
BANK ROBBERY**


Entered
8/10/83
I.O. #402
(Rev. 6-22-80)

WANTED BY FBI



KATHERINE ANN POWER

ALIASES: Priscilla Cox, Claire Johnson, Maureen Sheila Kelly, May Kelly, May S. Kelly, Jane Pascarelli,
Kathy Power, Katherine Ann Powers, Kathy Powers

FBI No. 545 574 H



Photographs taken 1974 Photograph taken 1975 Date photograph taken unknown

DESCRIPTION
AGE: 21, born January 25, 1949, Denver, Colorado
HEIGHT: 5' FEET: 100
WEIGHT: 145 to 150 pounds COMPLEXION: medium
BUILD: slender HAIR: light brown or dark blonde
EYES: blue or light brown RACE: white NATIONALITY: American
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS USED: 522-74-2089 803-46-6275
OCCUPATIONS: cook, newspaperer, waitress
REMARKS: May have short menish-cut hair style; wears glasses or contact lenses
SCARS AND MARKS: pockmark on left cheek, appendectomy scar, large scar on abdomen

CAUTION
POWER IS BEING SOUGHT IN CONNECTION WITH A BANK ROBBERY IN WHICH A POLICE OFFICER WAS SHOT TO DEATH. POWER SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

Federal warrants were issued on September 24, 1970, at Boston, Massachusetts, charging Power with unlawful interstate flight to avoid prosecution for murder (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1072); on September 29, 1970, with theft of Government property (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 641); and on October 1, 1970, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with bank robbery (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 2113a, 1 and 6).

**IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE.
TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES OF ALL FBI OFFICES LISTED ON BACK.**

Identification Number 4402
(Rev. June 25, 1965)

William A. Lohr
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C. 20535

(Just a souvenir Elana found while going through her files ... contributors' notes continue on the next page.)

Bette S. Tallen is a 44-year-old fat Jewish lesbian living in the relative calm of Disney-dominated Central Florida. Anyone wishing to visit the Mouse may give her a call.

Caffyn Kelley: I am a fabric artist and a writer. I work at odd jobs for money. For fun, I edit and publish books by women artists at Gallerie Publications. I live out in the country, on a steep rock cliff by the ocean; the watershed is my first community.

Debby Earthdaughter: I'm 33, raised working/middle-class. Now living on SSI with CFIDS/MCS. Living on lesbian land outside Tucson.

Diane Anderson, 26, is a mixed-race, lesbian journalist who edits *Girlfriends* magazine and an anthology, *Lavender Locker: Voices of Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Youth*, out in 1995. Her work appears in *Deneuve*, *Washington Blade* and *On Our Backs*. She and her wife divide their time between Idaho and California.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa is a Chicana *patlache* dyke writer from south Texas now living in Santa Cruz. She wrote this poem to honor her part Basque ancestry. She is the author of *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* and *Friends From the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado*, a bilingual children's picture book.

Herlinda E. Arellano: I am a working class, chicana dyke scholar who lives in Berkeley. I was born in New Mexico and raised in Tucson, Arizona. My birth name is Herlinda and I am presently called Lea. I have been writing for two years with Cherrie Moraga in our group called Indigena As Scribe. I am an educator, organizer and spiritual leader in my community.

Jessica Stein: Loves writing above all else, and also loves reading, tough women and music. Has many women to thank for many things. Is 17 years old; has won many nifty writing contests for high-schoolers, including the Russell Sage College poetry contest. Hates people who say, "I'm not a feminist, but ..." Volunteers at Kitchen Table Press in Albany, NY, and loves it. Misses Vermont. Thinks this bio reads like an ad in the personals.

Judith Berns: What is not in the title is that I am 37 and recently moved from Chicago to Minneapolis. I am a writer and bilingual, elementary school teacher and would like to learn how to ride a horse without falling off. Recently I joined the Minneapolis Zen Meditation Center and Shir Tikva (a temple).

Julia Malott: I am a white Appalachian dyke separatist of Scottish descent. I live in Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati, where many Appalachians migrated when the mines became mechanized and began closing.

Juliana Pegues is a mixed heritage, middle-class, able-bodied Asian American DYKE. Anxiously awaiting the revolution, she bides her time gossiping, eating and organizing with friends and allies in Minneapolis.

