

sinister wisdom 57



on healing

Sinister Wisdom 57 Winter/Spring 1996

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A Journal for Lesbians

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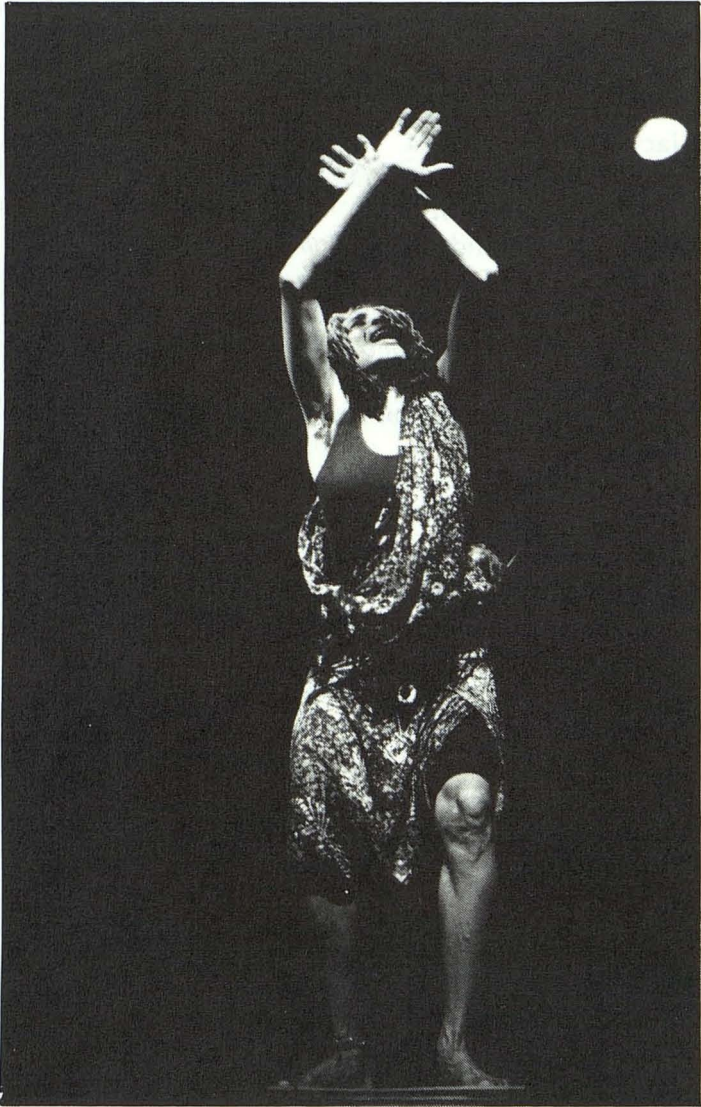
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Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural, multi-class, born-womon lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. *Sinister Wisdom* recognizes the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance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

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Auction Block from Ise' Oluwa
Cathy Cade

 Notes for a Magazine

Akiba Onađa-Sikwoia

Witnessing, creating and holding a form for the body of work contained between these pages has indeed been profound. I've been constantly reminded of my need to transmute energies within myself in order to face each day in my power.

Each of us editors experienced deep transitions in our lives. I was pushed through numerous doorways. It feels as though ages have passed since this journey began. What is true, is the growth, wisdom and compassion I've gained from this process have been priceless.

Since June of last year, when we first began working on this issue, seven important people, affecting my life — who have influenced my survival, have died.

Due to the bankruptcy of Inland, our major book distributor, Sinister Wisdom, too, almost died. This was indeed a very challenging time for myself and the board but our hard work and struggle were equally matched by the daily support, love and commitment to the survival of this publication, which came from you. Through your donations, so often accompanied by letters of such inspiration, we raised over \$10,000 in two months — the money needed to pay our back printing bills and get this issue out. Somehow, I even found the strength to write four grants, one of which has been awarded, to buy a printer. All of us have been greatly inspired by your support. Thank you.

Feminist publications and wimmin's bookstores are really struggling to survive. We urge your continued support.

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Recently, I learned of a museum which opened in honor of the KKK, somewhere in the South — while hours and hours of pontification and debate continue, as to whether or not racism "still" exists. One feature of this museum is a kind of memorabilia — pictures of dead black men, bodies charred from being burnt. Some still hanging from trees — necks limp, eyes bulging, lips swollen. It is said there were photos of black wimmin, too horrible to show — their legs stretched apart and tied, the semen of their

white killer rapist still caked on their bleeding swollen thighs. Pregnant wimmin hung — their stomachs slit so the fetus could fall out. (Incidentally, much of this murder, beating and rape occurred while our “familiar” were forced to bear witness.) This story was not told in *Roots*. Nor will you hear about the museum or any of the above on the evening news. The country will not organize because 29 black churches — our institutions — have been burnt down throughout the South in the past year.

African Americans are survivors of the most horrific ritual abuse/violence.

Equally horrific is that the violence has never stopped. It's become more sophisticated, more subtle. The word racism rolls off the lips of liberals so easily these days. Sometimes one can almost forget it is a war and not just a word.

Meanwhile, we black folk are expected to, miraculously, rise up with love in our hearts and teach (and be “sane,” whole and grateful) because laws have been passed — rhetoric has been spoken. When we don't more jails are built — for us to die in. New laws are invented. The constitution is changed. Our communities are bombed. We're called savages and thugs, our children are killed.

Besides the violence I experience as woman, as dyke I contend daily with the violence of racism.

It is said, memory is stored in the bones. My ancestors are not only African but Native American (who, of course have suffered the same deadly experience as black people) and Scottish — the slave masters. Who will take my bones?



These are unprecedented times as we approach critical mass and the year 2000. Living here in the Bay Area, knowing the Earth is going to start shaking at any time, preparing our earthquake kits, looking at the way weather is changing all over the world; watching the continued destruction of land, water, air, people and all other forms of life; listening to the whispers of the ancestors, experiencing the denial in most everyone, of the state of emergency we are in, while choosing to be conscious, is quite awesome.

Healing” is not the word at all for this issue. It should be titled “amazing.” This issue is about unequivocal survival, courage, creativity, vision, alchemy and, unfortunately, the systematic

matter-of-fact violence most girls and wimmin are born into.

The prevalence of stories of sexual violence and suffering at the hands of others touched old scars inside of me and brought my commitment to this work so close to home. Yet the courage these wimmin found to speak, to continue living and loving has given me so much strength to pull from. Inside these pages are the stories of Big Spirits: warriors and healers and lovers and mothers and dykes.

•••

This issue is dedicated to Terri L. Jewell, a black dyke, author of *Succulent Heretic*, Opal Tortuga Press. I admired her for her inspiration, words and commitment to support black and other wimmin of color to write — she committed suicide late last year.

A. Miriasiem Barnes:

It has been an honor and a privilege to sit on the editorial committee of *SW* for a second time. Sorry to say I had to take a leave of absence. The reasons for this leave were multi-leveled personal dramas. I was suddenly dealing with death and dying in a up-close and personal way. My circle of family and friends were reducing right before my eyes. We at *SW* were dealing with the issue on Healing. Yes, how appropriate. H.I.V. — AIDS laid claim to 4 relatives and 6 friends. My son was in a accident in which his best friend died. I was facing my own physical limitations as they kicked into full gear. What a ride!

I will miss my friends and family who have passed on. I know their suffering has come to an end, for this I am thankful. My son is on the road to recovery. I myself an getting stronger everyday.

As a lesbian it is often hard to weep with other lesbians when a male member of your circle is injured or lost. The love I've shared with these men does not negate the love I have for women. There is a saying which I have on my wall that I wrote for a friend years ago. Never before had I really read those words or taken them to heart as I have through this time in my life. "Things never are as they appear in just a glance, and yet when you look from the heart they are just as they should be ... Trust your Heart."

During this time in my life I began to question life itself and ask what was my meaning and purpose for living. Many of the answers I already had. Those I did not have I found in other

women's words, shared with SW.

Once again I'd like to make an appeal to all lesbian visual artist and writers — please continue to send your works to SW. I'd also like to thank the women who have submitted their works.

If you have an interest in helping SW reach its full potential, if you want to be a part of the planning and fundraising efforts, please make contact. Your support is needed.

I would also like to thank everyone who so freely gave to SW during our last mailing. Because of your support SW will continue to be available to lesbian communities.

SW can only survive with your continued love and support.

Elsa E'der:

I believe that life may not always bring us what we want or imagine we want, yet woven into the moments, hours, days and years of struggle, gems of illumination and redemption have actually, for me, been the most difficult to recognize and embrace. My participation in SW's Healing issue was one such struggle. Difficult as it was, the process chipped away at personal layers of hardness and my own pain surfaced with a relentless need for attention and healing.

On the eve of this issue's publication, I nearly suffered a breakdown, and now with the help of therapy, strive to dismantle my own demons and mean voices. Along the way, many friends have held my hand, let me tell my story ... and cry. I hope these pages will enable similar resolves to take that one more step towards wholeness, and yes ... life itself in all its myriad faces. We are not alone ...

Marianne Hewitt:

Prior to our first meeting, each participant in the editorial group had an opportunity to do a preliminary reading of submissions. Gathering together for the first time, each one of us remarked in some way upon the fact that most of the work we received was about the experience of healing from sexual violence and abuse.

This response was overwhelming, pointing as it does to the prevalence of sexual violence in the lives of women. The far reaching effects — the drain on our health and energy — are a harsh reality to live with on a daily basis. It breaks the heart.

During the months spent in preparation of this issue, I experienced more than the usual upheaval in my own life. Two friends OD'd on heroin. Another two died, after living with cancer. My family life has been deeply troubled.

Over these same months, the nation obsessed on the media spectacle of O.J. and Nicole; while Oakland said an emphatic "NO" to its teachers. Their call for healing in the lives of children and those who love and care for them haunts me. (This is a lesbian issue.)

Betrayal of children at the hands of those to whom they are entrusted engenders deep despair. The wounds are lasting.

I have struggled throughout this editorial process with my own history. More to the point, I am struggling with the ways in which it is mirrored in my present. It is in this reflection that I know I must change.

Birth is transformative. Creation moves the body, cracks open the heart, changes the shape of things. So it is with the alchemy of words. I am grateful for these poems, stories and pictures which speak not only of suffering — but of hope and endurance.

SW #57 is finally going to press! As I write these words, my shoulders drop a little. I exhale. It has been a long journey to the completion of this issue.

Akiba's call for art and writing on the subject of healing was answered by women of talent and courage. The strength and beauty of their lives will be evident as you read further. The work speaks for itself in these pages.

•••

Please note: "love's acolyte" printed on page 94 of SW issue #56, *On Language* did not belong to Elizabeth Luciano. It was, instead, written by Elsa Gidlow and published in *Sapphic Songs*, Druid Heights Books. Many thanks to the wimmin who brought this to our attention.

Upcoming Issues

#58 Open — Out in August

#59 Sexuality — What does this term mean to us as lesbians, dykes, two spirited and queer wimmin? Clearly there have been, within the past decade, new definitions of sexuality. Quite often I've been angered by the ways in which my lesbianism is defined only in terms of what someone thinks might be my sexuality. That which gets the most attention tends to be the way in which lesbian sexuality is defined. Many closeted issues of the past that affect our notions about and experiences of sexuality are now everyday topics such as sexual abuse, AIDS, prostitution, bisexuality, transsexuality, celibacy, S&M and so on.

At 53, I am very aware that my expectations as a sexual being are quite different than they were at 32 and 22; what about you? I would like to see serious discussion (not hate letters) about our beliefs and experiences and realities about sexuality. Twenty years ago stores like Good Vibrations were places where dirty old men went and dildos were pieces that only butches carried and quietly bragged about. Today that is different. There are generations of us that have grown up in this "sexual revolution" and others of us who have watched it come. How are we bridging the gaps between realities? What kind of language are we creating to speak to one another about our differences and about our experiences?

I experience great separation in our communities around these issues; we all have our camps and our own good reasons for being there, but in my opinion we are not surviving; we are becoming more and more isolated.

This is not an issue on *Erotica* although it could be.

Deadline June 1, 1996 (we've not received many submissions for this issue — there is still time, don't miss out!)

#60 Lesbian Violence — More and more writings are centered around lesbian violence. Sometimes, if you look hard enough, you can actually find a group addressing the issue of lesbian rape and battering, but most of us are in denial about this issue.

Often we don't believe a woman can rape another woman. While those victimized are left unsupported, experiencing trauma, deep pain and betrayal.

Most often there is no community to support this pain and the regaining of power and control. No one wants to get involved. Denial keeps us from holding the perpetrator accountable for her abuse. The perpetrator might be a best friend. Thus her partner, the victim of the abuse, loses her support system and is left unprotected and isolated because she has mirrored a dynamic no one wants to face. Does this sound familiar? Just like the heterosexual community.

SW would like to provide a forum to discuss this tragedy — indeed it is tragic, the ways we treat one another sometimes. I realize this is a very sensitive issue and one we might want kept in the closet. However, silence will not protect us. This issue is not intended to "out" anyone. My intention is that it be a forum whereby we can talk about and identify the violence, acknowledge it occurs while seeking ways to stop it. This issue is not only to address the obvious such as battering and rape, but likewise emotional abuse and betrayal.

Future Issues — Wimmin in prison. We are confident this issue will happen and are seeking funding for it. There are dykes in the Bay Area who are willing to support this effort. We need those of you in other areas to likewise give input and support.

Many of our subscribers are in prisons in the South. I'd like to network with any of you working with wimmin in prison. We've decided this issue will not include wimmin in mental institutions — it will be too much to do for one issue. We imagine it will take a year to pull this together, which means submissions will probably be due by June 1, 1997. We are seeking writing, poetry and visual art by dykes who have been inside and wimmin who are inside now.

April Citizen Kane

I Will Not Be Broken

I will not be broken.
Everyday I will wake up.
I will put on my face.
and I will say this.
I will find my own voice.
I will be true to myself.
I will live my own life.
in my own way.
I will not give up hope.
I will not let my heart
be cold and empty.
I will not be ruled by despair.

I will reach up.
look up. jump up.
laugh out loud.
I will be all that I can be.
I will sing my own song.
I will know my own needs.
and I will meet them.
I will not be broken.
I will not die here.
I will not give up hope.
I will carry on.
I will overcome.
I will achieve.
I will meet success head on.
and I will not be afraid of it.

I will say all the things.
that I need to say.
as soon as I need to say them.
and I will not be broken.
I will talk out loud.
laugh out loud.
be gay and loud about it.
I will not be broken.

Chrystos

My Sleeve Wet

*for Joanne 10/24/95**Love Chrystos*

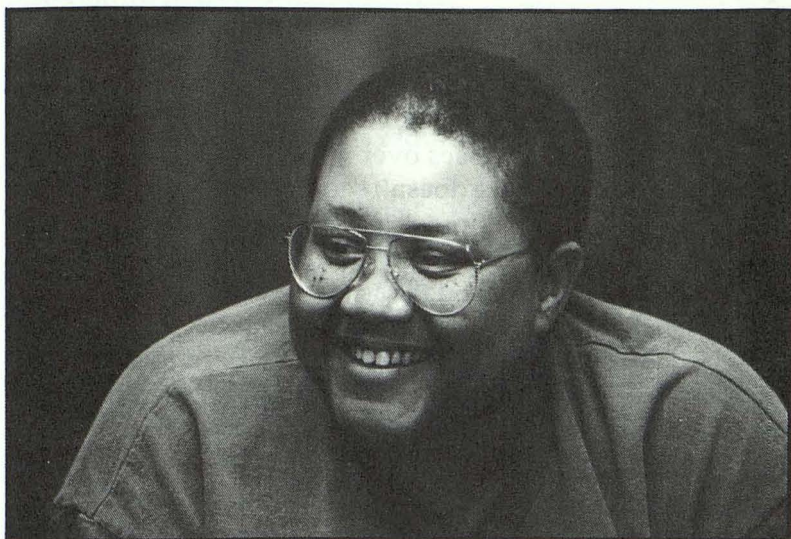
You died last night soon after I brought a salmon
home for my dinner sensing I'd need
a powerful meal to hold me
I hid beside the fire of your spirit
warming my numb hands
before your laughter, cranky control of any kitchen
you passed through
I'll miss your cooking
Querida I'll go on
as you willed me to
carrying your fierceness & good heart
into this world you loved so passionately
& I still fear
I'm painting big fish for your daughters
to help them smile
to hold them as you did
I'm sending your beloved woman
the pink roses you loved
I'll keep writing these books
you believed in until they came
This pair of eagles who circle my garden
in the rain as I weep
lift my heart to yours

Cheryl Jones

My Dearest Sweetheart

An Excerpt from Joanne's Memorial 11/11/95

Thank you for your bottomless faith.
Thank you for living out the courage of your convictions, and nurturing that potential in me.
Thank you for your absolute and unequivocal honesty and kindness, for your unconditioned love.
Thank you for all the lessons you taught me, especially the ones I didn't want to learn.
Thank you for enduring your disease long enough for me to get ready for you to go.
Thank you for being with me every moment since you died.
Thank you for inspiring such love in so many people that I cannot feel lonely.
Thank you for claiming me as your wife everywhere you went and in every relationship and interaction of importance you had.
Thank you for your passion, and the million ways you let me know I was it for you.
Thank you for our transcendant union.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.



Joanne "Jajo" Garrett: January 25, 1950 to October 24, 1995. In July 1987, Joanne received a multiple myeloma diagnosis, with a prognosis of 6 months to 2 years. From then until the time of her death, she continued to live life to the fullest. She loved fishing, Scrabble, food, friends, family, the kids in her life and her wife, not necessarily in that order.

Naomi Baran and Lily

Joan Annsfire

Insomnia

It's three a.m. on a mid-November morning. The house is quiet and still; even the neighbors' dogs seem to have drifted off to sleep.

Usually, when I am awake at this hour, I feel distraught, tormented, worried about my lack of sleep and the workday ahead of me. I have spent most of my life caught in the cycle of work and sleep and work again, trapped in the quicksand of economic necessity that closes over my life.

Tonight the dark silence doesn't seem either long or oppressive. The night is full of time, a precious commodity I have often wasted. Thoughts enter my head and I let them pass through. My body seems as light as air, without gravity holding me to earth. It's a dizzying kind of freedom.

It's hard to believe how much my life has been torn apart in the small space of a few weeks. The pile of books beside my bed reminds me that this ordeal has not been something invented by my imagination. I glance at the book titles: "Cancer as a Turning Point," "Who Dies," and "Charting the Journey: An Almanac of Practical Resources for Cancer Survivors." The books help me make sense of the world and of my situation.

Many of the people in these books underwent a total transformation of their lives after a cancer diagnosis. Because of this turn-around some had miraculous recoveries and became disease-free. Others died eloquent and articulate deaths in which they found meaning and beauty in the small details of leaving this world. It makes sense to me that death must be a transcendent and powerful experience, involving more than just pain and terror.

Not that I'm dying, necessarily. My various doctors all say different things. The latest statistics come from the surgeon who will operate on my leg. He says with a level four melanoma, there is a forty percent chance I will still be alive in five years. And

forty percent is a far better prognosis than for people who have AIDS.

It's the books that caused my lover and partner, Cheryl, to ask in a state of near-panic, "Why are you so focused on death and dying? Have you given up on the hope of staying alive?" "No, it's not that," I explained, "If it turns out that I am fine, I'll have no difficulty adjusting to the prospect of staying alive. But I need to be prepared for any eventuality, and that includes the possibility of dying."

We have both been reaching to each other in our own ways. Still, we keep floundering for lack of an adequate vocabulary to express emotions so profound and intense that sometimes just trying to speak at all seems redundant. At those times, we just cry.

The truth is that at forty years old, even though I've watched so many of our gay male friends die of AIDS, I have never believed the concept of mortality applied to me. I suppose I simply assumed I would live forever.

On some level I seem to be coping. But many times during the day, I experience panic attacks; my heart starts beating rapidly and I have trouble breathing. These episodes leave me weak and dizzy. After I regain some self-control, I usually have to run to the bathroom to have a bout of terrible diarrhea. Which is why I'm losing so much weight. Cheryl says I'm starting to look like a "cancer patient."

Western medicine's treatment for melanoma is surgery. If it's a deeper lesion, the treatment is more extensive surgery. Cutting is a last resort remedy for a type of cancer that does not respond to radiation treatment or chemotherapy. "A real all or nothing type of cancer," Cheryl says. And it's true there are only two possible outcomes of my situation. Either I will die of a metastasis or I will be fine. There isn't a lot of middle ground.