Karen Burns is a sculptor, painter and author of an unconventional new book for children — *The You Can't Stay Within The Lines So Don't Even Try Coloring Book*. She lives in Rochester, NY, where she is a founding member of WAVE (Women Against A Violent Environment).

Letta Simone-Nefertari Neely: i am an african-american womonlovingwomyn living in brooklyn/guided by audre's spirit/practicing a spirituality given to me by the wind and stories of elders/i am always trying to make connections that one day will help us breathe easier. ache.

Laura Irene Wayne is an African American painter, printmaker, graphic artist, poet, writer and illustrator of children's books. For the past 13 years, she has exhibited locally, nationally and internationally. Her work has appeared in and on the covers of magazines, books and newspapers. Her first book of poetry, *Journey to Feel*, will be available in December 1994. Contact her at Womyn Work: a Fine Art Company, POB 221850, Sacramento, CA 95822, (916) 427-4567.

Lisa Gray: I am a 27-year-old caucasian lesbian with a cat (what's new?). When I'm not visiting the ocean, hiking to mountain lakes or drinking coffee, I work as a social worker for children in crisis in the Seattle area.

Lisa Williams will be spending the next year in Antarctica where, in her spare time, she hopes to work on a play. She also looks forward to celebrating her 35th birthday in the dark.

Mara Math moved from Boston to San Francisco the long way around — via two years in New Zealand, where she was a union organizer. A former *Gay Community News* feature writer for five years, she is currently an arts critic for *The Bay Times*, and writes a column, “Medusa Oblongata,” for *Dykespeak*. By the time you read this she will have turned 40. She loves women who talk with their hands.

Mañita Avila is a Witch whose spells manifest into literary and performance art. She has published work in *Plazm* and *Confluence*, and her poetry performance, “Falling on the Edge of October,” has recently been released on underground video. She is currently writing a novella, *Objects D’Art, Isabella*.

M.K. Stewart is a hot and sexy dyke witch writer, searching for ways to eat and pay her rent by doing what she loves. This is her first national publication, and she’s tickled pink to appear here in *Sinister Wisdom*.

Myke Johnson is a working-class lesbian activist and witch of European and Innu descent. Her article, “Wanting To Be Indian: Cultural Appropriation in White Feminist Spirituality,” was published in SW #52. She is currently trying to find financial support for her ongoing passion work, exploring the intersections of spirituality and politics.

Nancy R. Levine is a quietly spiritual, boldly lesbian photographer and sign language interpreter.

Rachel Rosen: I love being a Jew. I’m also a proud Lesbian and Disabled Separatist. I was born and raised in the Canadian capital, a small, multicultural yet wasp dominated city. Being Jewish was not spoken of much, yet anti-Semitism was rampant. I fight against cultural appropriation and objectification and for recovering what truly is ours.

Rainbow Williams: born and raised in Louisiana, now living at Pagoda, a lesbian seaside community. Member of “Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.” White, middle-class, does

architectural drafting and historic timelines. Single, fat, great hair. Plays dulcimer.

Samara: maintaining my sense of wonder and absurdity while trying to survive in the Oakland school system.

Sarah Jacobus is a 43-year-old Jewish lesbian feminist and writer of creative non-fiction. She lives in Los Angeles, where she is an adult education teacher, audio artist-in-residence in county facilities for juvenile offenders and longtime Middle East peace activist.

S. Naomi Finkelstein — I am a writer, an activist, a trouble-maker and a good cook. I have ... street smarts, a sense of humor, good friends, a wonderful cat, a girlfriend who keeps me on my toes and a terrible job. I consider myself real lucky.

S.S. Szymaszek: I am originally from Milwaukee, but live and work in Philadelphia. I have published poems in the *Portland Review* and have work coming out in *Sojourner*. I also have written movie reviews for the upcoming gay/lesbian movie guide, *Images In the Dark*. I most recently completed a writing workshop at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont.

Winn Gilmore grew up in the South, went to college in New England and lives in her newly purchased Oakland home with her partner and dog. Between fishing, karate, writing and working, Winn travels. Her work has appeared in *Aché*, *Herotica 2*, *On Our Backs*, *Writing Desire*, *Sinister Wisdom* and *Unholy Alliances*. She dedicates this story to the memory of her mother's fighting spirit: May your passionate flame reignite!

Winifred Eads lives in Seattle.

zana: i'm disabled, 47 and going through big midlife upheavals. wondering what the landscape will look like when the dust settles.