I'm not supposed to go in for surgery for another two weeks. Then they want me admitted to the hospital for at least a week. They say I will have to remain completely immobilized in bed for the entire time so the graft will "take." In spite of the circumstances, I'm trying to think of the hospital stay as a time when I can read, write and relax. I hope there won't be too

much pain; I'm worried that if I'm heavily drugged I won't be able to get much writing done.

I don't really think I'm writing the final chapter of my life. I believe if I were really wrapping things up here on earth, I would sense it at some deep level of my being. I would know everything I was here to do had already been accomplished.

At odd moments I start to cry. Sometimes just driving down a familiar street will make me intensely sad. It's as though the first step in dealing with the possibility of death is beginning to mourn myself, my friends, my neighborhood, my life. When my fear recedes, I feel as though I'm mourning another person.

The sadness comes when I think of all the things I've always wanted to do but somehow never got around to doing. I think about the way I'd given up writing for the last fifteen years. I never believed in myself enough to seriously pursue something artistic. I'm sure now if I'm given the time after this ordeal, nothing will prevent me from taking all kinds of creative risks. If I survive I know I will be fearless, unstoppable.

There is a dream that keeps haunting me on the odd nights when I actually do fall asleep. I am walking through a bombed, burned-out wasteland that looks like the aftermath of a nuclear war. I am alone, the last living creature. I roam the devastated streets calling out the names of all the people I miss, every name I can remember. In the morning I am always relieved to discover it was only a dream. But the relief only lasts up until the point when I remember what is really happening. My waking nightmare still seems so unreal.

One of the strangest side effects of being in this altered state is people look different to me now. When I see them on the street or riding on public transportation, I find myself weaving stories about their jobs, the circumstances of their lives. The weirdest part is I think I look different to them also. Strangers start conversations with me wherever I happen to be. I wonder if I'm giving off a new and different kind of energy, as if awareness of mortality creates a higher level of connectedness with other humans. Most of the time I just feel more deeply alive, more attuned to what is happening in the present moment.

Yesterday, in the sauna at the gym, I was lying on my back,

on the wooden planks, looking at the light on the ceiling — imagining how it would fade and disappear if I died suddenly in a massive earthquake or explosion. I kept trying to visualize nothingness, descent into the void, returning to the place I came from before I was born.

If I die from cancer it won't be like a gunshot or an explosion. There will be time to tie up loose ends, time to say good-bye. Still, it helps me to remember that planning and preparation aren't required for dying and often prove to be impossible. Death is an unusual voyage. You don't know where you're going or when you're leaving. You don't even have to pack. It's something that's perfectly natural and the ultimate challenge since it involves the total relinquishing of control.

Tonight, I am lying in my bed in the pre-dawn silence. Nothing has really changed. The terms of my existence remain exactly the same; there are no guarantees. The only thing I can be sure of is none of us will get out of this life alive. This morning I am free of pain and fear. The clearest sound is my own heart beating. Each breath is regular and reassuring. I take comfort in knowing, at this moment, there is nothing at all I need to do. In a few hours the sun will rise once more. Chances are, I will watch it happen.



Leah Moussaioff
November 24, 1955 to June 6, 1995

Rivka Mason and Jan Thomas

Leah's Passing

Leah Moussaioff, Rivka's 39-year old sister, died on June 6, 1995. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 1994 and was hospitalized four times due to calcium poisoning caused by the cancer breaking down her bones. During her last hospitalization, she suddenly removed the I-V and said, "I want to go home." At that point a web of community came together to help her through a period where she was less and less able to speak of her own needs. The responsibility shifted to us, her loved ones, to arrive at the decisions we thought she would have wanted.

Rivka: I received a message from Leah's son Danny that his mother was going downhill fast — she might not make it through the night. I flew to Seattle immediately. Jan followed the next day.

As soon as I got to Leah's house, I peeked into her room and saw two shaved-headed women, Leah and Val, asleep on the bed. It shook me to see my sister so vulnerable. This really **was** happening! On some level it was hard to get until I was in her presence. Talking on the phone every week, I imagined her more alive in her being, but when I saw my sister's weathered body, I knew her time with us would be short.

Jan: Leah's house was full of people and activity. The spirit of lesbian community was clearly a powerful force supporting her in this journey. Although I had previously met only two of the women there, within a few days I felt I had known them all for years.

Val looked different from the way I had remembered her, as her hair was only a quarter inch long. When Leah was considering treatment options, Val told Leah if she did chemotherapy she would shave her head in solidarity. Leah's calcium eventually went out of control, so she did a round of chemotherapy to bring the calcium level down. When Val walked in the hospital afterwards, Leah asked her if she remembered her promise. That's how Val came to shave her head. "I would have done ANYTHING to make Leah feel less alone in what she was going through — it was such a small thing."

Rivka: The focus of healing for a long time had been the special

diet which we so hoped could restore Leah's health. Now Leah could no longer eat solid foods. As I viewed the remnants of efforts to feed her, scattered around the kitchen, I was reminded again of how hard Leah had been working to stay alive.

Being Leah's medicinal cook was my entry point — the way I could contribute concretely to her healing process. I took a handful of root vegetables and made a broth, hoping to get some nutrition in her to ground and strengthen her. When the broth was done, I put it in a large ceramic bowl to cool. Cradling the bowl in my hands, I moved toward the window that looks out from the kitchen onto her garden. As I raised the bowl to bless it, I prayed to the elements — the strength of the mountains, the healing rivers, the sacred sky, and the powers of the winds — to come into this bowl, to cast healing magic into the broth, to nurture and heal her. My body shook as tears welled up — a few dripped into the bowl. I put some broth in a jar with a straw and took it to Leah. She was "sleeping" most of the time but at this point she was receiving her pills. It was a good time to let her know I was there.

I looked at her body, so thin from illness: high cheekbones stuck out of her drawn face; collarbones protruded from her shoulders; bony fingers drew up close to her head. As if to convince myself I thought, "This is my sister — this is Leah." Alongside my sadness in knowing she was on her way out, I was full of love for her and happy to be in her presence.

"Sleeping" doesn't quite describe the place Leah was in. Mostly in her own world, when someone interacted with her she would slowly open her eyes and acknowledge their presence. I said to her, "Leah, it's me, Rivka." She turned her head, looked at me and said, "Wow... Rivka... you're here..." Her eyes had an otherworldly look to them. Then with a hint of a smile, she slipped back to that other place.

Jan: Women were mingling inside and outside the house. The phone rang constantly. Word was getting out Leah had taken a fast dive downhill. In the living room, people were sweeping, clearing and rearranging things. Sue came to say they were moving Leah's bed outside to the garden. Leah, just like Rivka, never passed up any opportunity to be out in the sun. She was conscious of being lifted. Any movement seemed to cause pain, so four women placed her on a chair and carried her — one holding her head up, the others supporting her on all sides. Holding court from bed in

her garden temple, she looked like a high priestess. This was a place where, no matter how many women were around her, there was enough space to accommodate and absorb all the energy that was coming toward her from the people who loved her.

Rivka: Leah could no longer tell us what she needed, so a few of us gathered to discuss what was to be done. Keeping in mind everything we knew about Leah's intentions, we considered the options. Do we allow her body to take its natural course in letting go? Do we try again to intervene with Western medicine and keep her alive as long as possible? Would this cause pointless suffering? Leah didn't want to die. She had worked hard to stay alive. Now her body was giving way, inviting her to accept the dying process. This was simply the truth of what was happening to her.

For Leah, being alive meant being able to get around and do the basic simple things of life. She had no interest in lying in bed, unable to do anything for herself, without the realistic possibility of things turning around. With this in mind, we decided to intervene one last time with an I-V flush to try to reduce her calcium level. We hoped this would restore her faculties enough for her to be part of the decision-making process in the choices we now faced.

Sunday morning after the I-V drugs had taken effect, I was startled to find Leah sitting upright in her chair with her eyes open, asking for broth. No one could quite face asking her the questions that were hanging in the air: "What if it doesn't work and things don't turn around?" "Where do we go from here?" (Later I found out she had told Val she only wanted to go to the hospital if she broke a bone.) In her will she specifically said she didn't want to be kept alive by artificial measures. The important thing which she had stressed all along was she wanted to be pain-free and comfortable. This became our obsession—the focus of all our activities.

Ultimately, it became too much of an effort for Leah to suck liquid through a straw. How would she continue to get her pain pills? How could she receive fluids? What was the next step?

Monday morning Leah's hospice nurse Margo came by. We all felt relieved to be able to tell her what was going on and ask the hard questions. We thought that Margo would suggest an I-V as a way to get pain medication in Leah, but she helped us think it through further. There were other ways to relieve her pain. An I-V

wouldn't necessarily be the kindest thing we could do. Her inability to take in nourishment was a signal that her body had actively begun the process of shutting down. If we gave Leah an I-V, her lungs would be more likely to fill up with fluid, worsening her breathing problems and increasing her suffering. An alternative would be to make a paste of pain medication and water which could be absorbed directly through her gums, adding to the effect of the pain medication she was already receiving through her skin from patches on her chest.

This was a wrenching moment and a definitive turning point. Leah was moving toward death. We made a collective decision not to interrupt this process. We felt that drawing things out and overriding what her body was trying to do was pointless and would only add to her suffering. We all felt she would have wanted it this way.

Jan: Life continued to go on around Leah. At one point her friend Tina appeared with a plunger to help unclog the pipes. Several other women sat talking, laughing and crying in a corner. Home-cooked food appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, brought over by friends. Meanwhile people did the laundry, talked with the many friends of hers who called or came by, sat quietly by her bedside, burned sage to clear the energy field, made occasional calls to the hospice nurse, had deep talks with one another, ran errands, looked at pictures, cried, told stories about Leah, and ... waited.

Rivka: I was crying on and off throughout the day, but I kept feeling the need to let it all out in a bigger way. So I headed off to Lake Washington with Jan and my cousin Miriam, just as it began to rain. We dashed from the car and got under the protective canopy of a tree. Feeling the support of these two close women by my side, within seconds I began wailing. My grief poured out of me just as a crash of thunder filled the sky. I felt that the heavens were answering me. After this much-needed release, we headed home, as none of us wanted to be away very long.

Jan: Back at the house, the loud sounds of Leah's laborious breathing filled the room. It was hard to hear because we worried that she was suffering. Fai called Margo the nurse to tell her about the breathing change. It was a relief to hear Margo explain that because Leah was already losing awareness of her body's activities, it was probably harder for us to hear than for her to experience.

Attending a loved one who is dying can bring up primal personal issues and feelings. It has its times of illumination and its moments of panic. Everything feels tinged with depth and meaning.

Rivka: That evening the atmosphere of the house took on a new feeling, as meditative music and candlelight kept watch with us. The veils between the worlds felt thinner than usual. I placed two pictures of our mother Rena Mae by Leah's bed, lit by flickering candles, to bring her close by and help them find each other.

Later I took off my jewelry pieces and slipped them, together with a few crystals and sacred objects, under her pillow to charge them with the energy. In another room Effie did emotional-body work with various members of the support family when we were upset. She helped us re-center ourselves so we could be more present to ourselves and Leah.

Two of the women were able to see and sense energies not visible to the naked eye. "Oh, did you see that? The energy is spiraling out from her head ..." "I see energy lines converging around her heart ..." These observations added to our understanding of what was happening to Leah, beyond what we could see with our usual means of perception.

At one point we were amazed to see that Leah, although seemingly "unconscious," had clasped her hands in a prayer position over her heart. She remained that way for hours.

Jan: Around midnight Diana mentioned that in her Native tradition something of the dying person is placed outside to help the spirits find her. So I went through Leah's house and chose a scarf and a particularly joyful picture of her. Outside the window where she lay, I draped the scarf across a rose bush and placed her picture in the center.

Tuesday morning we all milled around with varying degrees of sleep and non-sleep. Three women had shared the night watch sprawled on mattresses by Leah's bed. Leah lay draped in a beautiful shawl, covered with flower petals and sacred objects. Although it was hard to believe, her heart was racing even faster than the day before. At one point we counted 160 heartbeats per minute. It was unsettling to hear her struggle for each breath.

When Margo came by to examine Leah, her blood pressure was barely detectable. We all gathered in the kitchen to discuss what to expect next. Margo told us she was glad to see Leah's

fingernails were turning blue, indicating she wasn't getting enough oxygen, because oxygen deprivation tends to produce euphoria. After hearing this we were relieved to be able to envision Leah going out peacefully.

I sensed Leah's breathing was shifting. Occasionally there were gaps, so I stayed close by. I very much hoped we could all surround Leah in love at the moment of her passing. A couple of big gaps in her breath signaled to me it was time to gather the women scattered throughout the house. First, I found Rivka in the kitchen. Leia and Effie were in the massage room. When I asked them if they wanted to come, they misunderstood me, asking, "Where are you going?"

"It's Leah who's going," I replied.

Seven of us gathered around her and took one another's hands. Her breath had become quite irregular. Val said, "We're all here with you," as she went around the circle and said each of our names. It couldn't have been more than twenty seconds later that Leah took her last breath. The sound of her breathing had filled the house for two days. But finally, all breath left her. She went in peace.

We stood silently for a time, passing the Kleenex around, each present with our own experience of what had just happened. Then Rivka and Miriam sang the Shma, a Hebrew prayer of blessing: "*Listen Israel, the Source of all our being, that Source is One ...*" Chants and rounds followed. Loose petals from flowers throughout the house were collected and scattered across her body. More sacred objects were placed on her. One woman cradled her head and others caressed her hands and face. At a certain point the circle opened up and we drifted off, each full in our own experience, as if a part of Leah's spirit had come into each of us. None of us would ever be quite the same again.

Leah had said whatever happened after she died would be up to the people who were left. She had arranged for cremation but beyond that we were on our own. This gave us tremendous freedom. Spontaneously we evolved a creative collective response to her passing. First we circled to discuss plans for her memorial activities. "Let's open the circle to include Leah," someone suggested, so we reformed ourselves by her bed. As we made decisions, someone piped up, "I half expect her to sit up in bed and say, 'I don't know if I agree with that...'" We all chuckled at the

thought. So much love filled the room. Miriam summed up the feeling of trust that had built among us over the course of the last few days: "This is a group of women I could climb Mount Everest with." **Rivka:** Fai found out we could keep Leah's body with us for 24 hours. We were surprised to learn that if we wanted, we could take her to the crematorium ourselves. This appealed to us. Then Fai asked me, "Would you like to build a box for Leah?"

One of the many things Leah and I had in common was carpentry. We had gone through carpentry school together in the early '80's, back when I was first coming out. I felt grateful to have the opportunity to be close to Leah in this way: to be in her workroom, using her tools, making use of her recycled mahogany and channeling my feelings into useful action to honor her. I asked Irenia, also a carpenter, to help make the box. As we talked, laughed, and shared stories of Leah, all that energy went into the making of the box — like the love of cooks pouring into a fine meal. It was finished in only an hour. Throughout the evening and on into the night, friends and family decorated the "body box" using a wood-burning tool and colored markers. Flower pictures which had been taped to the ceiling over her bed were placed inside the box. In a visible, tangible way, loving energy would surround her and send her off.

Meanwhile, Leah's body remained inside the house with candles burning nearby. We continued to speak to her and include her from time to time, as some of us believed that her spirit remained nearby for some time after the actual point of death.

Rivka and Jan: Preparations continued the next morning. While some women padded the box with soft, colorful cloths, others made a garden altar from the many flowers and other sacred objects in the house. A fire was lit in her outdoor firepit; people wrote messages to Leah and offered them to the fire. Her boom box, set under the body box, poured out some of her favorite tunes. Bowls of scented water were put by the altar. Finally when all was ready, we gently carried her body outside to the garden and placed her underneath the same tree where she had lain in bed just three days ago. Surrounding her in a circle, we undressed her and began to wash and anoint her. The water we used to wash her soaked into the earth. We anointed her with her own homemade salve, made from herbs grown in her garden. No one said much.

Rivka found a dress in Leah's closet which Leah had gotten in

the Old City in Jerusalem when she was a teenager. She had loved it and had worn it for years, so it seemed like the perfect thing to dress her in. After it was placed on her, we carried her to the box and set her inside. Then with several women on each side of her, the box was loaded into the flatbed of Leah's truck for her last ride.

Someone asked, "Do you think we need a lid?" (Yikes, a lid — it *might* be a little weird to drive around town with a body in a box and no lid!) Miraculously, an old wooden door found in Leah's garage fit her box as if it had been made for it. It was put on loosely so we could remove it and be with her body one last time at the funeral home.

Off we went with two women leading the way on a motorcycle with flashing lights. The women in the back of the truck held hands across the top of the box as we traveled slowly through the arboretum and alongside Lake Washington, two of Leah's favorite places. Her Chinese herb pot, in which so many batches of healing herbs had been prepared, rode with us in front — it would hold her ashes after the cremation. Midway there, Rivka turned on the car radio and punched buttons for the stations Leah had liked. We found some great soft jazz and cranked up the sound so the women in the back could hear it. On a gloriously blue-skied Seattle day, after what seemed like a longer ride than it really was, we finally reached the funeral home.

With all of us standing around Leah in the viewing room just before we left her for the last time, Debra and Rivka said Mourners' Kaddish, which praises and reaffirms one's belief in Source and Spirit in the face of loss.

The great essence will flower in our lives and expand throughout the world. May we learn to let it shine through, so we can augment its glory.

Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter

O Fortuna!

Dedicated to my lover of twenty-four years

Through weeping,
desires are
clearest known.
Without the fences
of Never,
I would not
have discovered the path.
Refusal and enmity
have laid me low;
they have not
stopped my labor,
not dimmed my love.

The Wheel of Change
turns in every life.
The play of Chance
is always at work.
Influence, prosperity,
health and honor
must pass;
as certainly,
they must return,
to us or our successors.
Shall we stare
at loss till
we miss what comes?

The wind in autumn
strips the trees
of all that has died.
Should we wall in
the trees, to save them?

Should we refreeze
the river in Spring?
Should we repair the past,
or build a present city?
Blues may be sung
in the dark of the moon;
what shall we sing
in its crescent, its half,
its fullness, its kindness?

Mariah L. Richardson

blues siren

a gut-bucket
blues-faced woman
rattled with demons
that shook my faith
to the core
snatched my heart
flung it full force
into the slop
jar the floor with
my shaking and trembling
tears drip drip dripping
in time with
a dry clock ticking
no time kept
only the aching

I wished to give
her melodies and
sweet serenades
but with no ears
she could only hear
the low bass and moans
of pains long gone
locked in a suitcase
she always dragged around
made my burden heavier
I needed more light

locked doors of
hidden rooms
drums beating out
which way?
this way?

which way?
this way?

she wouldn't take
sang songs only
of fears and fire
anger and bayou snakes
dark houses and
left alone abandoned
me left wanting
but God helps those

sing praises

who help themselves
for strength comes

sing praises

from the one
inside yourself

A. Miriasiem Barnes

It had Nothing to do with Being Butch

I wanted her inside of me
I did not know how to ask
FUCK meant something else
I wanted all of her
as she had taken me inside of her
many times before
and soared
I wanted to fly
I did not know how to ask
FUCK meant something else
I wanted to give myself completely
to be open ... opened
I wanted so much
I knew so little
I did not know how to ask
more I begged
more please
I lost it right there
she knew
no more to be said
she took me and he came out
there was nothing left for him to steal
she had taken it all
and the tears still stain my face.

Laura C. Luna

I Cry

I will no longer bleed for you,
blood of anguish, blood of rage
blood spurting, flowing, gurgling,
dripping down my arm
soothing my twisted cries
keeping the silence
to protect you,
from harm
from judgment,
from the white man,
whom you professed was my enemy.

**But it was you, father,
with whom I lived
you too, became my enemy.**

You used me,
heaped your years of fury,
disgust, revenge, anguish,
impotence between my legs
shoved it down my throat
burning, bleeding, scarring me
My warm blood turned icy cold,
coagulated,
encased in the sheath
of my mummified being.

My love has dried up
refuses to come out,
even under the gentle caress
the sweet lapping kisses
of the woman I loved.

The stirring of a memory

of the body I never knew,
 terrorized and trapped
 into aberration, silence
 dissipated into fragments.

I pick up the razor
 slice open the skin to feel
 warm blood trickling
 along the smooth brown surface
 soothing my desperation,
 quieting my thoughts,
 allowing shallow breath to tap
 deep beneath my rib cage
 and gently lull out my exhale,
 I sigh in relief.

I cry, when I see
 what I have done to myself,
 what I was trained to do.

While I sat on the edge of the bathtub,
 my blood dripping onto the floor,
 like an old leaky faucet
 my face a hateful, mangled caricature
 of you father,
 your deity singed into my mind.

I remember my mother opening the door
 she screamed, "Oh my God, what have you done?"

I cry for the twelve year old child,
 who hated her mother for not protecting her
 I cry for the two year old baby
 left with her father's parents
 who, tired of her cries for mama,
 yanked her up to the stove
 burned her hands and feet
 the child screams into silence,
 seeks refuge in the ash.

I cry

for the child's mother
whose faith in god
couldn't save us from damnation.

I cry for the little girl
with the bleeding head
tugging a strand of her matted hair.
She skips and beckons me
in her sing song voice,
"Touch my hair.
Do you think I'm pretty?"
then,
skips away into the crevices
of my mind, before I can
touch her.

I cry for the little girl
whose crazed look was born
out of the torture and lives on
in the belief that her sole purpose in life
is to be bound and sodomized.

I cry for the child who clings to her dogs and begs
"Please don't let them kill my doggies!"
I am locked in that time
so long ago.

I cry for the ten-year-old child
who took an overdose of aspirin
hoping the doctor would see her pain,
and rescue her.

I cry for the girl turning 13,
locked up, tied down, shot up
with tranquilizers and antipsychotics
raped again and again
Psychiatrists gave her father immunity from his crimes
They labeled her
psychotic-schizo-hysterical-mad.

I cry for the teenager

who refused to spread her legs
 for the father's son.
 She was beaten into submission
 under his rallying cry,
 "DYKE! BITCH!"

I cry
 for the lack of memory of an unscarred body
 for the word food, synonymous with rape
 for the loss of taste and sense of smell.

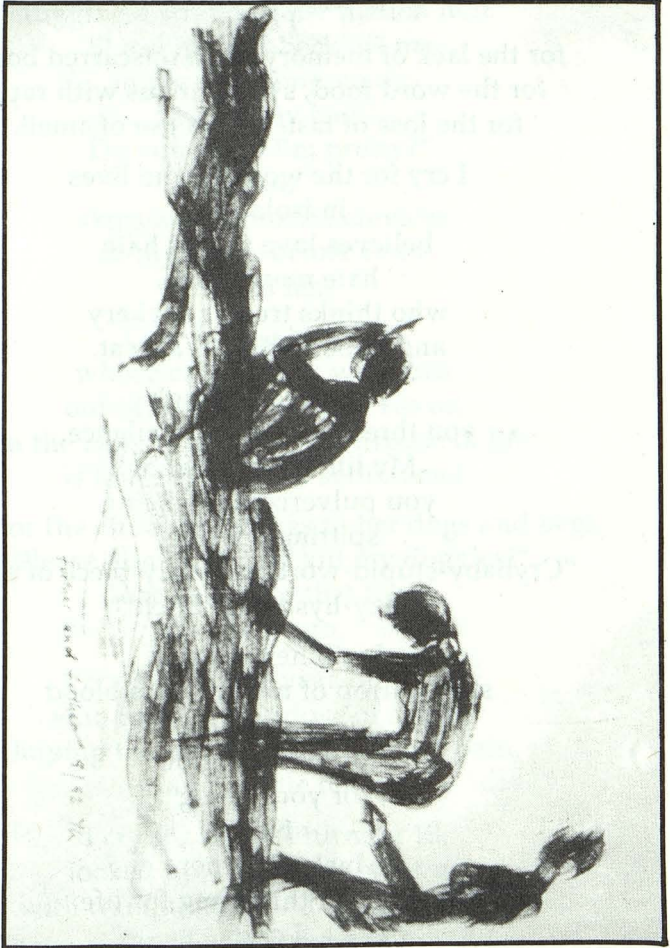
I cry for the woman who lives
 in isolation,
 believes love means hate
 hate means love,
 who thinks trust is trickery
 and to be tricked is a treat.

I cry, even though
 you threatened me into silence.
 My life in your hands,
 you pulverized my being
 spitting, hissing,
 "Crybaby-stupid-worthless-ugly-piece of shit-
 crazy-hysterical-bitch!"

I will never again
 shed a drop of my precious blood
 in your name
 for your religion
 or your being
 No.

Instead father,
 aching and throbbing for life.
 I cry!

"Further and further"
Yvonne Kettels



Christina Springer

Today

Today, I thought
about getting the ice pick
out of the closet
& hacking away
at myself.

& looking at my reflection
I took in my body
parts finding nothing
I'd particularly
want to be rid of.

& so, I turned inside
ready to do damage there

& looked at the teeth of my thoughts
the pursed mouth of my ideas
the kinky hair on my spirit
the iguana eyes of my soul
the broad sphinx nose of my world
the firm dimpled chin of my mind

& disappointed,
not really,
put the ice pick
back where it belongs.

Adrienne Y. Nelson

How To Throw Your Own Birthday Party

To blow up balloons, Fear must learn to savor oxygen and let the good life rush from her lungs at the right speed. Celebration only comes through effort. The big lips of Anger can make a dark blue balloon expand easily within her hands.

She fixes the end the way she wants it, and hands hot air to Fear. After the party, Fear must learn to release the steam. They're in a dark room, waiting for my arrival. It's my life they're celebrating. No one ever threw me any parties or took me to the right

soirees. Anger and Fear are hidden right in my living room, behind the couch on their hands and knees. Fear ducks when I enter. Anger throws the bouquet of balloons. A surprise I've learned to catch. Anger always pops into my life whenever Fear makes living seem too easy. The dark room becomes bright. Fear rises slowly. My dark skin is open to them both. Anger sees my right leg creep backwards. She shoves Fear down so my life can be free again. Anger yanks my hand and draws me into the party. She wants me to learn to make a grand entrance. If I don't, she's through with teaching. Anger slants a pen, following through with cursive on parchment paper. The dark ink begins to bleed. Anger wants me to learn to write my own invitations. She shows me the right words. Fear snatches the pen from Anger's hand, proving that she too, can re-create her life.

Fear teaches me the rhythm of healing. My life
is the record that keeps spinning through
a song no one wants to dance to. Fear takes my hand,
becomes my partner. We slowdance in the dark
until Anger cuts in. She screams the steps, "Right,
left, right, left," until, by stumbling, I learn
to take charge of my life. Now, I can get through
a dark crowd of people with my own two hands
guiding the right way with everything I've learned.

Marianne Hewitt

On Birth

with gratitude, for Jesse Hewitt

Legs and arms spread wide across the bed,
my girl child takes more room in sleeping
than two grown women.
The Night Monster visits her rarely
and seldom stays long
looking, from what I gather,
like a puppy smashed in traffic.

I sleep alone in the smallest possible space
or curled tight into my lover
leaving no room between us
for the monsters we both remember.
Sleep will never find me on my back,
lips parted, and smiling some child's rhyme.
Sleep holds danger –
is inevitable.

I remember cold hands
tearing away the bedclothes
muffling my screams
I remember surprise
as the trickster masks of father, husband, lover
fell away.

Then, finding myself staring into the face
of rapist, demon, betrayer.
I remember sounds of pain
this urge to escape the clutches of isolation
disappearing into the night.
Heard by no one
Not even Mama.

I remember later on, and older
lying beneath those who paid

to carry on the masquerade
 their sweat and semen pounding.

I remember wearing the mask
 of child, wife, whore.

My lips whispering lies of seduction
 knowing this would bring him back another time
 bearing roses or bills to fold
 and tuck inside my stocking.

I have seen myself smile sweetly
 mind busy with the calculation
 of bills still due, and tricks unturned.

Sleep will never find me on my back!
 Lips parted and smiling some child's rhyme.
 At the core of me, raw and bleeding,
 my cervix forms a fist clenched tight.

I marvel that this body could be a vehicle into life
 Two days of labor
 and resistance, learned young from Daddy
 became the source of new pain
 and deeper.

My cervix opened, but not happily
 even for the love of her.

Starting from the inside,
 she forced an opening
 in a way that I could accept
 from no other.

From the walls of my uterus
 where pain and silent screams still echo

She began.

My cervix,
 a clenched fist
 Shut up, tight
 and angry

Her first window into the world.

K. Linda Kivi

Furious

1.

I was born in a bad mood,
a bad, bad mood
I tell myself this now because
I have never known anything
but this sting of red on my tongue.

2.

Six: report card reads —
Linda is bright but has a chip
on her shoulder I cannot see it and don't
know, not then, to ask why
John gets to run, endlessly
while all Jane does is watch.

3.

Eight: back pressed against
the kitchen's louvered doors
when I should be dusting the baseboards
to the buzz of my brother's lawn mowing
serves me right for eavesdropping Mamma's
hard hands on the black receiver
her words have stayed with me — *Linda has bad*
character she tells a friend. Why
does no one recognize pissed off
when they see it and even I begin
to wonder about my furor for justice.

4.

Eleven: yes it was around then that I found
my dumb weapon, still flat chested
— and teased for it — I began to sprout a few
shameful hairs in my armpits
learned not to raise my whole arm, just
a timid hand, easily overlooked

when I wanted to speak, the rage of silence
already in my small breast.

5.

Fourteen: the year they showed The Holocaust
on tv and I understood that stupidity
and hate lived before I did, thrived richly among
the keepers of power, I had not been singled out
just lumped in and my outrage grew bigger for those
who I had never known, than it ever could
for just me. Just me.

6.

Sixteen: fury gathered my hair into a tight
bun at the nape of my neck, I never let
it down, uttered not a word about carpet burns
on my ass and the one meaning of the word
NO!

7.

Twenty-one: I stamped the streets for freedom
in South Africa, reproductive rights now, end
all aggression against Nicaragua, eat no Chilean grapes
kick him in the nuts, back away as I say
I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm didn't mean to hurt anyone
before I turn and run for my life.

8.

Twenty-three: walk to work at the battered women's
shelter, my volunteer shift on the rape crisis
line, I vow with each step that never, never again
my fists clenched, even more than before, never
to let them unfurl, but I cannot help but reach
up and prod the long blue bruises on my neck.

9.

Thirty-something: in a house I built with my own
hands pounding so many nails that I had to
reach some heart of some matter, home:
finally safe: at last
and finding myself not in a bad mood at all
but *furious*

Debby Earthdaughter

My Healing is Unrecognizable in Able-Bodied Terms

One day in the food co-op, I ran into an able-bodied woman I hadn't seen in a long time. I smiled and said, "Hi."

With disgust in her voice she said, "Oh you're wearing a mask now?"

The smile goes out of my eyes, as I feel her repulsion, and I say, "Yes, I'm really glad I found the mask, it helps me live better."

She sees the mask only as a mark, a sign of my unhealedness. For me, the mask is a gift, which helps me function better in the world.

Products in the store will still make me sick — floor cleaner, incense and scents people wear. The mask gives me more room, by filtering out some level of the toxins. It affords me another moment to find the burdock and a few more minutes to search out the elusive light bulbs. It means, if there's a back-up in the cashier's line, maybe I can stay without getting so sick I have to leave the store. The mask isn't a substitute for more environmentally accessible spaces. For me, it's a little less throwing-up, a bit less dizziness and fewer sinus infections over the course of the year. It's more evenings where I actually get to cook some of the food I bought for dinner, instead of being too exhausted to get out of bed.

Her idea of healing is really a small one. She sees healing only in able-bodied terms. To her, achieving any healing means I would be more able-bodied, less sick and less chemically sensitive. Her idea fits with my old notion of healing/growth. Back then, I would set some goal and work as hard as I could to achieve it.

Now, my idea of healing is being closer to my true self. Doing what's there for me to do — without needing to know exactly where I'm going. I'm working to clear the clutter and avoid distractions so I can be more of myself.

Freer of distress and blocks, I take better care of myself, but not with the expectations of specific results. 'Cause I've sure tried the if-I-just-eat-this-way, try-these-vitamins, do-these-exercises, then I'm gonna be more able-bodied process. Inevitably, the crash and disappointments came when I didn't achieve my expected results. My new way is different. I take better care of myself. I do whatever

I am doing, for the sake of doing it, while knowing I can't control the results. Because of this I'm living more in harmony with my community and environment.

One big block in my life used to be the desire to be invisible – an issue which, in the past, would prevent me from wearing a mask, because of the curiosity it brought.

When I was a kid invisibility was one of the strategies I employed to shield the abuse. Occasionally this worked but for the most part it was an illusion of control. With the ritual abuse I experienced, I don't believe trying to blend into the woodwork or anything, for that matter, could have stopped what these people did to me. Much of the abuse I experienced was targeted specifically at me because of the ways I was different. My difference was something I could hide.

Today, it's not worth it to hold on to the invisibility strategy because I'll always be living in reaction. Trying to prevent what people might do.

It's difficult though, wearing a mask to be less invisible, to be noticeable, to have a visible sign of disability. While the mask doesn't bring the kind of abuse I experienced as a child, it does bring a lot of hard stuff from able-bodied people. Whenever there's a sign of disability you're getting ableism. Wearing a mask for Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is something strange that people don't understand yet. Those who use a wheelchair experience ableism, but at least now everyone knows what a wheelchair is. With more of us wearing masks for things like MCS, maybe more folks will get it, but we're not there yet.

Strangers often stare and come up to me asking all kinds of questions about why I wear a mask. I wish they knew what it was. I'd just like to get through what I'm doing. Any place I'm in wearing a mask is toxic so I don't want to hang out there and give this big education. I just wanna get my stuff and get out as quickly as possible. Another thing that's strange is people's fear about why I wear the mask. I remember once when I was in a public bathroom and came out of a stall the woman next in line didn't want to go into the part of the bathroom I'd been in. I guess she was afraid I had a contagious disease. She didn't know I wear this mask to keep the stuff she wears out.

Narrow definitions of healing and what's acceptable are part of the biggest obstacle to creating accessibility. When able-bodied people don't see us as acceptable, the way we are, their attitudes

can often be like, "Go to your room and come out when you're healed." This may work when you have a cold or flu for a couple of weeks but it doesn't work when it's your entire life.

Those of us with disabilities try and do things which will bring physical healing if possible. We monitor our diets and our exercise. We change our environment if we're chemically sensitive. I think the greater healing comes from learning to care for ourselves even though we know we can't control the results. You learn over time to do the things you hope are gonna be nurturing, just for the sake of giving goodness to yourself, even if you don't know what the results will be. This teaches a lot about acceptance and living in the moment.

Before Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), my approach to life was one of plans and goals. I would experience enjoyment in the moment but even that was framed within my idea of what my life was becoming. All of this changed as I became disabled.

You plan for the things you can. Then, sometimes you suddenly change from being able-bodied to disabled because of something unforeseen like a car accident. Or, you may have a more gradual experience, as I did. I suffered with lots of allergies as a kid; developed CFIDS in my 20's; now I have MCS as well.

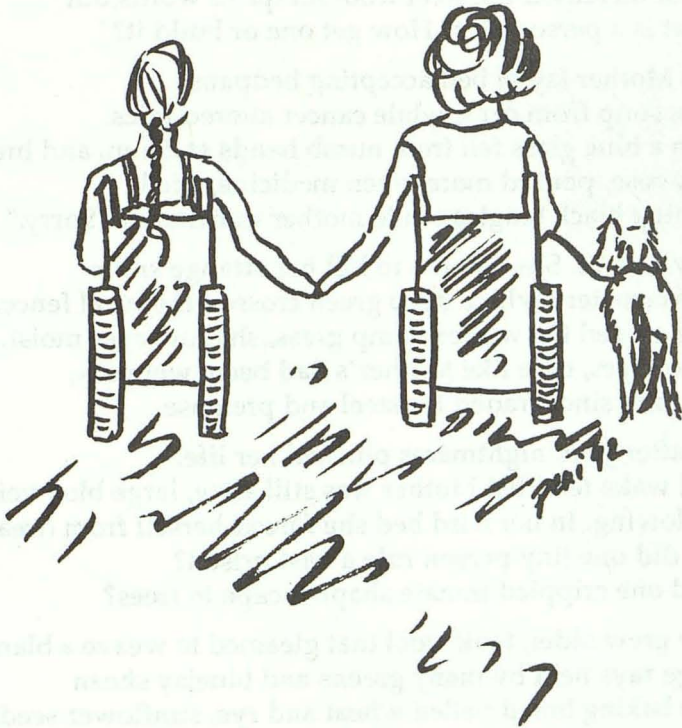
My process has been about learning how unpredictable life is, so I do what I can in the moment. Living with CFIDS, in particular, has taught me a lot about getting clear on priorities. I've always had multiple interests. Often, in the past, I could get distracted, dissipating my energy, losing focus due to my enthusiasm. Experiencing a lot of fatigue has taught me to sort out the excess — examine what's before me. If I don't have much energy I ask, "What do I really want to do in this hour, in this day?" MCS is a big wake-up call to everyone on the planet. If those of us who are more "sensitive" are getting sick then these same toxins are affecting others, even if they don't feel it yet.

I wonder when things will change? When everybody is very sick? There are some efforts towards using less toxic products. Still, it's frustrating when I hear people talk about creating environmental access as though it's this horrible burden, versus something which will benefit everyone, even if they're not chemically sensitive.

Sometimes people do get the big picture, which is really gratifying. A friend of mine, who did access work in her community, was thanked and told the work she'd done resulted in the workplace being more healthful for everyone.

I think able-bodied women still view women with disabilities as some kind of burden. If they're gonna create access it's like, "Oh, we need to do this for political reasons." Or, maybe there's some individual women they like and want to be involved in what's happening; still their attitude is like there's this tremendous work they're doing for "those" women.

I'd like to see the kind of change where able-bodied women want to create access. They understand having an accessible space so disabled women are able to participate is not charity work but something which benefits all. I'd like to see the time come when able-bodied women recognize women with disabilities bring useful knowledge, which comes out of disability consciousness that the able-bodied community can really use.



Peni Hall

helen laurence

Mother Green, Mother Blue

When Libby in ringlets built wild designs
using wooden tiles that gleamed a royal blue and green,
Mother passed by, judged "Blue and green don't go together."
The girl was 6. She argued
"What about sky and leaves? lakes and grass?"

Age 11 came with hidden love and panty stains.
Mother was nervous, proclaimed "You should
be like Caroline and Sharon — they have personalities."
Protest increased the steel wool scrape of words but
"What is a personality? How get one or build it?"

Then Mother lay in bed accepting bedpans,
baths, soup from cans, while cancer altered roles.
When a blue glass fell from numb hands at 2 a.m. and broke
Libby rose, poured more green medicine, tried
brushing black tangles while mother murmured "Sorry."

Libby was 14. She wanted to kill her strange smile
at the cemetery where deep green crossed the rural fence.
Cows grazed the winter-damp grass, shallow eyes moist,
but her eyes, blue like Mother's had been, were dry,
tears long since traded for steel and pretense.

Year after year, nightmares pinched her life.
She'd wake terrified Mother was still alive, large blue veins
still flowing. In her hard bed she forced herself from dreams.
How did one tiny person rule a vast prison?
Could one crippled inmate shape escape to trees?

Libby grew older, took wool that gleamed to weave a blanket,
orange rays held by many greens and bluejay sheen
while baking bread yelled wheat and rye, sunflower seeds
and home through the laughing cries of children.
In dreams, tidal waves were tamed to wading pools.

Now before work Libby looks in a new mirror,
winks at wrinkles, selects a bracelet of turquoise
quite green and richly wed to her lapis ring,
and recalls suddenly her sleep last night ... Mother ...
and for the first time Libby loved her in a dream.

Zelda Lockhart

The Same Jesus

At nine
I used to sit and concentrate so hard
on praying and faith
thinking
that my mother would stop getting beaten
by her husband
that my oldest sister would stop lying in the dark
listening to Frankie Beverly and MAZE albums
and crying
thinking my friend Bernetta and her sisters would get a toilet
and heat and doors
and screened windows
thinking somebody
would believe my best friend Tina
believe that her uncle had raped her
and made her pregnant
that Tina would become pretty again
and stop prostituting
that all the dirty kids
who smelled like syrup
when the school's free breakfast was pancakes
would smell like soap and department stores
that the empty potato chip bags
would stop blowing
that the cars would stop looking old
sounding loud and graying up the air
on my side of St. Louis
that everything that had always been me
and around me

would be clean
and changed
and whole
like God promised
if I believed in his Son.

Now I let my mind run wild
without boundaries
without faith
in phantom white men with long hair,
blue eyes and ever lasting love.

Reverend Reynolds used to preach
a sermon called "The Same Jesus."
When I was baptized it fired up my hypocrite Aunt Lucy
who said my ten year old head
was nappy and bald in back,
who called me four eyed and named me "eyes."