Books Received

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

Her Head A Village and Other Stories — shows the lives of Black, working-class immigrants from a lesbian perspective, by Makeda Silvera, who edited the anthology *Piece of My Heart*. 1994, \$12.95, Press Gang, 101-225 E. 17th Ave., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5V 1A6.

The Woman Who Loved Airports — quick-witted, delightfully well-written dyke stories, by Marusy Bociurkiw. 1994, \$12.95, Press Gang.

The Dyke & The Dybbuk — after 200 years, a demon is freed to pursue the descendent of the woman she was supposed to haunt, who turns out to be a cab-driving London dyke, by Ellen Galford. 1994, \$10.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., #410, Seattle, WA 98121.

Latin Satins — four Chicana dykes who share a house in L.A. form an act and deal with the music, sex, family and racism — a good read, by Terri de la Peña. 1994, \$10.95, Seal Press.

Another America/Otra América — Beautiful, intelligent poems of conscience, by Barbara Kingsolver, Spanish trans. by Rebeca Cartes. 1992, \$10.95, Seal Press.

The Black Back-Ups — poetry on African American life written over the last 20 years, by Kate Rushin. 1994, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Dykes To Watch Out For 1995 Calendar — a wonderful calendar for keeping both your days and senses of humor in order, by Alison Bechdel. 1994, \$10.95, Firebrand.

We'Moon Gaia Rhythms for Womyn — 1995 astrological datebook, multicultural anthology, herbal resource and more, this year focusing on "Survivors: The Healer Within." \$13.00, Mother Tongue Ink, POB 1395, Estacada, OR 97023.

1995 Sudie Rakusin Lunar Art Calendar — fantasy womyn make up "A Tribe" of four species, beautifully illustrating every moon month, with info on astrology and goddess holidays. \$12.00, 1994, Full Womoon, POB 1205, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

1995 Lunar Calendar: Dedicated to the Goddess in Her Many Guises — 13 well-designed spiraling moon pages include 23 artists & writers (all genders), herbal and astrological info. \$15.00, 1994, Luna Press, POB 511, Kenmore Sta., Boston MA 02215.

Who Cares If It's a Choice — Snappy Answers to 101 Nosy, Intrusive and Highly Personal Question About Lesbians and Gay Men — is cute, by Ellen Orleans. 1994, \$7.50, Laugh Lines, POB 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004.

The Amazon Chronicles — an engaging old-fashioned thick dyke heroic saga of the Amazons during the time of the Trojan wars, by Jane E.M. Robinson. 1994, \$15.95, Clothespin Fever Press, 10393 Spur Ct., La Mesa, CA 91941.

I Am Your Daughter, Not Your Lover — poetry that initiates the Dandelion Warrior Series: books for the incest survivor liberation movement, by Marie Cartier. 1994, \$8.95, Clothespin Fever.

Mother Journeys: Feminists Write About Mothering — lesbian and straight mothers from wide spectrum get into the nitty gritty of it, edited by Maureen T. Reddy, Martha Roth and Amy Sheldon. 1994, \$15.95, Spinsters Ink, POB 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Give Me Your Good Ear — 15th anniversary edition of this intergenerational, early second wave novel, by Maureen Brady. 1994, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink.

Lesbomania — Humor, Commentary and New Evidence That We Are Everywhere — short pieces by Jorjet Harper. 1994, \$9.95, New Victoria, POB 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

Nun in the Closet — murdered nuns, sex, money and a lesbian bar owner feature in this mystery, by Joanna Michaels. 1994, \$9.95, New Victoria.

Up, Up and Away — a balloonist video specialist is chased through Louisiana swamps for what she knows, while falling in love. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Personal Ads — cute fantasy sex vignettes constructed around the personals, by Robbi Somers. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Triple Exposure — a lesbian romance with likely triangles, jealous lovers and husbands, by Jackie Calhoun. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

A Rage of Maidens — a Caitlin Reece mystery focusing on the aftermath of sexual assault and the rage of its heroine. 1994, \$9.95, Naiad.

Lesbian Visibility — a Danish lesbian pilot study about lesbians within the European Community, with special reference to lesbians in the labor market, is a landmark work which comes with a note acknowledging its white, middle-class bias, by Vibeke Nissen and Inge-Lise Paulsen. 1994, available from LBL, Landssekretariatet Knabrostraede 3, Postbos 1023, 1007 Kobenhavn K., Denmark.