Reverend Reynolds said it was the same Jesus
who walked upon the waters
who made Aunt Ruby shout,
and who changed one loaf to many loaves of bread.

And last night Ruby called because her back is bad
and her cancer is eating her stomach
and she is the same Ruby
and I told her to leave me alone
because I learned how to duck
and don't call my house looking for redemption
and she said I was the same selfish disrespectful child.

And when the pastor dunked
me he did three times,
one in the name of the father,
one in the name of the son,
and one for the holy ghost
and that night my ten year old baptized body was clean
until my father came and raped it.

And two weeks before my wedding

(to a man just like my father)
Reverend Reynolds died
and I cried
because I thought when he married me
I would be clean again.
And that day I found out
I was pregnant.

And the day before the wedding
I called my mother,
started to tell her
that I must say "no!"
to wedding my father's prodigy
but she cut me off
with a sharp "SHUT UP!"
which protected her image of son in law
but slashed my throat
and made me cover my crotch when I knew
she would not protect it.
That night I changed
my underwear three times
because I felt dirty
and ten.

I used to steal food stamps when I was nine
and stop at Johnson's Grocery
buy Fritos and Now & Laters
then I'd throw away the due bill
not caring how much change I was supposed to get.
And my mother knew I stole from her
but never said a word until
I stole from big brother
then she whipped me
with a switch and I was glad
to be visible enough to be hit.

And at big brother's funeral Reverend Jefferson preached
that "The Same Jesus"
that raised Lazarus' lesioned body from the dead

would carry my hero brother on to glory.
And my mother fell down crying
under the power of these words
and all her weight
(that could have saved big brother)
fell to the floor,
and I never realized how heavy she was
until I tried to lift her
from the coffin to the pew.



Jackie Hill

Morgan Ahern

I Rage

I was raised in an environment of manipulation and indifference. I do not heal from this. I rage.

I was born Romani, a Gypsy, to an inner city Vitsa* where survival was the greatest goal, love and solidarity the strongest tools.

The giorgios** attacked and broke my family. They took the children and placed us in the institutions, and later the homes, of Catholics. Missionary spirit in the heart of colonized New York. Saved from my heathen family. Every means was tried to exorcise the Gypsy demon thief from my soul. Victim of the vilest behavior modification techniques, I was right handed by 9, emptied of tears by 11, cast aside by 12 and electroshocked by 17. I do not heal from this. I rage.

I talk with my grandmother, Jenerose, daily. She would be 100 years old this year had she not died of a broken spirit. She was a Drabarni: a story teller, a healer. It calms me to speak with her. Much of her image I construct from childhood memories. I have no picture of her though I once did. Gypsies are not fond of photographs or cameras or anything which freezes our spirit. Jenerose and her entire Vitsa were photographed, fingerprinted, measured and registered in 1921 Germany. (The perpetual third reich). She saved her children by escaping to the United States, only to have her children's children stolen from her. Gypsies are called child thieves, yet it is always our children who are stolen. For our own good, of course.

I have no pictures of my grandmother, though I once did; a photo mounted on the back of a lady's bejeweled pocket mirror. A 40 year old woman, solemn and strong, stared boldly at the photographer, her thick, long hair held back with a bandanna; three bracelets on each wrists; hands on her hips. A daughter of those burned as witches, their fires shone from her eyes. For years I hid that photograph fearing it would be destroyed for being a

bad influence on me; a lure from a life to be forgotten — language, rituals and all. I had that picture of Jenerose once, but I hocked it when I was strung out, penniless and pregnant. I do not heal from this. I rage.

I want to believe in healing. I wear red for protection and eat garlic and pepper against pollution. But when the external forces are murderous, health becomes a mirage.

Our health is determined by the political forces and economic realities which shape our lives. Our capacity to maintain health — emotional and physical — is determined by our race, gender and class status. Access to all society's resources is based on privilege.

Poverty is the greatest cause of stress, high blood pressure, infant mortality, decaying teeth, wounded spirits Schizophrenia is a label used primarily against the poor. We do not heal from this. We rage.

We are attacked, murdered or locked up in prisons and mental hospitals to kill our rage and silence our truth. It is our rage which keeps us fighting. To hear the truth, do not talk to therapists or doctors or politicians. Speak with the psychiatrized, the imprisoned, the impoverished and the disenfranchised.

To begin to heal, we must first become enraged.

*Vitsa: family

**giorgios: non Gypsies

A. Miriasiem Barnes

Somehow I Found My Voice

I am 1 of 21
from 1 man
a black son of a slave

day one
they
laid me
among you
we brown skinned new born babies
all to one side of the nursery

2-3-4-5
elders spoke-speak
"don't fight among yourselves,
you're all you got, all you'll ever have,"

I did not fight then
we did not fight then
we shared
food, clothing, shelter, beating, laughter
tears
we even shared stories
big ones
possibly secrets
then and now

you silence me
as I yell for you
freedom
our freedom
my freedom

go away
we don't want you here
where must I go

how can I stand
 my legs were built on tradition
 now
 broken by tradition
 how must I stand

did my love
 my choice
 to love you as an equal
 to wipe away your tears
 stand by you
 when you feared for your very life.

He stood over you masturbating
 you were only ten I was twelve
 I wiped his semen from your face
 with my blood stained gown,
 stained from his visit to me
 just moments before

that night I held you
 knew I could never hurt
 anyone
 the way he hurt you
 the way he hurt me.

Today you tell me he is
 misunderstood
 he is the son of a slave
 he is a black man in a white world
 unemployed
 he had a right
 to vent his anger
 his rage on little children

we must march in white dresses
 veiled faces
 protect his manliness
 you tell me I've stolen
 his jobs, his women, his land

he is a man
I am a woman
I should step back
back in time
to chains and varicose veins
over shitty diaper filled buckets.

What happened?
we slept two or more
in one bed
ate from the same table
read the same books
played the same games
cornrowed each others hair
we ran crying, kicking and pleading
at the sight of the straightening comb.

Now you my sister
make it very clear
I am alone
I was not alone on the civil rights marches with Martin
hearing the words of Malcolm
I was not alone in Soweto
I was not alone in the cry for the release of
Nelson Mandela

Yet I, the black lesbian, stands
alone on each page waiting silently
to be given a voice in black women's literature.
Is my hair not nappy enough
my skin no longer dark enough...
am I not a black woman?



Girlfriends Forever
Adalia Selket

Jeannie Witkin

Decided

Tall golden bridge blue sky bright light
You stride along legs strong hands free
Beams up road across water below
Options possibilities decisions

Upward upward those beams arch
With strength touch the sky
You look away reject that choice
Did you decide last year?

Onward onward the road goes ever
On and on more of the same
Too hard too much no more you cry
Did you decide last week?

Downward downward sheer drop beckons
Water calls tempts with simplicity
You look look twice entranced
Did you decide last minute?

No upward striving
No onward pacing
Down you leap silent and swift
Your last decision

In memory of Dawn Williamson

Annalee Wade

Butch medicine

There had always been that part of me I hid from her, the part that wanted to be held.

One night after much mescal I hit her face. Stung flesh shocked us both. Like a frightened rabbit I ran into the desert and buried my solid silver belt buckle, a favored possession, deep in the sand, then smoothed over the surface so I could never find it again. As I walked back I wondered if she would leave the way I left after my husband hit me.

We ate silence for two days until my son came home from the army. Medical discharge. But I knew he was a drunk. "That poison is killing you," I said. Was it a little rabbit I saw skitter across his gray eyes?

"I need a healing ceremony, mama. Smoke, prayers, dreams. Leaving food on our ancestors' graves. Offering corn meal to the slain deer before we eat them. Our old ways, our power. Do you remember?" I did not. We were half breeds. Pale Indians. I couldn't even make proper Indian tea. I felt useless. I wanted to drink. She grabbed my arm. Her fingernails made tiny crescent moons in my skin. "No," she said, "we must help our son."

That night a new ceremony began with her on top. For the first time she possessed my body and controlled our movements. Her long hair enveloped me like wings of a black bird. Up, up we flew and I knew she wouldn't let go of me until I was ready to fall weak and tired. I recalled an ancient Yaqui heaven of flowers and dancing skeletons and wondered if this is how it felt to die. I gasped with relief. In that moment we both knew

Ardena Shankar

The Waning Moon

The first time I heard a woman speak of menopause was in the early 60's, I was twenty-two and a young mother. Thoughts of menopause had never entered my mind. During that time I sang in the women's choir at the church I attended. The choir rehearsals were special for me because it was the one day of the week I was free of child care responsibilities. I had two hours of women only time.

There were approximately seventy-five women in the choir. The women ranged in age from their early twenties, up to our eldest member, Mother Breckenridge; whose actual age was beyond my imagination. She was obviously long past childbearing years.

The women's choir was one of ten singing groups in this very large church, considered to be one of the finest and most popular. Learning music was the main focus; visiting among members occurred before or after our work was done. Choir rehearsal was not a social event.

When Sister Willa Mae suddenly squealed, and squirmed, and cried out "Lord have mercy! Lord have mercy! Hot flashes! Hot flashes!" We were all startled. Everything stopped. Our choir director lost control of the rehearsal. We all turned to face the back row where Sister Willa Mae sat. All of our attention was focused on her, who in discomfort bounced her full bottom on the polished oak pew. We were embarrassed by her passionate, almost sensual outburst.

Sister Willa Mae tugged at the collar of her floral print dress and wiped her glistening face with a white, lace bordered, handkerchief. She tried to cool herself with quick, snappy movements of one of the paper-board fans donated to the church by one of the local funeral parlors. She continued to cry out, "Lord have mercy! Lord have mercy! Hot flashes!"

Many of the sisters in the choir were younger than Sister Willa Mae and simply did not understand. Those who were old enough to understand revealed nothing. They lowered their eyes, hid their mouths behind their hands, and laughed quietly. They offered no support.

Mother Breckenridge seemed to be both embarrassed and annoyed. She turned to Sister Willa Mae and gave her a look as if to scold her, as if to say "Be quiet and make the best of it! Stop drawing attention to yourself."

I sat beside Sister Willa Mae in the row with the other alto singers, and like the rest of the women I turned to look at her. Her face was a rich, brown, copper color, with gleaming dark eyes. She had crisp white curls among the darker strands of hair that framed her face. Her large breasts moved up and down as she breathed in and out. The heat she was experiencing seemed to radiate from her. She must have been beautiful when she was younger because she was beautiful still.

Sister Willa Mae was very much alone as she sat among us in her own "private summer." I was no help to her. I did not understand.

After a few minutes the choir director regained her control of the group and called for the women to return their attention to the business of gospel music. There was no discussion of the disturbance. I heard only a few quietly spoken comments after rehearsal about something called the Change of Life. It was said that when some women reached middle age they became emotionally unstable and their behavior became unpredictable. It was not discussed further. Neither my mother nor my aunt, the elder women of my family and members of the choir, said a word about it.

There was very little information available to the women who preceded me in age and life experience. It was deemed, by them, to be inappropriate to discuss such things, even with other women.

Nearly twenty-five years later, when I reached middle-age and was experiencing undeniable indications that I was menopausal, I asked women who were post-menopausal to share their experiences with me. I was told by more than one of my elders, including my mother, "I don't remember." As far as they were concerned, menopause remained mysterious.

Even though there is more information available now than in Sister Willa Mae's time, I was just as unprepared for the journey. The transition from childbearing years to Cronage was rarely discussed among my peers. Fearing menopause means the end of the vitality of our lives, that we will become undesirable and invisible, in a culture which reveres youthful beauty. Some women I spoke with seemed to be in total denial about menopause. They

hoped it would go away if they just ignored it. A few women I talked with would admit to being of the age to be experiencing physical or emotional indicators associated with menopause. Some were embarrassed when I introduced the subject into the conversation and were unwilling to discuss it at all. They seemed to think menopause is shameful. "I'm not that old!" they told me. To some, menopause is basically a myth and women who speak of menopausal symptoms are simply weak. These people have no interest or compassion for the subject because they know little or nothing about it.

Menopause is the process of the reduction, to the eventual cessation of female hormone production. This is an important life transition, the most significant indicator since the beginning of a woman's menstrual cycle, that her body is changing. Another sacred passage.

According to what I was able to discover from the few books available at the local library, symptoms of menopause can begin as early as the mid-to-late thirties for some women, and continue for years after her last period. On the average it begins between the ages of forty-two and fifty-two. 10 to 15 percent of women will experience little or no discomfort during this time. Another 10 to 15 percent will have a definite sensitivity to this intensive hormonal shift and experience a severe response to the change of levels of estrogen and progesterone in their bodies. The remaining 60 to 70 percent will fit somewhere between the two extremes. Symptoms of menopause may include bloating, aching joints, fatigue, headache, insomnia, flatulence, indigestion, incontinence, night sweats, hot flashes, anxiety or panic attacks, wiry chin whiskers and other discomforts which include hormonally induced depression.

Various books on the subject indicate that a woman's experience with menopause can be influenced by genetics, smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, lack of or little physical activity and a woman's dietary habits. Most women will encounter menopause while functioning in a fast-paced, unsympathetic world. Chances are she won't have a clue, at the beginning of this process, what it is exactly she's going through.

In my late thirties to early forties I began to have extremely difficult menstrual cycles. Fatigue, lower back pain and painful hemorrhoidal swelling, accompanied my usual menstrual

irritability and malaise. At that time information was beginning to appear in the mainstream medium, TV, and women's magazines about a condition called pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Some of the descriptions of PMS symptoms were similar to what I was experiencing. This was the first time that I received any information about what had become my personal struggle. It was a relief to know there was a label for what I was experiencing. A friend and I discovered that we shared similar symptoms. My friend shared material she had on the subject of vitamin-mineral supplements and an herbal tincture called Vitex or Chasteberry. All of these things were very helpful.

By my late forties what I had come to believe was PMS accelerated. I began to experience debilitating fatigue around the time of my cycle. Painful hemorrhoidal swelling increased and lower back pain became more intense. I became weepy and bloated. Unpredictable mood swings meant that my nerves were constantly on edge. I was beginning to find it hard to concentrate. Sometimes I felt confused and had trouble making simple decisions. During the two weeks before my period was due, I was often in a state of extreme low-energy and had to spend most of a day in bed. This was a significant change and I began to lose trust in what I could expect of my body. I was uncertain as to what was going on. Going to the doctor's office didn't help. They ran many tests and found nothing. Iron supplements and antidepressants were prescribed.

By the time I reached the age of fifty, night sweats, hot flashes, aching joints, and heavy periods which required the changing of super Tampax Plus every hour as well as the additional use of Maxi-Pads, had become the norm. After doing a bit of research on my own it was finally clear to me that I was in menopause not PMS. I was in the 10 to 15 percent group who had a severe response to the change in estrogen levels. Neither denial nor thinking positive thoughts would offset this inevitable passage. Eventually, I couldn't be sure from one month to the next if I would be having a period or not. And if I did, whether I would bleed for two days, two weeks or even a month.

I began waking up at night for frequent trips to the bathroom and finding myself unable to get back to sleep again. Insomnia made me tired and irritable during the day. I was not able to work the way I wanted and needed to. I began losing momentum in my career and my self-image began to suffer. I didn't lose confidence

in my basic intelligence or talents but I started worrying about my ability to accomplish goals. I was often too tired to keep appointments. I felt my physical warranty was up and I was falling apart.

Menopause is not considered a disease it is a natural process. However its various symptoms can suggest a number of conditions. The more these symptoms persisted the more concerned I became about my health in general. I often ended up in the doctor's office, distressed and in tears. Heart palpitations sent me to a cardiologist (my father died of a heart attack at age fifty one). I was tested for diabetes because of frequent urination (members of my family suffered from diabetes). Tests were done which found me in general good health. This was not only frustrating and confusing but expensive.

A woman having a difficult menopausal passage can be dismissed by some as neurotic or a hypochondriac. But if you are the woman experiencing these symptoms nothing could be more real. I was experiencing an adverse response to the change of estrogen levels which was unrelenting. It was interfering with my ability to perform the ongoing requirements of my work. I could not afford to be at the mercy of fluctuating hormone levels. If I was not sick then I wanted to feel healthy. Something had to get better. Prolonged stress left me feeling desperate. I was aware that some women tried hormonal replacement therapy under such circumstances.

Hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) is a program of estrogen and progesterone replacement. HRT was created originally for the post-menopausal woman. However, some women have found that estrogen supplementation provides relief from stressful menopausal symptoms. Estrogen has also been credited with offsetting heart disease and osteoporosis. However, HRT is not without controversy. I had been personally reluctant to participate in HRT. As far as I could find out, very little research has been done on HRT. One public health expert considered HRT to be the largest, uncontrolled clinical trial in the history of medicine. Uterine and breast cancer has been linked to HRT. That was troublesome for me. Women in my family had suffered from breast cancer. There did not seem to be enough information to recommend it as safe. Yet, some women have used it and consider it to be safe.

What is true? I wanted an update on the subject. What exactly are the risks I might face? What are the side effects? What are the benefits? What's best for me? I decided to discuss it with my

doctor. I made a doctor's appointment, prepared my list of questions and hoped to receive information to help get through this difficult passage. I remember feeling particularly stressed that day as I sat in the doctor's office. I felt exhausted in body, mind and spirit. I wanted to get on with my life. I didn't know what to believe about HRT. It felt like a momentous occasion. I was facing something I had feared.

My doctor was a young, intelligent, friendly woman, with a charming 'Doctor to Patient' manner. But I was unable to engage her in a detailed discussion. She literally waved my concerns aside without giving me the information I felt I needed, and recommended I start with a low dose of estrogen. I didn't know what a low dose was for me. I don't know how she was able to determine that. However, she spoke with all the authority the medical profession and her white coat gave her and she filled my hands with samples of Premarine. In complete desperation, with not a drop of fight left in me, I succumbed and took the samples. I took the estrogen for ten days as she prescribed. On the eleventh day I began the Progesterone. On the fourteenth day I awakened in great pain from swollen hemorrhoidal tissue. I had to cancel an important income producing job and go to the hospital emergency room.

The emergency physician, after consulting with a specialist and after obtaining my permission, performed emergency surgery. Surgery was a bad idea. Over the next three days I returned to the hospital three times seeking relief from extreme pain. During the course of two weeks I consulted, or had consultations on my behalf, with eight different medical professionals (including a surgeon), as well as alternative practitioners. I was desperately seeking a solution to what had become a debilitating situation. In order to get relief I went from Demerol, to artificial Morphine, to Vicodan, and other class three prescription pain relievers. Over the counter suppositories and other remedies for hemorrhoids were useless. I was exhausted! It was months before I started recovering.

Because of this experience I cannot recommend HRT therapy. I do suggest that any woman who is interested in HRT do research on the subject herself. I also recommend seeking information about other approaches such as herbal alternatives, homeopathy, Chinese herbs and acupuncture. These may offer some women

help during this important time.

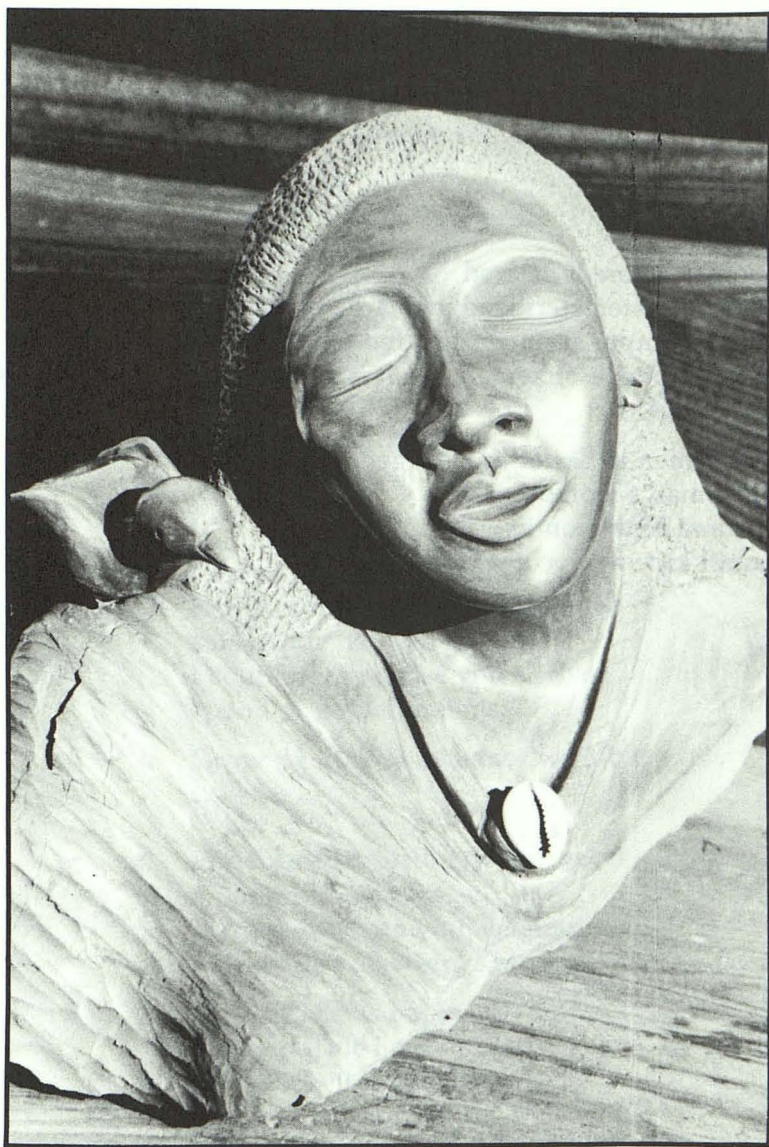
Menopause is part of the cycle of life — it is inevitable. Just as each woman has her own variation of the menstrual cycle, each woman will have her own variation of the menopause experience. There is no single type of menopause and no single way to deal with it. As frustrating as it has been for me, I believe that it is better to speak about it with other women than to suffer in silence.

During my distress an acupuncturist/herbalist healer, in my community, offered to share her knowledge and wisdom with me. I had a consultation with her and she gave me the gift of her concern and time. There was no rush. In the quiet of her office, with a cup of savory herb tea, she allowed me to shed tears of frustration and despair. It was not her intention to heal me but rather to lead me to empowerment through this journey. She told me of herbs and remedies of the earth which benefit women during their menopausal journey. She gave me understanding and encouragement, and a book by Susun Weed, *Wise Woman Ways: Menopausal Years*. Her loving generosity and this wonderful book have made all the difference. Susun's book is at the top of my list for any mid-life woman seeking practical information to benefit body, mind and spirit. She introduces herbal allies, discusses PMS, fatigue, sleep disturbances, depression, night sweats and hot flashes.

Sharing my concerns and commiserating, as well as sharing information, support and compassion with other women, has been a great help to me. It is time to bring information and discussion about menopause out into the open and acknowledge it for the important phase of a woman's life that it is.

Women, as well as their partners and friends who love them, can benefit from a basic understanding of what they are experiencing. Mid-life can be the time for a woman to redefine herself, reestablish her sense of self worth, and to determine for herself the quality of this next part of her life. This includes how she will handle menopause.

As I approach the end of my menopausal journey, I look forward to the promise of post menopausal zest. I am certain that as I am older now I am also wiser. I am more confident of my intelligence and talent than ever. There is still so much I want to accomplish. I anticipate a highly creative, as well as productive, post menopausal life.



Adalia Selket

Tzivia Gover

A Family Recipe

The nineties way

Ingredients:

1 Woman, more if desired

1 Turkey baster, sterilized in a large pot of boiling water;
or an empty syringe prepared the same way.

2-5 tablespoons of semen; fresh is preferred. Frozen may be substituted.

Place semen in baster or syringe.

Fill woman's womb-bowl.

Let stand nine months,
or until kicking to come out.

Tzivia Gover

First Born

I.
The strangest story I know
is that five years ago
today my daughter
was born, a virgin birth
on Virgin Mary's birthday.

And so she arrived,
small, pink, and wide-
eyed with wisdom.

II.

I dared to be your mother
too. To cut the cord that held you
safe inside, knowing
I could not promise you a silver
spoon or golden moons.

Growing up was a chance we took.

III.

For your first birthday I wrote
a poem about stars
staring down on you, keeping you
safe while you sleep. This year

I tried to be as happy
as the purple hat I bought
you. Packed it up, knowing
you will never wear it.

IV.

Five is still too young to be told
Some wishes never come true.

V.

Close your eyes and make a wish
for me. Promise there is someone
else who will catch the lucky
eyelash we blew from your fingertip —
Someone who is keeping the promises
we tossed into the fountain on
the backs of pennies — Someone
who breathes in the candles
when we blow them out.

Colleen Kelley

The Women Who Live in Me

There are women screaming in straitjackets
beneath my left breast;
A lonely woman sits in a shack
under my tongue.
There are stake burned women
lining the roof of my mouth
(I can never get the taste
of burned flesh and wood rinsed out).
Nervous, Lesbian couples hide in my hair follicles.
If asked, they would still say
they're cousins, companions or just good friends —
never lovers, beloved and adored by each other.
Rows of women
are shackled to my rib cage
lynched and hanging in my inner ears
And hundreds of other women
are crowded behind my knees, in my uterus,
along my thighs, down my spine, pressed against my heart.
They were stabbed, shot, ripped apart, hung, burned,
skinned alive, beaten to death.
They were butchered by male doctors who loved to experiment,
cast aside when husbands wanted firmer flesh,
locked up and told they were crazy.
All of these women were trivialized and objectified,
but now they live in the body of a woman
they, by their sufferings, have radicalized.
I will live my life honoring them.
Their pain will always keep me electric with righteous anger;
their agonies will always keep me working
to avenge, one by one, the women who live in me.

Julia Youngblood

This work is from my 1991 installation for the San Francisco's Mission Cultural Center's Dia de Los Muertos, Rooms of the Dead II. Each artist had a room in which to create an atmosphere for the dead, for ancestors, for grief and healing. I photographed forty people and their grief spot, which is thought to be in the center of the chest, between the breasts. When asked to be photographed everyone responded immediately with what they needed to say/feel/experience. Our time together was intimate and as real as it gets. I was honored to be a part of this healing and wanted to create a room that would lovingly hold all that these individuals had entrusted in me by allowing me to participate in their ritualization of the grief spot.

The ceiling was a red string web from which metal hearts hung from yellow and red ribbons. In the corners of the room were piles of sand with feathers coming out of the sand. The feathers and sand in each corner were a different color, red, yellow black and white to represent the directions. The floor was a blanket of yellow corn kernels and dried rose petals of pink, red, burgundy and black. In the center of the room was a grouping of old glass milk bottles filled to the top.

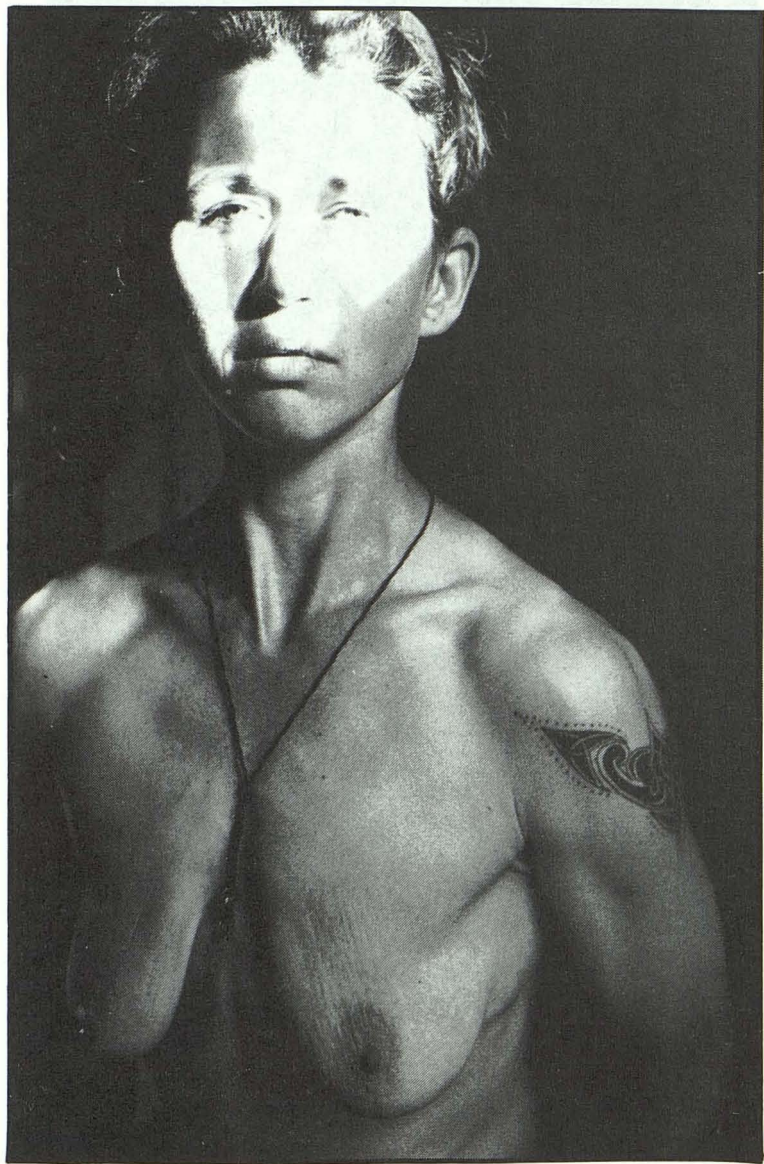
People spent a lot of time in the Grief Spot Room. Two guest books were filled with their feelings and stories:

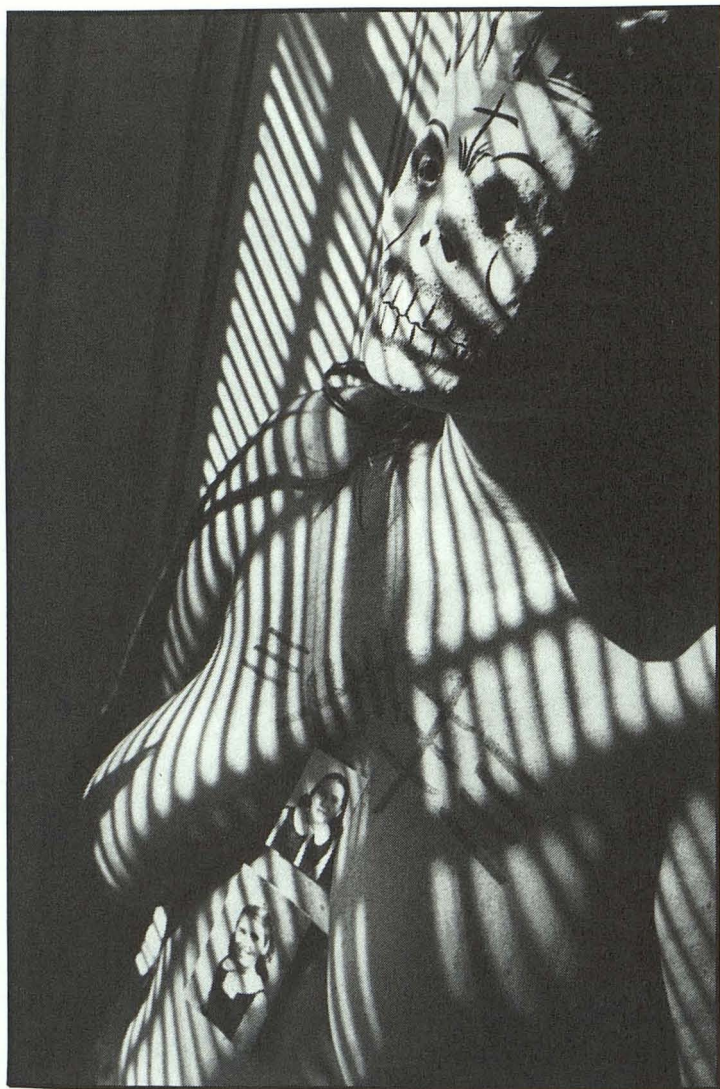
"Never knew what this spot was called. Mine is deep. Deep enough to drink from, and people have."

"You (all) have reminded me to notice my grief spot. Some people entering this room expressed disgust. I knew they were inwardly enthralled and excited by the openness of this room. I wish they had said 'HOW BEAUTIFUL,' because that is what I felt! Thank you for teaching me something like this. I want to hear more, and possibly share my grief and passions with all of you. I am 17 and just learning how to grow."

"Between your breasts is a very deep well for me to lay and curl up peacefully. And when I put my ear there I hear an old Indian drum beat, soft yet strong and steady and I thank god ... for everything, for life, for releasing tears, for friendship! for a moment, for children."

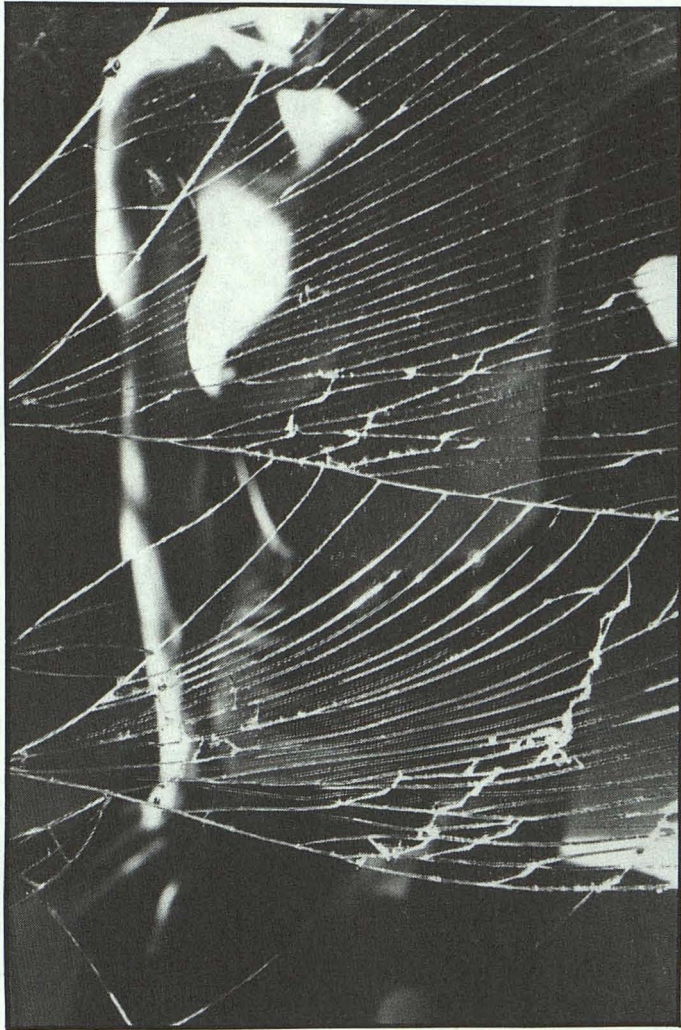
"Julia Youngblood, this, this grief is filling me, pouring over me, falling out of me, holding and crushing my body, my eyes, my perception, my ability to exist... You are giving THIS. I am 17 and am surprised to have made it this many years. Soon I'll be 18 and only terror grows out of that inevitable growth. You are beauty. You have given me some TRUTH."





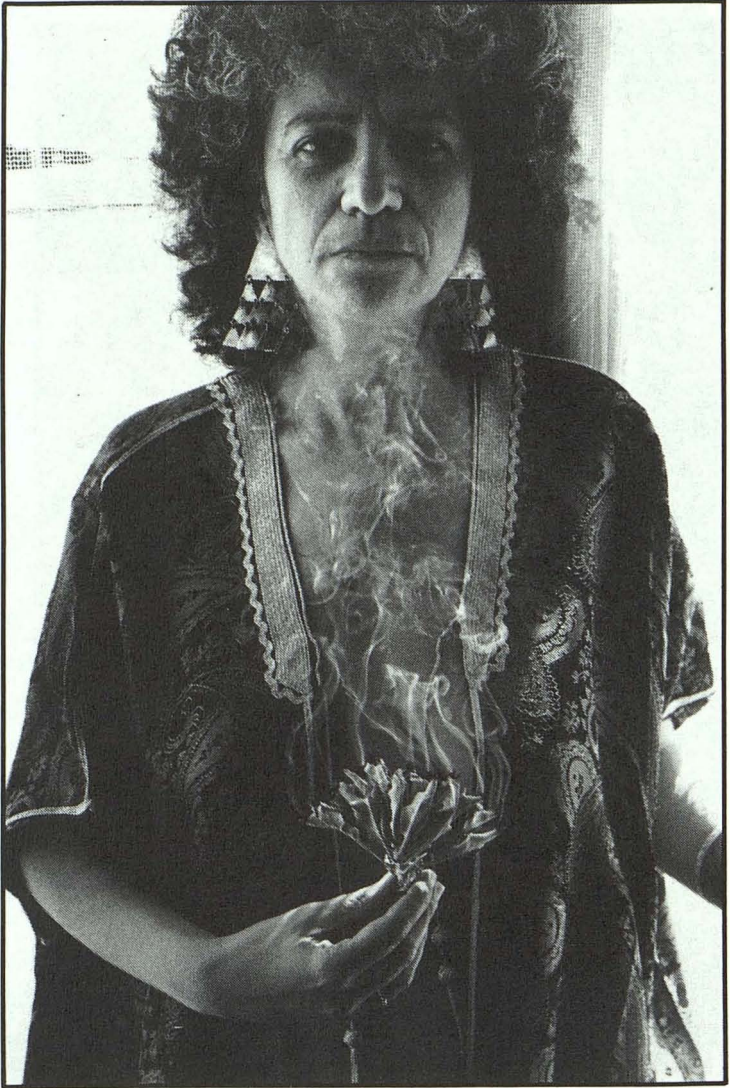
I miss my mommy even though I never met her... The day I made physical contact with my birth family was the first time I really felt like I had a body.

— Barbara



*My body was broken by a disease/the connections broken/cracked,
severed/My body didn't work/does not always work/never works
like it used to/and the GRIEF in this is/sometimes — used to be/
ALWAYS — UNBEARABLE.*

— Julia Youngblood



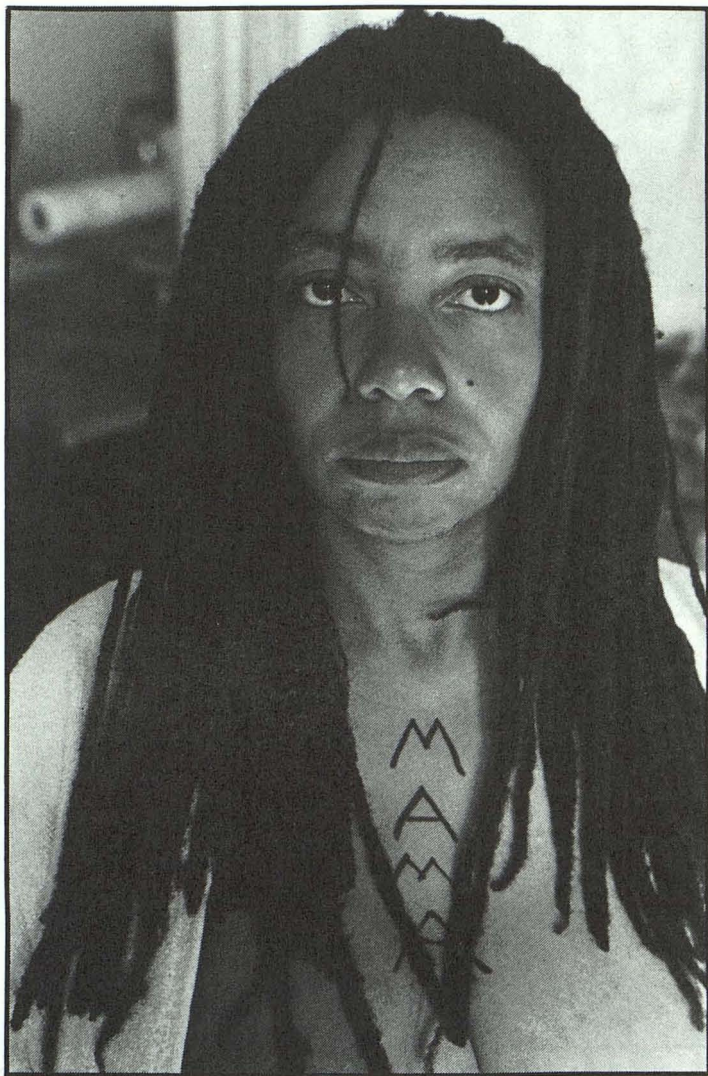
Cleansing is going on here ... of grief from loss of intimacy ... it comes with acceptance of limits and decisions to acknowledge my own needs and desires.