On Lill Street — set in Chicago, 1976, with a 24-year-old dyke activist coming of age in the second wave, by Lynn Kanter. 1992, \$10.95, Third Side Press, 2250 W. Farragut, Chicago, IL 60625.

Confronting Cancer, Constructing Change: New Perspectives on Women and Cancer — 19 essays & personal testimonies, many by lesbians, edited by Midge Stocker. 1993, \$11.95, Third Side Press.

The Sensual Thread — love and awareness of the beings on earth, set in Tennessee, by Beatrice Stone. 1994, \$10.95, Third Side Press.

Aftershocks — dykes cope with the Big One (8.0) in this well-written novel, by Jess Wells. 1992, \$9.95, Third Side Press.

Maud's House — a girl who painted on walls grows up to paint a rural town's mural, by Sherry Roberts. 1994, \$18 (cloth), Papier-Mache Press, 135 Aviation Way #14, Watsonville, CA 95076.

Two Teenagers in Twenty — writings by lesbian and gay youth, edited by Ann Heron. 1994, \$17.95 (cloth), Alyson, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Death By Denial — Studies of suicide in gay and lesbian teenagers, compiles government sources, mostly men's comments, but useful until we do our own, edited by Gary Remafedi. 1994, \$9.95, Alyson.

Anna Day and the O-ring — a slight children's book starring a dog, a boy and his two moms, by Elaine Wicken. 1994, \$6.95, Alyson.

Tilting the Tower — essays on teaching about lesbians and lesbian studies in high schools and colleges, edited by Linda Garber. 1994, \$15.95, Routledge, 29 W. 35th St., NY, NY 10001.

The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire — theory on psychoanalysis, film criticism and the nature of dyke desire, by Teresa de Lauretis. 1994, \$14.95, Indiana Univ. Press, 1-800-842-6796.

The Courage To Heal — updated resources & a response to "false memory syndrome" grace the 3rd edition of this thick guide for women survivors of child sexual abuse, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis. 1994, \$22.50, HarperPerennial.

Growing Old Disgracefully — New Ideas for Getting the Most Out of Life — a playful, often engaging, fairly straight group of essays, poems & personal narrative, by The Hen Co-op (Maxine Myers, Barbara Tayler, Anne Woolfe, Edith Redstone, Shirley Meredeen and Mary Cooper). 1994, \$10.95, Crossing Press, POB 1048, Freedom, CA 95019.

Indecent Exposures: Shifts in Feminist Photography 1970-90 — an illustrated slice of Australian feminist life in art theory, by Catriona Moore. 1994, \$19.95, Paul & Co., POB 442, Concord, MA 01742.

Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature 1900-1970 — an important anthology of the work of five women and 14 men, edited by Paula Gunn Allen. 1994, \$24.50 (cloth), Ballantine Books.

Announcements and Classified Ads

PUBLICATIONS

Look up! *THE '95 LUNAR CALENDAR: DEDICATED TO THE GODDESS IN HER MANY GUISES* — fresh works by 23 artists and writers, 32 pages, wall-hanging, 19th annual edition! \$20 postpaid from Luna Press, POB 511, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02215, USA, phone 617-427-9846.

ESTO NO TIENE NOMBRE, revista de lesbianas latinas en miami, is a forum for latina lesbians with a Miami twist. Open to all forms (Spanish, Spanglish, English), \$10 per year (checks to: Tatiana de la Tierra). Guidelines, subs to: 4700 NW 7th St. #463, Miami, FL 33126.

MAIZE, A Lesbian Country Magazine. \$10/yr (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 Gay Youth Comm. Coalition of the Bay Area, \$5 (to We Are Here) from: 2215 Market St., #479, SF, CA 94114.

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

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

COMING OUT IN COLLEGE: ANTHOLOGY. Seeking coming out stories by current college students or graduates within the last three years. Send w/ SASE to Annie Stevens, 3300 Teagarden Circle, #403, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Deadline: March 31, 1995.

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

HEY PAESAN!: Writings by Italian-Descended Lesbians and Gay Men Fouri d'Italia, seeks work in triplicate w/ SASE by Jan. 15, 1995; edited by Giovanna Capone, Denise Nico Leto and Tommi Avicolti Mecca. 278 State St., #2, SF, CA 94114.

VIDEO MEMOIRS ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, archival and contemporary, for "The Second Wave," a 4-part TV series, is sought by Women Make Movies. Contact them for info on how to participate: 462 Broadway, NY, NY 10013.

BLUE COLLAR, WORKING CLASS AND POOR LESBIANS' identity anthology: who decides who's a lesbian? What a real lesbian looks, acts, sounds like? What we call ourselves? For info, send SASE to: POB 8939, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

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

DYKE REVIEW MAGAZINE — "We don't judge it, we just publish it." All publishable forms of dyke expression. Call 415-621-3769 or write: 584 Castro St., Ste 456, SF, CA 94114.

YOUNG WOMEN HEALING FROM ABUSE — send all forms of publishable expression for a new anthology to the Birch Heather Project, POB 11244, Portland, OR 97211.

LESBIANS IN ACADEMIA anthology — send 1-page abstract, or request guidelines from: Esther Rothblum, Dept. of Psych., Dewey Hall, Univ. of Vt., Burlington, VT 05405 or E-Mail to bmintz@moose.uvm.edu by Jan. 1, 1994.

LESBIAN CONTRADICTION seeks non-fiction on experiences of the Far Right around lesbian/gay & women's issues. Ongoing column. LesCon, 584 Castro St. Ste. 356, SF, CA 94114.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE — let's be honest and claim ALL we are, have been and will be for centuries! For guidelines, info: SASE to Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, running deadline.

BREAST CANCER AND BODY IMAGE anthology seeks art, non-fiction, poetry from survivors and/or surviving friends. SASE for guidelines before sending work to Raven'Light POB 135, Graton, CA 95444. New deadline: April 1, 1995.

LESBIAN SELF-REPRESENTATION in photo based work sought for article and conf. presentation. Send slides, statements, cv or queries to: Cyndra MacDowell, 6018 Jeanne Mance, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2v 4K8, 514-272-4851.

OUT IN VIDEO Festival of Lesbian/Gay Narrative Shorts, seeks under 30 min. dramas. OVF, Box 14022, SF, CA 94114.

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

LAVENDAR LIFE will enter all stories and poetry received through Dec. 31, 1994 in their writing contest, prizes from \$100. POB 898, Binghamton, NY 13902-0898, attn: Pamela K. Fite.

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.

LESBIANS NEEDED to fill out short survey for lesbian grad student's dissertation. Anonymity guaranteed. Lesbian Wellness Survey, UVM-Dewey Hall, Burlington VT 05405, 802-657-2999.

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

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

QUEER GLANCES, QUEER MOMENTS — lesbian and gay short short stories. Deadline: March 31, 1995. Canadian SASE (or international reply coupon): Karen X. Tulchinsky, #1002-1340 Burnaby St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6E 1R1.

AIDS IN PRISON — survey by former prisoner Jeannie Pejko to determine needs of prisoners with AIDS: write her at 4624 N. Hamlin, Chicago, IL 60625 for more info.

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/RETREATS

WOMEN, WAR AND PEACE: THE VISION AND THE STRATEGIES — international conf. of Women in Black and women's peace movements. Jerusalem, Dec. 28-30, 1994. Activists and scholars invited. Contact Erella Shadmi, 4/11 Dresner St., Jerusalem, Israel 93814. Tel: (2) 718-597; Fax: (2) 259-626.

OLOC — Old Lesbians Organizing for Change helps form new groups of lesbians over 60, provides ageism education, stimulates existing groups to confront ageism. OLOC, POB 980422, Houston, TX 77098.

"CROSSING THE BOUNDARY; FEMINISMS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY" is the Univ. of Tulsa's 10th Annual Comparative Literature Symposium, March 17-19, 1995. Abstract deadline Dec. 15. For info: Kerri Shaw or Sarah Theobald-Hall, English Dept., Univ. of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK 74104; tsm17466@vax1.utulsa.edu.

"COMPLICATING CATEGORIES: WOMEN, GENDER AND DIFFERENCE," 10th Berkshire Conf. on the History of Women, June 7-9, 1995, seeks paper proposals by Feb. 1, 1995. Query Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Afro-American Studies Dept, Harvard, 1430 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138.

LESBIAN NATURAL RESOURCES (LNR) is a new organization dedicated to developing rural lesbian community, providing grants & assistance with land purchase, establishing land trusts, tax exemption & land skills. Emphasis on making this resource available to lesbians of color. For more info, write: POB 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0742.

BUSINESSES

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.