— LA Hyder



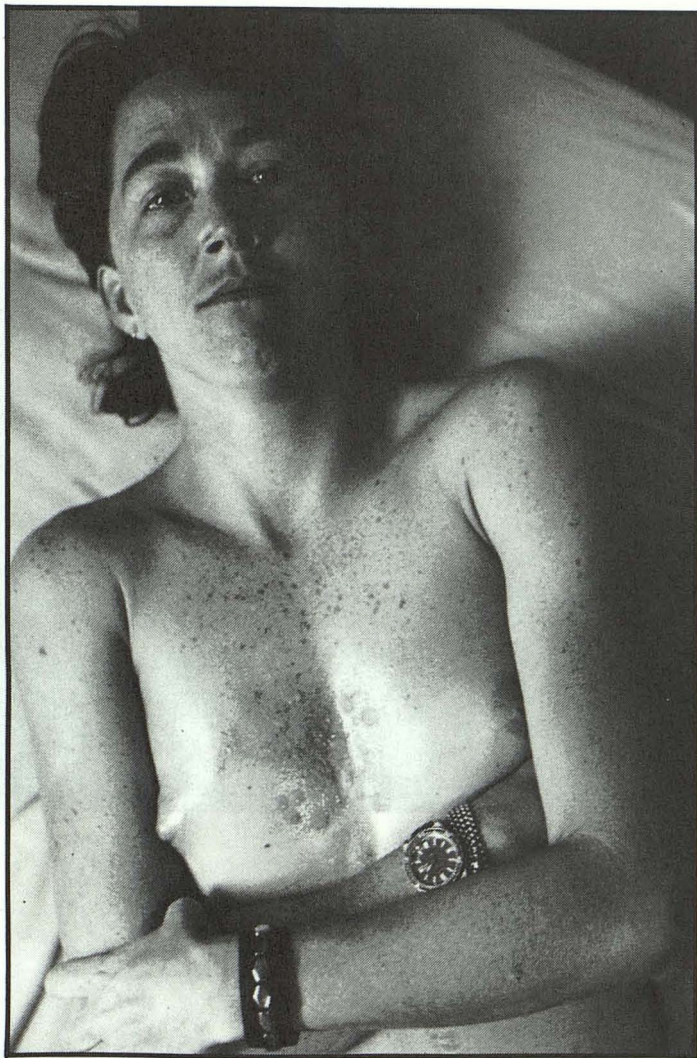
I was raised on television. I was told, I am an American. I learned how to have a marriage from Lucy & Ricky ... I learned how to grieve, how to die, from the evening news ... I grieve for my misplaced culture. I grieve for my dead people, Iranian and American.

— Soraya



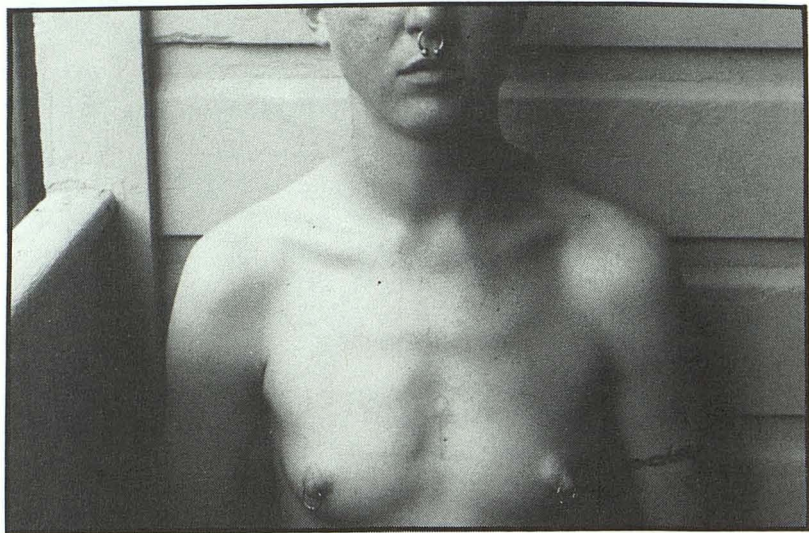
Mama was a short fat little lady who always wore an apron and smelled like apple pie and sweat. She thought she would be remembered for what she said, but I remember her for what she did. She loved us and loved us and loved us and loved us.

— Diane



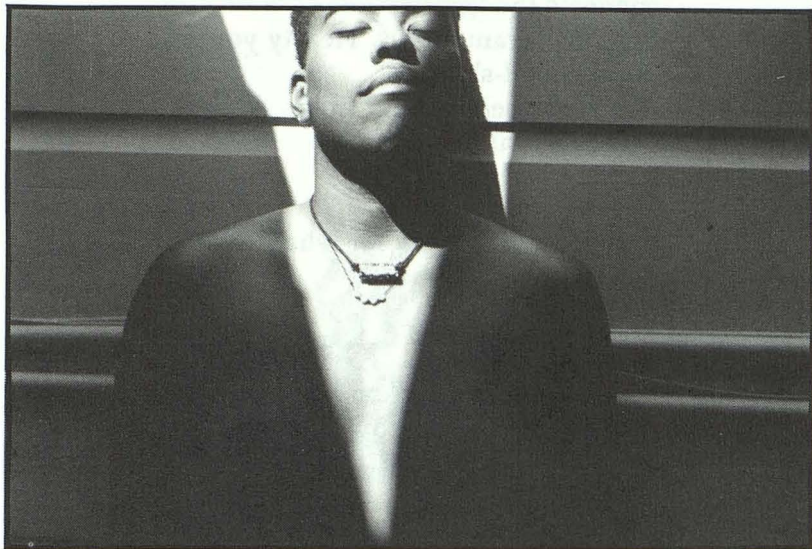
*When my mom died, I had horrible pains in the center of my chest/
She was 46, I was 28/The pain was harsh, sharp, stabbing thunderous
explosions/I pushed my fists against my grief trying to stop/erase it/I
love my mom, I miss my mom/May she rest peacefully in my heart.*

— Diana Manley



*Words cannot express the pain/through which the body lives/and
mind endures/sacred lives lived/everlasting trials/keep me alive/
never lost/life pain/growth pain/ownership/never again to be
infected by their disease/now I hold the blade/the power with which
to inflict/or endure/it is of my choosing/strength in the creation
and nourishment of the killing/to be reborn.*

— Lauren



My mother told me once how she surrounded us with light as we were comin' up. As I became older I'd fall asleep staring at the light on the ceiling of my room. The light would drown out all the noise in my head and soothe me. Looking back on that time I see the light as this INTENSE HEALING POWER

— Sarah Elizabeth

T Malone

Rising Tide

Cliff House appears
a toy tossed above sand. Couples
converse the length
of gather granulation. Hearty youths
paddle, seal-skinned,
then disappear behind froth
into fluid valleys.

So grieve:

For what was never; for what was
& was lost. For fear
of what's to be?

Bloodstone
heart must heal; broken
quartz bones of the soul.

That strong gait,
embellished limp,
an impish grin caps fear
beneath bowled down dreams.

Tears run
internally amok;
Slam torsoed shores,
turn with tsunami strength
body into cleansed hull.

So, rock me, Mother
while I hold tight,
drenched within
Your sanctum; given life.

Freed Spirit
becomes a woman gone

from her own illusions
long & strong enough to
seize a handed rescue
to see
the moving Power
and to know:

fertility — not futility
arrives with the coming

Flow...



Jackie Hill

Joanna Kadi

Coiled Tongues*

*Which tender body
shall be carved up
and presented on a platter
to Monsignor tonight?
Male or female?
White, yellow or brown?*

Wavering at rectory door
I watched my father's car
grow smaller.
Catholic obedience
always goes too far.

Before Monsignor devours flesh
he dresses it properly
manipulates each limb carefully.
Do clerks blanch
when selling garter belts
and black nylons
to fit 10-year-old bodies?
Are store managers
appreciative accomplices
who insist Monsignor
take generous discounts?

Mouth a final blessing.
"You Lebanese girls are so pretty"
His voice slimed over my ribs,
anchored in.
Some words cannot be exorcised,
even with flames.

Monsignor savors flesh more
when flavored with lies.

"Yes, I liked it."

I memorized the force
of white fingers
picking my bones clean.

Years later

I remember children
whose eyes slid under the pew
whose tongues tangled
when Monsignor walked by.

The VanDerHagen girls
the Beneditto boys
the Lee children.

I envision priests
marking names in ledgers
systematically recording each feeding.

Years later

at a party
someone tells a 'joke':
A newly-ordained priest
celebrates with
a lavish table.

"If this is poverty, Father,"
asks a guest,
*who could have been me
who would have said it grimly*
"If this is poverty, Father,
what does chastity look like?"

Times change.

Time changes.

Bony and bloody remains
on platters
metamorphize slowly,
gather force.

Now

when he poisons the room
with his presence

our eyes will rivet instead of slide
tongues coil instead of tangle.
"What does chastity look like?"

The man with the backward collar
will chew his fingernail, grip chair tightly
as this new reality strikes full force:
No bodies here
for carving, serving, devouring.

Memories withstand long decades.
Sins cast long shadows.
Take heed.
Broken children coil long tongues.

* For any reader fortunate enough to be unaware of the catholic church hierarchy, monsignors are above priests and below bishops. The rectory is the house next to the church where priests and monsignors live.

Melanie Cockrell

Self Portrait, 1989

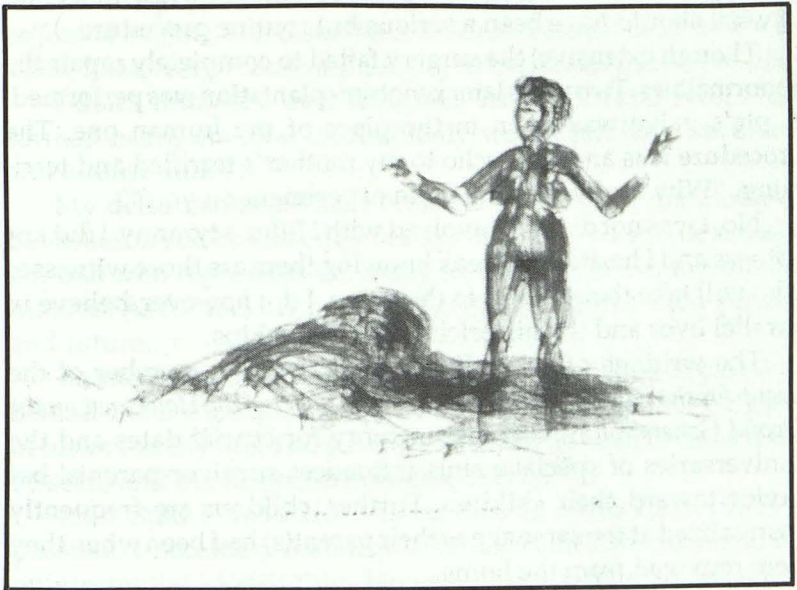
They tell me I'm still young — even though being raped made me eighty inside, worn out from their questions my lack of answers. *Why'd you stay? Why'd you let him? Aren't you done with it yet?* As if it were a cold. As if memory were a tithe tossed from the car on a toll road and not a heavy fog that cuts through the rest of my days like lead dividing bright colored glass. But still the sun presses through the reds, blues, and golds of holy windows. How I go on, god only knows.

Rebecca Hall

Glass

I am 31 years old. I am afraid of the bathroom.
I wake up in the morning after sweating all night
muscles rigid, jaw clenched
I can get into the shower. It's safe now.
i can't get into the shower
Sometimes I rest my head
against the bathroom window and I can feel
it
feel it breaking my body small and powerful crashing through
the glass shattering, it feels so good it slices through the skin,
cleans the semen, stops the pain i can feel it. it feels so good
there is freedom there. i can feel it i can feel it i know it to be true
flying through the glass shattering free.
truth is not there it is here in this cold, cold room. i must stay
here choking on semen, shit in my mouth, i can't get it out i
wash and wash and the water from my mouth never runs clear.
he laughs. it is what he wants. he wants me to feel like this like
nothing, like worse than nothing. like him?
This is the time for cleaning and relaxing
to start the day to end the day
this day will never end never
the water gets colder
how long have i been here choking?
i am cold i cannot breathe it stinks it stinks it feels filthy i am
filthy i am filth
I have learned my lesson
you have taught me well big brother.
big brother watches always i can feel his eyes burning
into my neck always, wherever i am
i sit with my back to the wall
even now i do.

Sometimes I rest my head
against the bathroom window and I can feel
it
feel it breaking my body small and powerful crashing through
the glass shattering, it feels so good it slices through the skin,
cleans the semen, stops the pain i can feel it. it feels so good
there is freedom there. i can feel it i can feel it i know it to be true
flying through the glass shattering free.



"if you want to change your life"

Yvonne Kettels

Liliana Slomkowska

Hitler My Heart

There was a time when I blamed my health problems on Hitler.

Because, after three years of forced labor at the Bremeburg work camp, my mother saw each doctor as a persecutor, each surgery as an experiment, my heart was not repaired until it was almost too late. When finally I gave my consent, the surgeon thanked me. He could not understand why my family was not there, why I had been so obviously neglected. No matter how many times I explained the war, the camp, the terror, he still could not believe that in this day and age (1976), in our medically-advanced country, that anyone, let alone a parent would not avail their child of what should have been a serious but routine procedure.

Though extensive, the surgery failed to completely repair the abnormalities. Two years later xenotransplantation was performed. A pig's valve was sewn in the place of my human one. The procedure was an ironic echo to my mother's terrified and terrifying, "Why are you letting them experiment on you?"

No, I was not directly involved with Hitler's tyranny. I did not witness and I hesitate to speak knowing there are those witnesses who will take their secrets to the grave. I do, however, believe in parallel lives and the historicity of relationships.

The writings of Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg, a member of the *Group for the Psychoanalytic Study of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation*, reveal that memory for crucial dates and the anniversaries of special events influences survivor-parents' behavior toward their children. Further, children are frequently hospitalized at the same age as their parent(s) had been when they were removed from the home.

Though she had long left home, my mother was 21 when she was interned; my age during the first surgery. At 23, with the help of a pig's valve I was again free to breath. In the spring of 1945 the Bremeburg *Arbeit Lager* was liberated and my mother was released. She was 23.

Thirty-seven years apart, on different continents, we were both, once again, free to live. I do not think either one of us ever thought that life after-the-event would be so difficult, or that the event would not remain more firmly in the past. My mother tells me she still "dreams" that the earth, alive with bodies, moves beneath her feet. As for me, I will never live with more than fifty percent heart-lung capacity, or without the heightened risk of congestive heart failure, or a stroke.

I do not believe that my mother and I ever imagined our survival, our healing, would so inextricably bind us. I know my mother worked with children before, during and after the war. The only two photographs from that time she shows without hesitation, with joy, is of her feeding and teaching orphans. She has also mentioned that sometimes the kapos were good and they got a little extra (food) for a child.

She always just mentioned these details as if speaking of morning coffee and muffins. This casual tone, which once caused me to doubt each detail, I now recognize as the flipside of terror, an expression of healing.

I don't think she ever imagined having a child with a deformed heart, one that undoubtedly would not have survived, and almost didn't.

My deformed heart has become the symbol of my mother's devastation and consistently betrays her history. I am the remaining one who represents the many lost. Through me, my mother mourns. As for me, her past has unwittingly become my present and future.

Recently I read about a reversal of the association of past with behind and the future as in front. A reversal that clarifies the place of history in my life. The past, isn't it really in front of us as it can be seen, and the future, the unseen, behind?

As a child I was trained to become as ordinary, as other as possible. I became a mannequin of a certain Americanism, the quintessential blond: thin, blue-eyed and taught to let others understand me as dumb. My first love was the image of such a woman, a model torn from a *Seventeen* magazine perfume ad. The copy told me that she loved the perfume, rain and her brother's best friend. I hid her in my top dresser drawer for years knowing any Nazi would love and spare us.

I became acceptable, even desirable. All my official documents, driver's license and passport, reflected the fantasy. It wasn't until my first lover of consequence, a dark-haired woman with brown eyes, noticed my *green* eyes that the facade began to crumble, and a wound began to heal.

But that was only the physical body, a place to enter. Just as most would never suspect my mother's history and when told often deny it, "*But you're not even Jewish!*" I have lived a lifetime of "Well, you don't look sick." Or, "I never think of Lusia as disabled," or "chronically ill." And, from those who find me too closely aligned with my mother's history: "Aren't you over it yet? When are you going to put the past behind you?"

Often, even mostly, these comments come from family and close friends. Yes, even those who consider themselves evolved feminists. Some, who have adopted the dangerous and cock-eyed optimism of New Ageism, counsel me to forgive, accept my chosen path, accept that my mother chose hers, that everything happens for a reason, every experience is worthwhile. The most honest response came in a post-fireworks discussion this 4th of July. A woman I've known for almost five years admitted quietly, but firmly, "We don't like hearing about these things."

By bringing the Nazi Genocide forward, sometimes coupling it with my medical traumas, sometimes the medical traumata alone, I become unacceptable, even intolerable to some. My "path," my exploration of the past as it exists in my body creates discomfort. In their New Age estimation such exploration is resistant to "letting go," to "healing." I am judged as unwilling, unable or not ready to accept. Implicit in this judgment and dis-ease is denial. But either way, denial or acceptance, the antidote is silence.

Certainly, every philosophic/spiritual construct has its lineage of truth, an enticing prescription, a solace for generational wounding. Complicity and silencing, however, should not be mistaken for solace or truth. There is a certain banality in the New Age insistence that all must be forgiven, forgotten and distanced that I find frightening. Hannah Arendt has written extensively and convincingly on the "banality of evil" in relation to the complicit acceptance of the Nazi regime. How violence continues so innocently, even well-meaningly.

As I write I span a spectrum of emotions, from anger and hurt, rage and repugnance, acceptance and relief, to fear, silence and self-effacement. The doubts drift in.

Perhaps my ailments are simply a malicious twisting of fate which I would do well to accept as my chosen destiny. Perhaps some things are better left unsaid, do not deserve saying?

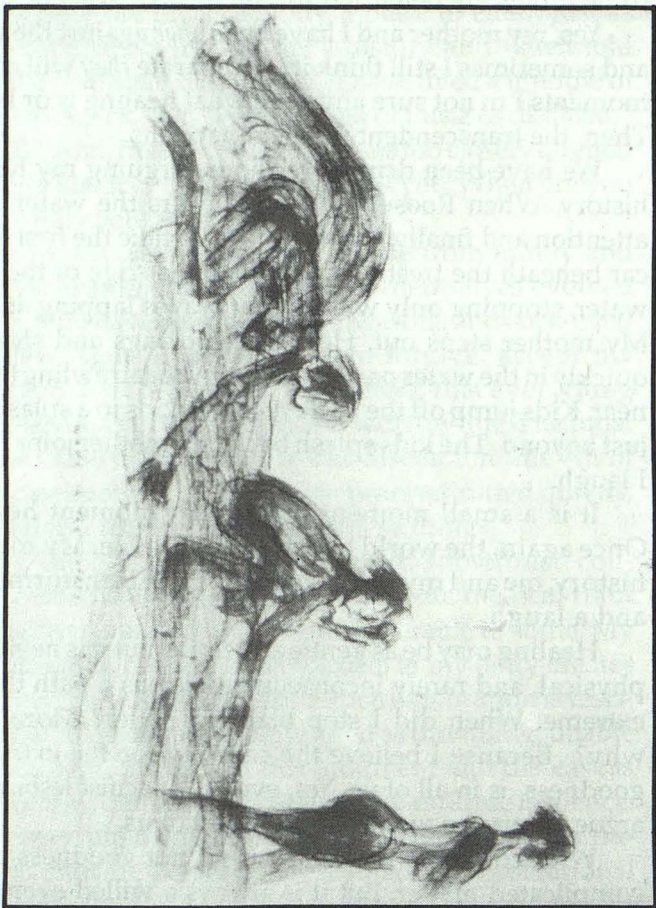
Yes, my mother and I have been a *we* against the world. I'm 41 and sometimes I still think if we separate *they* will come. In these moments I'm not sure anymore what healing is or how it begins. Then, the transcendent moment happens.

We have been driving for hours arguing my health and her history. When Roosevelt Lake appears the water captures our attention and finally, the words stop. I take the first exit, drive the car beneath the trestle bridge, past the edge of the lake into the water, stopping only when I hear waves lapping at the hubcaps. My mother steps out. Her wig, stockings and shoes off, she is quickly in the water past her knees. A boat trawling the lake comes near. Kids jump off the back. A crane skids to a splash in the water just beyond. The kids splash back. My mother joins in and smiles. I laugh.

It is a small moment but in that moment healing occurs. Once again, the world becomes hospitable. My mother and her history, me and my health concerns, are transformed in a splash and a laugh.