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SUPPORT

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

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

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

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AD RATES

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#55, Open theme: **January 6, 1995** (Pub: April 1, '95).

#54, Language: **May 8, 1995** (Pub: August 1, '95).

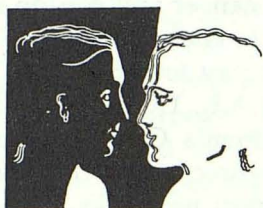
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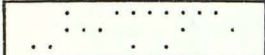
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Some Current & Back Issues

- #53 **Old Lesbians/Dykes:** guest edited by 9 old dykes, features the work of 38 womyn over 60, including Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon & Sally Miller Gearhart.
- #52 **Allies** includes 10 interviews by Jamie Lee Evans with lesbian activists.
- #51 **An open issue** where lesbians lay claim to our lives.
- #50 **Not The Ethics Issue** we had planned (read it to find out why). But there is great work on ethics & more. Guest edited by Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch.
- #49 **The Lesbian Body:** here's where flesh and theory meet — includes lesbians of color, roles, disability, body image, fat, sex, menopause and more.
- #48 **Lesbian Resistance:** investigations into the activist heart of our courage — including messages from dykes in prison.
- #47 **Lesbians of Color: Tellin' It Like It Tis'.** Special 160-page issue edited by lesbians of color, includes new work in all forms — essential reading!
- #46 **Dyke Lives.** New, international fiction and poetry.
- #45 **Lesbians and Class.** The first issue edited entirely by poor and working class dykes includes analysis, personal narrative, poetry, fiction & a graffiti wall.
- #43/44 **The 15th Anniversary Retrospective.** 368 pages, over 90 lesbians' work from the second wave. An amazing, indispensable source collection!
- #42 **Lesbian Voices.** Our first intentional all-lesbian issue 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.**
- #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 Berbir*** by Jill Drew, a book on being in Beirut in 1982.
- #21 **Separatism revisited,** Jewish survival & defiance, Black lesbian writing, photos of dykes in drag, suicide, bars, letters about anti-Semitism.

We recently found a case of slightly damaged copies of #39, **On Disability** (\$5 ea.). *Sinister Wisdom* #1-19, 27, 37 & 38 are out of print. Photocopies can be provided — \$5 for the first article, \$1 for each add. in the same order (\$17 for a whole issue). Allow one month for delivery.



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Submission Guidelines

All written work should be mailed flat (not folded), with your name and address on each page. Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems or two stories per issue. We may return longer submissions. We prefer you type (or send your work on 3 1/2" discs, ASCII or Mac, with a printout). Legible handwritten work accepted, tapes accepted from print-impaired womyn. All submissions must be on white paper. SASE MUST BE ENCLOSED. *Selection may take up to nine months.* If you want acknowledgment of receipt, enclose a separate, stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos, stats, or other duplicates of their work. Let us know if we can keep artwork on file for future use.

We publish only lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as lesbians of color, ethnic lesbians, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. See pages 10-11 for details on upcoming issues. We are open to suggestions for new themes.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We provide free subs to women in prison and mental institutions (15% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subs for lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. • Enclose an extra \$10 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). • Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, special occasions. • Consider doing a benefit or subscription drive for SW in your city.

We need lots of lesbian energy to keep printing. • We particularly need volunteer or commission grantwriters and ad sales reps. • Our equipment needs list includes (in order) an office-quality Mac-compatible laser printer, a scanner & OCR software, a CD drive, a fax or fax-modem. Thanks to each of you who participates in reading, writing for, building *Sinister Wisdom*.

Let us banish god
dispatch him (her it them) to the place
where worn out legends go to die

— *Lisa Williams*

My love for Asian people, culture and religion
is messy, intertwined with anger and shame.
... This is the new age, the new rage of
imperialism. I am choked to death by all your
love.

— *Juliana Pegues*

Each celebration is different for I am a
solitary witch, an Indian psychic, a pagan
Chicana Catholic, a lipstick lesbian. ... I was
born pagan and queer — the ethnic product
of many cultures.

— *Diane Anderson*

They say that you become a woman in
Judaism when you turn twelve. I didn't become
a woman until that day when I decided to
take on the mitzvah of carrying on, of
struggling with, of reinventing my culture.

— *S. Naomi Finkelstein*

Damn church squeezes your mind between its
white knuckles until you come out thinking
you're worse than a murderer. And why ...
because you're a beautiful Black queen.

— *Winn Gilmore*