Healing may be as gentle as a smile, but it is never easy or only physical, and rarely inconsequential. It is a path that entails the extreme. When did I stop blaming Hitler? More importantly, why? Because I believe the capacity for the extreme, evil and goodness, is in all of us. Yes, even the pacifist lesbian feminist. To argue otherwise would diminish all of us.

Why goodness not evil, or evil not goodness triumphs is a complicated matter. But it is always a willed event, a conscious choice. I believe that my body has been violated physically, spiritually, psychologically, emotionally and historically. But in the name of healing, of goodness not evil. So I would live, not die. And if I choose to heal on all levels I know the many are mourned and more than the self is healed.



"Wade in the waters"
Yvonne Kettels

Melanie Cockrell

Asthmatic's Diary (a broken sonnet)

When birds beat their heavy
rage against my chest
I know it's time
to leave my body behind.
Flight's simple.
The panic travels
in from my limbs
to search for my heart
also beating inside
this marrow cell.

But my heart pushes
a patient rhythm
like the ocean sweeping
its smoothed stones
well onto the shore.
Only such steady hymns
will calm this flock of birds
in its fury to be free.

Still, each time, moments before
the peace of easy breathing
I see them breaking away
leather waving from their talons like ribbons.

Ellen Bass

I enter myself

I have lived too long on the edges
like a child listening outside the window
to someone else's mother read stories.

This body has gone through the motions
like an old milk horse, while I, the driver
having dropped the reins
busy myself with accounts and schemes.

I want to gallop bareback
the mane stinging my face.
Or better yet, be
the horse, feel my own flanks sweat
to the rhythm of my own churning legs.

Meanwhile, my elbows knock door frames.
My finger pokes my lover's eye as I caress her cheek.
Just yesterday my head clunked the wall of the toilet stall.

I have always been embarrassed.
I have hidden behind the conventional disguises
lest anyone accuse me of
poor taste, of calling attention to myself,
of flaunting. But

"Flaunt," my lover prompts me.
She's sprawled in the sun, her perfect breasts
rising like sand dunes. "Flaunt it,"
she chuckles, like water
tumbling over stones.

And so I do. I fill myself
like wind filling cloth, flaring
the pleated sacks of my lungs
oxygen rich in my blood

heart pumping to each fingertip
my crown, the tough soles of my feet.

I immerse myself
sleek, like a beaver slipping into a lake
full, like water sucked through green stalks
hot, like sun swelling grapes, sweetening
each taut juicy globe on the vine.

Victoria Lena Manyarrows

Silence is Deep

Silence is deep
and covers me like a shroud

i can't say what i've seen
what i've heard
what i've felt

i am a prisoner beneath your knives
under your threats
haunted by your heavy & jealous
shadow

i know you'll often follow me
sometimes chase me
and there'll be times i'll stay with you
and love you
offering you forgiveness & caresses
dreaming rainbows
that someday soon you'll change.

in my silences i'll pray for you
and hope the ashes of our ancestors will soften
your temper.

and in my silences i'll remove the shroud
and open my heart to those who surround me
those who embrace me
those who have courage to listen
and not run away.

i'll listen
for the earth to move
for the earth to shake
i'll listen and wait.

i'll shake off all silences
 and when the spirit moves me,
 i'll burn cedar and sweetgrass
 copal y sage

i'll fight you back
 shake off the silences
 i'll fight you back
 i'll break free of your chains.

and i'll speak my own language
 again.

i'll be the indian your conquistador soul
 despises,
 i'll be the healer you won't be able to keep
 down.

*and i'll break free of you
 i'll break free of you.*

*for my Chicana friends who are courageous, who are survivors,
 & who love Indians...*

Joan Annsfire

Deserted Beaches

i came to the edge of the ocean
barren and brittle as the blackened branches
of trees after fire,
a message transformed into charcoal,
a carving of scar tissue upon the land.

your illness, your death hardened me to a cinder,
all the loose pieces melded together.
now i walk the beach, a skeleton,
a grain of sand against the sky.

i remember the small things;
your hands selecting peaches,
moving slowly, carefully over the rows of ripe fruit,
your small, hairless head bound in Balinese fabric
that, like your life, had begun to unravel.

i came to the edge of the ocean
to spread small remembrances of you over the sand.
like ashes flung out from the side of a boat,
and the futile words tossed after them,
these lives are never long enough
to make up for those hard years of preparation.

i came to the edge of the ocean
to listen to the secrets the waves pass to the shore
to learn why you came to live among us
and why you left so soon.
like a hungry bird abandoned by its mother
i search for sustenance
in wide and empty spaces.

Gayle Bell

Brave Survivor

She read five pages of the hell she survived
on a night when confessions were RSVP
A freshly cultivated friend
the journey we walked on barren rock and biting wind
I heard of the little girl
who wanted to be safe and loved
who received beatings from HER
the one Hallmark sends no greetings
who was touched by a bully
The Man Of The House
good ol' family values
I walked my own inferno in her steps
careful of the mines and trenches
when her story finished
we were drained but mending
shit
in the soul was felt
"shit!"
was all I could say
"shit!"
was all I could feel
to soften the tone
she read a few light pieces of poetry
she knew my heart still wept for her
the girl and brave woman survivor
almost by way of apology
she changed the subject
so - by way of my apology
I say to her now
WRITE IT! SPEAK IT!
to me anytime

to them anywhere
to the ones who hurt you
until you feel no need to
be afraid to
speak
without being sorry
without fear, shame or guilt
SPEAK!
LOUD AND PROUD!
BRAVE SURVIVOR!



Jackie Hill

Jo Anne Reyes-Boitel

Untitled

I've decided to stand up straight
to give up those things I don't need
or deserve (because I deserve better).
I've forgotten the drinking, eating and talking
unless it concerns the mountains.

The energy within my rocks calls
and I know I can trust them,
pulling on them as I push myself up.

Sides of mountains give a little
and my feet curve around them.
Leveling myself,
The mountains believe in me.

I've decided to change my hair and face
to better express my intent, my ideals
because I'd lost my voice for so long (and have again found it)
I'm not changing my outward colors or textures
but insuring my face holds the radiance of our sun and my earth

I've decided to alter my name,
not to hide or forget but to remind myself
of where I come from and who I am and will be.
I've recognized the history of the voices in my head.
They are the whispers leading me toward the mountains.

As a child, the whispers told me
move toward us
touch the dirt and discover us
sleep, knowing we will tell the stories.

And they did tell me stories.
Of forgotten family and herbs,
stories of my heroes and friends,
stories of my past and its importance in my future.

I took in visions of people talking with me,
of cactus surrounding me, sharing
stories of companion lives, intertwining wisdoms,
drunkenness and untold histories.

And the mountains carried me up,
my fingers feeling their sides for the soft spots.
Helping me, I believe in myself.

I've decided on a new path,
a life that brings the sun's light
and lives within my dirt, projecting my voice.
And mountains pour from my mouth,
whispering the stories of my life.

Ellen Bass

Slowly, like archaeologists

Slowly, like archaeologists, we dig with our hands
layer through layer, not to damage the fragile shards.
With a patience glaringly inadequate, I follow you
through my fear, as our nails scrape away the heavy earth,
excavating your passion.

It's one more story of a child, hammered into terror
like a nail into wood. That child drags within you now,
sullen, she scuffs her heels as she turns away,
hiding her tenderness like young grass,
the blanched shoot encased in the tough sheath.

I want to believe you that time will heal.

I want to trust your moods like the tides, secure
even as you recede, that you will return
lapping me with your salty body.

But faith is not mine to own.

It's an exercise I must do every day, day
after day, like swimming, to strengthen my heart.

This is April. The California sun shines benignly
and acacia branches sway in the breeze.

But my body is a bitter terrain and spring
means the rivers gush, ice chunks scraping, crashing
against the banks, and each other.

Last night in my dreams I dropped to my knees,
looked you square in the face and wailed —
but the name that erupted from my lungs was not yours.
I cried the name of old wounds, and all the misery
of those years gripped me. I woke into terror,
trapped like a fish in ice.

You must understand. I spent so many years
trying to love a man into fullness, setting
my desire aside, like a casserole on a chafing plate.

Trying to hear him, see, accept him
 enough, believing
 if I could give him what he needed, he would give me
 what I needed. There is no way to tell you
 how desperate I am. My need so naked,
 I am ashamed. Unprotected,
 like the young basil in the garden.
 It is hardly dark before the snails
 slide toward it.

Nights when we get into bed, your body
 rests quiet as dry seed. Your skin
 like sun-warmed fruit, your breath light.
 While inside me desire churns. I am a seed wet
 with rains. Root, stem, the paired cotyledon leaves
 all stirring into life. I want to drench
 you, so dormant, so self-contained.

To slip your fear away, like the seed coat.
 Like the sun slips into the ocean, or a dress slips
 over the shoulders and slides to the floor.
 I want those times when your desire's drawn out like silk
 scarves from a hat and doves are released. Your kisses
 sing over my breasts and I feel your heart
 throb like hummingbird wings. Devour me
 like a whale eats krill, opening
 your magnificent mouth to the sea.

This will not happen. What's possible
 is possible only slowly. My pain
 and yours. They fit together neatly
 like dove-tail joints. We lie together
 naked, after a bath. It is six o'clock
 on a Wednesday evening. All over the city women
 are driving home, cooking, eating dinner, yet
 we are still. We look at each other.
 There is no motion. Lightly,
 I draw one finger down your back.
 You rest your head on my shoulder.

T Malone

Happy Any Day There's Birth

Ramlke features do not preclude softness
Even in you — sister proud
Of inability to sometimes bend —
Because sometimes
Bending can cause the whole
Heart soul self
To feel slaughtered
After all, African daughter
Your expectations are
Sometimes only yours

Even people you know
Should love you
Shove
And you not fully arisen
From some last shocking blow
Find not one year
Gets easier passing
Toward whirring cacophony.

Yet others pass
Away.

So keep stepping
As if your life depended
And when hope is with you — Praise!

When not
And there is only inner strength
Trust that you will find

Especial nectar
In torn away rinds.

Linnea

from my journal

"Still Working My Way Out of Violence"

The Permanent Stain

I understand that piercing can be done
with exquisite, merciful gentleness
if it is done imaginatively,
and only seen in the mind's eye.

Then the needle into the vein equates
with the scalpel parting skin
and the searing cut of a whip resonates
with the cutting red heat of a branding tool.

But memory is a cruel partner.
Such visions erode my serenity.
Was it ecstasy that followed pain?
Did beauty flow from violence?

Or is ecstasy like
the opening of a flower?
Does it come like the rustle
of beach gravel in the waves?

Or the purple and rose tones of twilight
reflecting through every nerve
washing over the skin to leave
a permanent stain of well being.

K. Linda Kivi

Now is the time to bury our ghosts

Under the leaning birch
 with the oblong wound on its trunk
 the boy
 who raped me at fifteen
 — watch the snow gather around
 his protruding ears, brim
 full his startled eyes, flakes
 standing sideways among the stubble
 of his military shorn head

 under the fat cedar
 the men
 who pinched my ass
 on a Grecian street whistled insults
 on a broken road copped a feel
 on a lurching city bus clucked

 under the trio of towering firs
 the thin man
 who told me the world
 was for my taking but fed me only
 a sliver of Boston Bluefish and
 four small flowers of broccoli
 it is important to be thin
 when you are free, he said
 and the snow takes him quickly, gently
 his bones fallen branches

 under the pine dying of blister rust
 the woman
 who said she loved me, seized
 my collar in her fist, held
 the other to my face told me
 to watch myself or else

or else
 what else will happen now
 that they are all enshrouded, frozen hard?
 me, safe under this soft coverlet
 of snow, I cannot help but cast
 one small thought to how the
 forest will rage when the snow
 thaws.

Marie Cartier

I Want

to love with the windows open,
I want to breathe a deep
sun rise, the proud morning glory
of my hand, blooming around your waist.
I want to love
this way with roots,
solid as dirt.

That sure knowledge of burrowing growth,
and home.

I want to love
with my tongue saying "yes"
like water running over and over,
"yes."

Holly Iglesias

Supplicant

Through December fields
under noon-high sun
I walked from those woods
casting no shadow
to her house

squat at clearing's edge.
Weeds, seed pods, and webs
of spider silk hung
across the transom
of her door.

Lying on the stoop
face to heaven, hands
crossed over my heart
I uttered her name
imploring her:

Wash me in the salt
pools of your seer eyes
seal my lips with oil
drape me in linen.

Buff palms to petals
scrape heals to new flesh
trim these hardened nails
back to new moons.

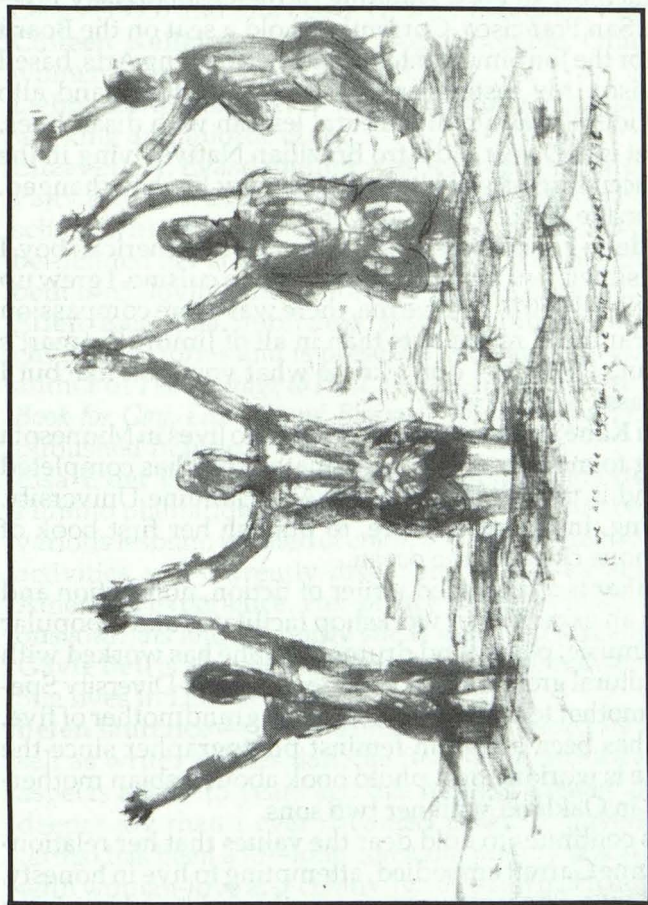
Roll a ripe peach up
the rocks of my spine
pulse under these waves
and rock me to shore.

Mistinguette

Traditional Medicine

for K.J., who understood

And now, not full enough of
 my Self, I shrink into
 a kernel, dry husk embracing
 a seed without soil. I am homesick
 for my sisters' voices
 soothing and teasing me
 into the step beyond
hold on & hold on & hold on
 This grief that makes
 my chest so tight I can't exhale,
 this hole burning in
 the lining of my stomach
 is only the bright ember of anger
 that I cannot vomit up. It
 no longer lights my way, it burns me
 as I hold it dear. I lay
 my head down tired as I wake
 and dream of medicine
 simple as this: a bath
 of blue water; a letter to my past
 beneath my bed; Billie singing
In My Solitude; parting
 oiling, brushing, parting,
 my cheek against
 the thigh of a woman
 braiding me into wholeness again



"if we are the beginning we will be forever"
Yvonne Kettels

Contributor's Notes

A. Miriasiem Barnes — I am Portuguese, Native American, Nigerian. I was born and raised in the U.S.A. I am a writer and musician and mother of two children. I am currently working on a novella. I am a member in good standing of the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band of San Francisco. Currently, I hold a seat on the Board of Directors for the Jon Sims Center for the Performing Arts, based in San Francisco. My instruments of choice are voice and alto saxophone. I identify as a multicultural lesbian with disabilities.

Adalia Selket is a 39 year old Afro Brazilian Native living in the Bay Area. Since I started working with clay my life has changed. Each piece I make is like a long prayer.

Annalee Wade — I am a sweet, old-fashioned all-american boy. I like punk music, violent movies and vegetarian cuisine. I grew up in the 60's and early 70's. Believe me, there was more compassion in the Black Panthers' raised fists than in all of Jimmy Swagart's TV tears. Diane DiMassa I don't know what you look like but I have a giant ass crush on you.

April Citizen Kane is a native New Yorker who lives in Minnesota and is hoping to move to a warmer climate. April has completed her MALS and is now finishing an MFA at Hamline University. April is hoping, in the near future, to publish her first book of poetry and move closer to the ocean.

Ardena Shankar is a published writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She is an experienced workshop facilitator and a popular performer of music, poetry and drumming. She has worked with many multicultural groups and is a trained Cultural Diversity Specialist. She is mother to twin daughters and a grandmother of five.

Cathy Cade has been a lesbian feminist photographer since the early 70's. She is working on a photo book about lesbian mothering and lives in Oakland with her two sons.

Cheryl Jones continues to hold dear the values that her relationship with Joanne Garrett embodied, attempting to live in honesty, kindness and love. She works as a psychotherapist and is raising two daughters, 15 and 3 years old.

Christina Springer — I cross disciplines like busy streets in Manhattan using film, traditional and performance poetry, video and theatre. A.K.A. General Manager of WYEP — voted best radio station of 1995 by the readers of In Pittsburgh.

Chrystos is a First Nations Two-Spirited (lesbian) writer, artist

and political activist whose poetry has been widely acclaimed. Winner of the Audre Lorde International Poetry Competition in 1994 and of the Astraea Foundation's Sappho Award of Distinction in 1995 and author of 5 books: *Not Vanishing* (1988) Cleveland State Univ. Press, *Dream On* (1991), *In Her I Am* (1993) *Fugitive Colors* (1995) and *Fire Power* (1996) Press Gang Publishers.

Colleen Kelley — a writer from Coolville, Ohio involved in women's Appalachia work.

Debby Earthdaughter — I am 34, European heritage from mixed working and middle class.

Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter was born and grew up in Tulsa. Dark Patty Beattie was her first friend, the one she walked home from school with. Blond Shirley Thomas was the next, the one who befriended her at the new school. And so it has gone. Now Elizabeth is 63, loving and writing in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Ellen Bass has published several volumes of poetry, some children's stories and is presently writing a novel. She is also co-author of *The Courage to Heal* and co-author of *Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth* — and *Their Allies* to be published in June, 1996.

Elsa E'der is one of nineteen granddaughters descended from Filipino plantation laborers of Hawai'i. She has been involved in various lesbian, women of color, and Asian American community activities and currently distributes media by and about Asian American experience. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals and currently she is writing a screenplay.

Gayle Bell is a fat, Black, nappy headed woman loving womanist. She lives in Dallas, Texas.

helen laurence — in a life once circumscribed by suppression of self as writer and lesbian, the final burst into awareness of both aspects about 15 years ago has brought greater and continually deeper joy than i ever dreamed possible. poverty (in *american* terms) has been a life-long constant, but my world is rich and full with woman-love and creativity. i live and teach in eugene, oregon — working primarily with women escaping domestic violence and recovering from patriarchal abuses.

Heidi Beeler — Trumpet-blasting-humor, scrawling, band-marching, board haunting, Dyke-woman, comma nanny, Founding member of the dixieland Dykes + 3. (not only is she the president of the Jon Sim Center for the Performing Arts, she is also a mind blowing musician and heart felt writer.)

Holly Iglesias – I am a doctoral student in Humanities at Florida State University and non-fiction editor of *International Quarterly*. My most recent publication is a translation of an essay by Octavio Paz and I have poems forthcoming in *Potato Eyes*. I recently began co-editing an anthology of lesbians' writings on their relationships with their mothers.

Jackie Hill — I am an artist/graphic designer. I was born and lived the first twenty-one years of my life in Trinidad & Tobago. I was fortunate to grow up in a family where being an artist was taken seriously. I currently live in the Bay Area.

Jan Thomas: Initially a social worker, over the past fifteen years she has worked on environment and peace issues. Her abiding passions include Eastern spirituality, social change, mountain streams, singing, and Asian mystical poetry. She lives in the Bay Area, California.

Jeannie Witkin is a Jewish lesbian living in Berkeley, California. She works with other people's words as a sign language interpreter. Writing lets her speak for herself. She is happiest when climbing tall trees so she can see what is happening in the world around her.

Joan Annsfire started writing again four years ago after a hiatus of nearly fifteen years. Her work has appeared in the Women's Cancer Resource Center Newsletter, *Mediphors* and in past issues of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Joanna Kadi is a working-class Arab halfbreed queer girl. Her first book, *Food For Our Grandmothers*, was published by South End Press in 1994. Her second manuscript, a collection of essays examining class, race, gender, sexuality and imperialism will be released by South End in October 1996.

Julia Youngblood — I am a mixed-blood, two-spirited writer and photographer, active in Native American and Lesbian communities, as well as the Gay and Lesbian Indian Community. My work often combines words and visual images in performance exhibition or book form. I write about disability, spirit, loving women, my two-spirited brothers, being mixed-blood and growing up in the South. I'm a new mother to a five-year-old. I'm lover to Che. I am director of newly established Serpent Source Foundation for Women Artists.

K. Linda Kivi is a mountain-dwelling, house-building dykely babe of Estonian-Canadian heritage. At 33, she is still amazed at what time dredges up.

Laura C. Luna — I am a Chicana living in Northern California with my two girl dogs, Yogi and Hodgi. In writing the poem, *I Cry*,

I have begun to release the beliefs that were ingrained in me. Crying is one of the hardest things to do. I am only now beginning to believe I have a right to my feelings and words. That I am not "crazy." I had this deep feeling knowledge that if only I could cry, I wouldn't have to punish and hate myself. My goal for now is to complete a collection of short stories (I'm working on) before this year is out.

Liliana Slomkowska — as 1996 represents the twenty-year anniversary of my first open heart surgery, I think of the publication of my essay as particularly celebratory, as words to live by. Thank you.

Linnea — I am lung disabled, fat, 54 single and a survivor. I am also sane, practical, talented and clever. I am loved by my friends. I feel that I have a long and healthy future. I live partly on my land near Willits, California and partly with my aging mother near Chicago.

Mariah L. Richardson is a literary performance artist, published poet and seasoned actor. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

Marianne Hewitt is a 39 year old poet, student, tutor, waitress, mother and lover. She is currently engaged in writing a work in progress, *The Poetics of Motherhood*.

Marie Cartier teaches the first class offered in the country on the culture and politics of incest survival "No More Shame," in the Women's Studies Department at UCLA. She created the Dandelion Warrior project, a movement for incest survivors, with groups meeting in California and Colorado. The Dandelion Warrior project includes writing workshops, theater presentations and classes.

Melanie Cockrell is a twenty-eight year old lesbian living in Minneapolis. She has been published in *The Iowa Review*, *Negative Capability* and other journals and has won numerous awards for her poetry including a Loft McKnight Award. In May Melanie is changing her last name from Cockrell to Figg, her mother's maiden (sic) name.

Mistinguette is a pushy, loud, Black dyke who lives in Ohio. She calls herself a poet when she thinks no one is listening. She is grateful for her Yam Sisters, who help "braid her into wholeness," and her friend Lee Evans, who made a New Year's resolution that mistinguette would submit something to *Sinister Wisdom* in 1995.

Morgan Ahern — I am Rominchal/Sinti (Gypsy), born in Brooklyn, New York. I was removed from my family as part of a program of forced assimilation. I write and talk about the historical oppression of Gypsies, and the situation they face in the world today. I am the founder of RED BANDANNA: ROMANI

AGAINST RACISM.

Rebecca Hall: an African-American lesbian lawyer and civil rights attorney, she is committed to the process of healing from incest and learning to thrive.

Rivka Mason – I am a proud bold bearded Jewish country dyke who presently resides in the Berkeley hills. I have made my living by planting gardens and by carpentry. At the present time my work is in the healing arts of Shiatsu, yoga and macrobiotic cooking.

T Malone — I am a 37 year old queer black woman who resides in Oakland. I have spent the past year totally immersed in a process of healing. Through a decades-long history of pain (and more than one moment of total despondency) I still believe that healing & wholeness remain possible — not only individually, but on a planetary scale.

Tzivia Gover is an MFA candidate in writing at Columbia University and a freelance writer. Her work has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, including *Evergreen*, *Peregrine* and *The Femme Mystique*, ed. by Lesléa Newman.

Victoria Lena Manyarrows — I am a 40-year old writer and activist whose work is strongly influenced by my American Indian and Latin birth cultures (Tsalagi/Eastern Cherokee and Italian). I am the author of a book of poetry, *Songs From the Native Lands* (Nopal Press, 1995). In 1994 I was awarded an Astraea Foundation Lesbian Writers Award in poetry (judged by Marilyn Hacker and Chrystos). For many years, I have worked with community arts, education, health and social service programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I have a Master's degree in Social Work. Since I was a young girl, I have been witness, survivor and warrior against the abuse, control, racism and sexism of domestic violence.

Yvonne A. Kettels — I am a Black woman who was born into the African Diaspora in Germany 30 years ago. My mother is German and my father is African — Zairean. My art reflects many things about my identity as a lesbian woman walking through this world. Foremost, however, my art is a dialog between the spirit world and its intersection with what some call "reality." My art is a celebration of the many faces of the Black woman.

Zelda Lockhart was born an African-American Lesbian on June 11, 1965. She grew up one of eight children and now resides in Norfolk, Virginia with her nine year old son. Zelda has been writing and performing her poetry and prose for lesbian and mainstream audiences for six years.

 Books Received

About the Books Received List: I've listed (almost) all the books we get in the mail. Unfortunately, there is never enough room or time to review everything we'd like to — although, in the future we plan to do more whole book reviews. If you're interested in doing reviews please let us know. I have listed the books of each press together. While I feel all of the books listed here are important — because our perspectives need to be out in the world — we have not actually reviewed them, and much of what I have said comes from the publisher's press release. Therefore, what is written here should not be viewed as my endorsement of a book. When I have read parts or all of a book, I've put my comments in brackets. — Akiba

Lesbian Sacred Sexuality — This work empowers women with the spiritual values inherent in lesbian relationships and an appreciation of their bodies — essays, short fiction and poetry enforce this theme. The first photography book that treats the spiritual elements of lesbian love, by Diane Mariechild and Marcelina Martin. 1995, \$24.95, Wingbow Press, 7900 Edgewater Drive, Oakland, CA 94621.

Thunder's Grace: Walking the Road of Visions With My Lakota Grandmother — intimate, painfully honest, essentially and overwhelmingly spiritual. This is a book about a woman's quest for meaning amid two cultures and a compelling account of the visionary underpinnings of Native American life, by Mary Elizabeth Thunder. 1995, \$16.95, Stanton Hill Press, Barrytown, NY 12507.

Black and Lavender: The Collected Poems of Margaret Sloan-Hunter — [The first time I heard Margaret read I was so touched. Between these pages I have been touched over and over again. These are pieces I will continue to revisit, for their resonance speaks to my heart as a black woman laughing, crying, loving and, by all means, living], by Margaret Sloan-Hunter. 1995, \$12.00, Talking Circle Press, 343 Soquel Ave #312, Santa Cruz, CA 95062.

Fire Power — With these poems of passion and power, Chrystos solidifies her place as one of the great political voices of our time. [Page after page of stories I feel, know and need to remember. Unapologetic, honest and matter of fact, *Fire Power*, mirrors the journey of a passionate warrior], by Chrystos. 1995, Press Gang Publishers,

101-225 East 17th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V5V 1A6 Canada.

Tangled Sheets: Stories and Poems of Lesbian Lust — heats up the body of lesbian sex literature with a collection for and about dykes in lust. A luscious sequel to the popular *Getting Wet: Tales of Lesbian Seductions*, ed by Rosamund Elwin and Karen X. Tulchinsky. 1995, \$14.95/\$12.95 US, Women's Press, 517 College St. #233, Toronto Ontario, Canada M6G 4A2.

In Her Nature — desire, love, hot sex, cool sex, grieving and thriving as a Jewish Dyke, by Karen X. Tulchinsky 1995, \$14.95/\$12.95 US, Women's Press.

Lavender Reflections: Affirmations for Lesbians and Gay Men, by Elanor Ruth Wagner. 1995, \$10.95, Alamo Square Press, PO Box 14543, San Francisco, CA 94114.

The Hadra — the long awaited third novel in the acclaimed Hadra Series, which follows the adventures of a fiercely proud tribe of women the Khal Hadera Lossien, who exist and thrive away from the company of men, by Diana Rivers. 1995, \$9.95 pb, Alyson Publications, Inc., 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Heatwave: Women in Love and Lust — features passionate, volcanic stories that deliver, both in terms of literary and erotic content, ed by Lucy Jane Bledsoe. 1995, \$9.95, Alyson Publications.

Tomboys — features the work of fifty lesbians who offer a lush and often cinematic portrait of Tomboyhood, with poetry essays, fiction and photos that span the decades from before the Second World War to present day, ed by Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber. 1995, \$9.95, Alyson Publications.

The Femme Mystique — a fascinating and insightful look at the world of femme identity within the lesbian community. The first book to focus exclusively on this newly mainstreamed style of lesbian self expression, features poetry, essays, short fiction and photography, ed by Lesléa Newman. 1995, \$11.95 pb, Alyson Publications.

Oral Tradition — taking their inspiration from the author's African American and Native American storytelling heritage, these are poems of finding home, making love, learning history. Tales of women and satisfaction, regret, love, danger, death and eternal life. [Spellbinding, witnessing the Griot weave her tales, each carefully chosen word, so full of purpose], by Jewelle Gomez. 1995, \$9.95 pb, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, New York, NY 14850.

The First Time Ever: Love stories by Naiad Press Authors, ed by

- Barbara Grier and Christine Cassidy. 1995, \$14.95, Naiad Press, Inc., PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302
- Miss Pettibone and Miss McGraw* — the enchanting story of four strong-willed women — two of whom happen to be ghosts, by Brenda Weathers. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Beach Affair*, by Barbara Johnson. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Bar Girls* — a novelization of the movie, by Lauran Hoffman. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Family Secrets* — an exhilarating blend of romance and suspense that will keep you enthralled from the first page to the sensational climax, by Laura De Hart Young. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Getting There* — a slow-dance in the eye of a hurricane. A banquet of eroticism where you'll savor each delicious word, by Robbi Sommers. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Final Cut* — mystery number two, by Lisa Haddock. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Paxton Court* — insightful, erotic and wickedly funny. A delightful contemporary tale about the comic chaotic and sometimes cruel business of learning to live together, by Diane Salvatore. 1995, \$21.95 hdb, Naiad Press, Inc.
- Payback* — a gripping thriller of romance, revenge and betrayal, by Celia Cohen. 1995, \$10.95, Naiad Press, Inc.
- The Hangdog Hustle* — the third in the Nell Fury Mysteries, by Elizabeth Pincus. 1995, \$9.95, Spinsters Ink, 32 E. First St. #330, Duluth, MN 55802.
- Common Murder* — the second Lindsay Gordon Mystery, by Val McDermid. 1995, \$10.95, Spinsters Ink.
- Domestic Violence For Beginners*, by Alisa Deltufo. 1995, \$11.00, Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., PO Box 461, Village Station, New York, NY 10014.
- Lesbian Parenting: Living With Pride and Prejudice* — in thirty-eight articles women talk of their multi-faceted experiences of lesbian parenting: legal issues, social issues, political issues, becoming pregnant and custody issues; also included are the voices of children of lesbian parents, ed by Katherine Arnup. 1995, \$19.95/\$16.95 US, Gynergy Books, PO Box 2023, Charlotte Town, PEI, Canada C1A 7N7.
- Deadly Reunion* — second in the Harriet Hubble Mystery series, by Jackie Manthorne. 1995, Gynergy Books.
- Last Resort* — third in the Harriett Hubble Mystery series, by

- Jackie Manthorne. 1995, Gynergy Books.
- Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* — guided by a moral vision yet grounded by realpolitik, *Virtual Equality* is a call to arms to the gay and lesbian community to begin with the work necessary to achieve genuine equality with the rest of America, by Urvashi Vaid. 1995, \$24.95 hdb, Doubleday, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.
- Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*, by Marie M. Fortune. 1995, \$16.95 hdb, The Continuum Publishing Group, 370 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10017.
- Lesbian Words: State of the Art* — a virtual primer to contemporary trends in lesbian thought, ed by Randy Turoff. 1995, \$10.95, Masquerade Books, Inc., 801 Second Ave, New York, NY 10017.
- The Adventures of Mona Pinsky*, by Harriet Ziskin. 1995, \$12.95, Calyx Books, PO Box B, Corvallis, OR 97339.
- Four Figures In Time*, by Patricia Grossman. 1995, \$13.95, Calyx Books.
- Seeds 2: Supporting Women's Work Around the World* — the sequel to *Seeds* traces the evolution over the last decade from women-specific, essentially anti-poverty projects, to efforts integrating women into major economic activity, ed by Ann Leonard. 1995, \$12.95, The Feminist Press, 311 E. 94th St., New York, NY 10128.
- Southern Lady: From Pedestal To Politics* — 25th Anniversary edition, by Anne Firor Scott. 1995, \$12.95, University Press of Virginia, PO Box 3608 University Station, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
- The Lesbian Parenting Book: A Guide To Creating Families and Raising Children* — filled with wisdom and humor, this book is essential reading for every lesbian who is involved in — or considering — raising a family, by D. Merilee Clunis and G. Dorsey Green. 1995, \$16.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave #410, Seattle, WA 98122.
- The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, by Terry Castle. 1995, \$16.50, Columbia University Press, 562 W. 113th St., New York, NY 10025.
- Happy Ever After* — [Fun reading], by Stacy Chandler. 1995, \$10.00, Speculators, Inc., PO Box 94038, Troy, MI 48099.

Announcements and Classified Ads

PUBLICATIONS

CONMOCION, revista y red revolucionaria de lesbianas latinas, a new national publication with 100% Latina lesbian vision, seeks writings and art by Latina lesbians in Spanish, English or Spanglish, any form. Subs: \$13 for 3. Info: 1521 Alton Road #336, Miami Beach, FL 33139.

MAIZE, A Lesbian Country Magazine. Land dyke networking since 1983. Sub: \$10/4 issues. Single issue \$3.50. MAIZE, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

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

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

DYKE REVIEW MAGAZINE — "We don't judge it, we just publish it." Looking for feature writers from your area; all publishable forms of dyke expression. Call 415-621-3769 or write: 584 Castro St., Ste. 456, SF, CA 94114.

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

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

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.

VIRAGO, a new quarterly for lesbian veterans, seeks all forms of writing. Queries: POB 1171, New Market, VA 22844.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

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.

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.

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.

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

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

LESBIAN VISUAL ARTISTS (LVA) a promotional & networking organization whose purpose is to network among lesbian visual artists and to promote their work. For more information contact Happy/L.A. Hyder, 870 Market Street #618, San Francisco, CA 94102, (415)788-6118.

EVENTS/ORGANIZING/CONFERENCES/RETREATS

THE FATE OF FEMINISM: IS THERE A NEXT GENERATION? S. Conn. State Univ. 5th Annual Women's Studies Conference, Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 1995. Info: V. Neverow, Women's Studies, SCSU, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515, E-mail: neverow@scsud.ctstateu.edu.

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.

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.

COTTAGES AT HEDGEBROOK — A Retreat for Women Writers grants cottages and meals for writers for a stay of up to three

months. Application deadlines: Apr. 1 and Oct. 1. For applications: 2197 E. Millman Rd., Langley, WA 98260.

NORCROFT — A writing retreat for women provides space and food for up to four weeks between May & October. Write for 1995 applications: POB 300105, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

DYKE SEPARATIST CELEBRATION — Lesbian Separatists will be gathering near Oakland, CA on Saturday, June 22, 1996 for workshops, networking, potlucking, dancing and fun. Lesbian Separatists put Lesbians first in our lives; we are committed to building strong Lesbian communities and to fighting heterosexism as well as all other oppressions. This Celebration is being organized by SEPZ, Separatists Eliminating Patriarchy with Zeal. We invite female-born Lesbians who identify as Separatists to join us for a day of camaraderie, strategizing and merriment. In order to make this gathering as safe as possible for Separatists with Environmental Illness (EI), this event will be fragrance and scent free, drug and alcohol free, and smoke free. (No smokers please!) In keeping with Separatist ideology, no bisexuals or transgendered persons or sado-masochists will be admitted. This event will be child free. Pre-registration is required. Separatists with special needs let us know ASAP. Separatists, please respond with a SASE and your enthusiasm and ideas to SEPZ, P.O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180

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.

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

Box #29, SF, CA 94110.

PEN CENTER USA WEST is offering grants for writers with HIV/AIDS. Applications are available from PEN Center USA West, 672 S. LaFayette Park Pl, #41, LA, CA, 90057. App. deadline Sept. 29, 1995.

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.

WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS (WBP) seeks proposals for small grants for disability access projects. Founded in 1980, WBP distributed lesbian and feminist literature on tape and in Braille to blind and print disabled readers for fifteen years. WBP is now in the process of disbanding and has surplus funds to disperse to other nonprofit organizations. We will review proposals for up to \$2,000 and will distribute up to \$5,000 total. Priority will be given to projects dealing with taping or Braille and to lesbian/feminist projects.

Please send a concise proposal to: P.O. Box 8475; Minneapolis, MN 55408. Include the name and contact information for your organization; proof of non-profit status or a letter from your fiscal agent; length of time your organization has been in existence; the nature of your organization's work; the amount requested, and what you specifically propose to do with this money. Also include the names and numbers of two organizations which are familiar with your work. Deadline: August 1, 1996. Decisions will be made by September 1, 1996.

October 19, 1995

Dear Friends,

We are writing to remind you of the case of Aileen "Lee" Wuornos, currently on Florida's Death Row for killing six men who attacked her. Recently four of her six appeals were denied; two still await judgment. The second set of appeals is being prepared now.

Lee was working as a highway prostitute when she was attacked. Prostitutes are much more likely to be raped than women in other jobs. In fact, prostitutes in one study testified that they were raped an average of thirty-three times a year.

The issues of violence against women and our right to self-defense were obscured in this case by sensational charges that Lee was a man-hating serial killer. Call her a serial killer and you can sleep well at night knowing the highways are safe ... for men. Call her what she is, a woman who killed before submitting to rape and possible death, and you are forced to wonder whose life is valued? As Lee said, "Who's supposed to die? Am I supposed to die because I'm a prostitute?"

Unsurprisingly, Lee did not receive a fair hearing of her case. In her only trial, the dead man's history of sexual violence was not allowed as evidence. Her overworked public defender had never tried a capital case; sixty references to self-defense were deleted from her videotaped confession; Lee's background of chronic abuse was not acknowledged as a mitigating circumstance, and the list of injustices goes on.

As feminists, we feel it is important to raise our voices to demand that Lee receive justice, and that women have the right to freedom from violence and the right to protect ourselves when violence does occur.

We urge you to demand justice for Lee Wuornos.

Write postcards to the Florida Supreme Court, 5th Judicial Circuit Court, 300 Beach St., Daytona Beach FL 32114. Demand a new trial.

Speak to your friends and family about Lee's case.

Rent a copy of the documentary "Aileen Wuornos: The Selling

of a Serial Killer" and host a viewing of it. We will supply an information packet.

Write letters of support to Aileen Wuornos, A#150924, DR1, Broward County Correctional Institution, PO Box 8540, Pembroke Pines FL 33024.

Form a defense committee in your area. Contact the Aileen Wuornos Defense Committee at (415) 995-2392 or write to us at 3543 - 18th St., Box 30, San Francisco, CA 94110.

Hildie Kraus
Aileen Wuornos Defense Committee



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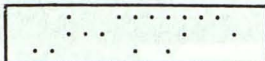
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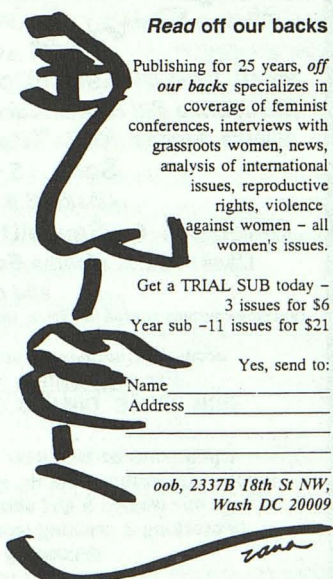
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- #56 **Diverse voices** explore the complexities of language — Akiba's first issue.
- #55 **An open issue** explores issues of racial identity and sexual identification.
- #54 **Lesbians & Religion:** explores questions of faith and community from many directions (Elana Dykewomon's last issue as editor).
- #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.
- #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.**

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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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 page 10 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*.

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my feelings and words. That I am not "crazy."
... I had this deep feeling of knowledge that if
only I could cry, I wouldn't have to punish and
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— *Laura C. Luna*

I've decided on a new path
a life that brings the sun's light
and lives within my dirt, projecting my voice.
And mountains pour from my mouth,
whispering the stories of my life.

— *Jo Anne Reyes-Boitel*

I will not give up hope.
I will not let my heart
be cold and empty.
I will not be ruled by despair.

— *April Citizen Kane*